

# Muhammad Ali and the Convergence of Olympic Sport and U.S. Diplomacy in 1980: A Reassessment from Behind the Scenes at the U.S. State Department

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**H**is ring artistry and press conference bravado have become legend. Very few athletes have been capable of touching the world's sport psyche in the enduring manner fashioned by Muhammad Ali. In his retirement, Ali's popularity has waned only slightly if we can judge by the numerous appearance requests he receives and the celebrity-studded fiftieth birthday celebration staged in his honour for American network television in 1992.<sup>1</sup>

Ali's career provides an interesting study for historians as his life has cut across numerous themes in twentieth century American history, including race, religion, military conflict, and spectator sport. A man of devout religious belief and great conviction, Ali has not been averse to entering the diplomatic arena.<sup>2</sup> This paper aims to investigate one such foray.

Following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979, President Jimmy Carter and the U.S. State Department searched for an appropriate response to the encroachment upon Afghan territory. The fact that the Soviet Union had shown a willingness to employ its troops beyond its borders was disturbing. The Persian Gulf region was a highly volatile area which possessed acute importance to the United States and its allies as a result of its oil reserves.<sup>3</sup> After a period of consideration, Carter and the State Department advocated a multi-lateral boycott of the upcoming Moscow Olympics as an element of the diplomatic retort.<sup>4</sup> Government officials found themselves in agreement with Muhammad Ali who had denounced the invasion, and who similarly favoured an Olympic boycott.

Ali was thoroughly disgusted by the military action in Afghanistan. Three days prior to Carter's official pronouncement outlining his administration's policy, Ali announced that his amateur sport club would boycott the Moscow Olympics. The Muhammad Ali Amateur Sports Club was composed of thirty-two boxers and track and field athletes, including hurdler Greg Foster, sprinter Houston McTear, and two-time Olympian lightweight boxer Davey Armstrong. The club's action

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represented the first organized boycott of the upcoming games by U.S. amateur athletes.<sup>5</sup>

Ali supported the U.S. government's call for a boycott through the use of an analogy. In Ali's estimation, the Soviets were:

like a bad child who you've told to stay out of the kitchen, stay out of the cookie jar and if you threaten to strike him, he'll see that you're not really serious and tomorrow he'll go take another cookie, or he may break the jar. The Russians have made a move that we should do something about. So we got to do something to show them that we're serious and if we go play ball with them, go boxing with them, run track or swim with them it just don't seem that we're so serious.<sup>6</sup>

Ali also accused the Soviets of "attempting to kill all religions." Although Ali's opinions had not been framed in "diplomatic" language, his statement on a boycott coincided with the Carter administration's viewpoint.

President Carter dispatched seasoned diplomats, such as Secretary of State Cyrus Vance, Deputy Secretary of State Warren Christopher, and National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski, to various parts of the world to engage in discussion with political leaders regarding the merits of an Olympic boycott. Carter chose Ali as his personal envoy for a mission to Africa aimed at enlisting the support of influential heads of state such as Julius Nyerere of Tanzania and Daniel arap Moi of Kenya.<sup>7</sup>

Ali's selection was assailed by the U.S. media as a foreign relations *faux pas* by virtue of the lukewarm reception he received in Africa from a number of the political leaders, and Ali's own statements which indicated a lack of preparation. Further, the media characterized the trip as an embarrassment for the Carter administration and Ali.<sup>8</sup> Contemporary statements by a number of politicians indicated they were swayed by the media reports.

Carter was a target for criticism in the House of Representatives. Republicans John Ashbrook of Ohio and Robert Bauman of Maryland questioned the wisdom of Carter's decision to send Ali. They were deeply concerned by the early media reports from Africa following Ali's arrival. Both individuals quoted from U.S. newspaper articles at the time their remarks were recorded in the *Congressional Record*. Ashbrook judged Ali's mission to have been the "latest in a long series of [Carter's foreign policy] travesties." Bauman was equally perplexed by Carter's action:

Mr. Speaker, until recently, I thought nothing the Carter administration does could surprise me. But the President has sent Muhammad Ali on a delicate diplomatic mission to Africa. While it is not true that the President will ask Cyrus Vance to fight Sugar Ray Leonard, it is clear that the administration has brought us into a new age of diplomacy.<sup>9</sup>

Previous historical examinations of the affair have also relied heavily upon the print media appraisal.

In his analysis of the Moscow Olympic Games, Derick Hulme labelled the mission a failure. Hulme's assessment was echoed by Thomas Hauser, Ali's most

recent biographer. "At best it was ill-conceived; at worst, a diplomatic disaster," concluded Hauser. Laurence Barton, who investigated the function of diplomacy and propaganda in influencing U.S. public opinion regarding the Olympic boycott was a little more charitable. Still, he claimed Ali "met with only partial success."<sup>10</sup> The reliance upon the media's assessment of the Ali mission provided contemporary observers and interested historians with a superficial analysis.

White House documents stored at the Jimmy Carter Library in Atlanta, Georgia, and State Department memoranda acquired through a Freedom of Information and Privacy Act request, provide an avenue of investigation previously untraveled by historians with reference to this foreign policy initiative. Personal correspondence with Jimmy Carter and Richard Moose (former Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs), and an interview with Frances Cook (U.S. ambassador to the Cameroon), who served as Media Press Officer for the Ali mission, supply critical, complementary sources of information. These primary sources furnish ample justification for a reassessment which will provide a broader, and deeper understanding of this diplomatic episode with Olympic overtones. This work neither attempts to justify the U.S.-led boycott of the Moscow Games, nor portray Ali's mission as a complete success.

This paper will show that Ali provided a more effective performance as Carter's envoy to five African countries than has been previously reported. One must also consider the conditions Ali encountered upon arrival when judging the merit of his efforts. Issues such as the predisposition of African officials, Soviet attempts to sidetrack the discussions, and time pressures upon the mission planners, require closer scrutiny in order to provide a fuller analysis. Contemporary media reports and subsequent historical analyses pay scant attention to these factors that had a substantial impact upon Ali's task.

The advocacy of a boycott of the 1980 Summer Olympics constituted only one element of the U.S. government's diplomatic rejoinder to the intervention of the Soviet military in Afghanistan. In his opening salvo, Carter recalled the U.S. ambassador to Moscow, Thomas J. Watson. He quickly requested that the Senate shelve its discussion pertaining to the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty (SALT II). He also opted to interrupt the sale of grain and high technology goods to the Soviet Union. The abrogation of the rights of the Soviet fishing fleet represented a further step.<sup>11</sup> On January 20<sup>th</sup>, Carter appeared on "Meet the Press," an interview-format program on NBC, an American television network. During the telecast, Carter set a February 20<sup>th</sup> deadline for the withdrawal of Soviet troops. If the Soviets refused to adhere to the demand, he announced that his administration would push for U.S. non-participation in the Moscow festival.<sup>12</sup>

Specifically, Carter wanted the International Olympic Committee (IOC) to cancel, postpone, or change the venue of the Summer Games. At a January 31<sup>st</sup> press briefing, State Department spokesperson Hodding Carter succinctly summarized the U.S. stance:

The United States believes that in the absence of a Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan by a certain date, that we should first make an all out effort to see to it that the games are moved from Moscow, or postponed, or otherwise not held there. That failing, the administration believes that American athletes should not par-

icipate; and would hope that others equally concerned about the imperialist activities of the Soviet Union in Afghanistan would join in such a decision.<sup>13</sup>

In addition to Ali's earlier advocacy of a boycott, Carter's position was quickly endorsed by other U.S. professional athletes, including National Basketball Association players Julius Erving and Earl Monroe, Major League Baseball players Johnny Bench and Tommy John, tennis player Vitas Gerulaitis, and race car driver Janet Guthrie.<sup>14</sup> Carter also received encouraging non-partisan support from elected officials in Washington for his boycott proposal.

High-profile politicians such as Senators Edward Kennedy of Massachusetts and Howard Baker of Tennessee, were critical of Carter's short-sightedness which, they believed, had precipitated the Afghanistan problem. However, the Olympic boycott initiative was generally well-received in Washington. Senate Majority Leader Robert C. Byrd of West Virginia summarized the prevailing attitude on Capitol Hill:

However much we might deny it, our attendance at the Moscow Olympics would be to tacitly endorse, and lend respectability to, a regime whose international conduct in invading Afghanistan is unacceptable to the contemporary world.<sup>15</sup>

On January 24<sup>th</sup>, the House of Representatives passed a resolution in support of Carter's position on the Moscow Olympics by a vote of 386-12. The Senate concurred with the House in a vote of 88-4 on January 29<sup>th</sup>.<sup>16</sup>

Despite overwhelming support from elected officials, Carter and the State Department realized that any unilateral action on the part of the United States with respect to the Olympics would be fodder for the Soviet propaganda agencies.<sup>17</sup> The opening of the IOC Session prior to the Lake Placid Winter Games on February 9<sup>th</sup> afforded an opportunity to impress upon the organization, and the Soviets, the seriousness of the U.S. position. This self-imposed deadline for attracting foreign support is central to an understanding of Ali's endeavour in Africa on behalf of the President.

The impending IOC Session forced the State Department to mobilize its resources in hurried fashion. Envoys boarded planes and fanned out in order to rally support for the U.S. response to the Soviet incursion. Deputy Secretary of State Warren Christopher headed to Europe while Zbigniew Brzezinski proceeded to the Middle East. Regarding the decision to entrust Ali with the State Department initiative in Africa, Carter recalled:

I was always interested in having the African nations know that our country is comprised of people who have a deep interest in them... [I asked] the most famous person in our country to represent me and the government of the United States in Africa. There was a specific interest on my part in having Muhammad Ali explain our country's position on the Olympic boycott, and also in his pointing out what our nation is, what its basic policies are, our commitment to freedom and human rights, and the fact that we

have black Americans who have been successful with a diversity of religious commitments.<sup>18</sup>

Although the mission required Presidential approval, Carter had not conceived of the plan. The Ali option was proposed within the State Department and rapidly came to fruition, largely due to the upcoming IOC meeting.

The idea was the brainchild of three African-Americans employed by the State Department: Arthur Lewis (Director of African Affairs for the International Communications Agency); Malvin Whitfield (Regional and Youth Sports Officer in Africa for the same organization); and Bryant Salter (Vice Consul, American Consulate, Douala, Cameroon).<sup>19</sup> Recognizing Ali's immense popularity in Africa and his support of Carter's call for a boycott,<sup>20</sup> they approached Richard Moose, the State Department's Assistant Secretary for African Affairs. Moose was opposed to a boycott of the Moscow Olympics, a position that placed him in opposition to many in the Carter administration. Although initially cool to the proposal, Moose was constrained by the fact that his superiors supported such action. He was concerned that the African bureau at the State Department would be seen as uncooperative, a potentiality which hastened his decision to forward the proposal to Vance and Brzezinski.<sup>21</sup> Carter accepted the proposal and instructed his staff to contact Ali.

The logistics for such a mission, from a State Department standpoint, were made more complex owing to the fact that Ali was in India at the end of January. He was in the midst of a twelve day tour of the country for various charities.<sup>22</sup> It had been established that Ali would visit Tanzania, Kenya, Nigeria, Liberia, and Senegal. The heads of state of these countries were esteemed members of the Organization of African Unity (OAU). In addition, the long distance runners from Kenya were highly regarded in international track and field circles. Ali was contacted by Louis Martin, Carter's Special Assistant for Minority Affairs, on January 30<sup>th</sup>. The State Department hoped that the trip could be initiated as early as February 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> as positive discussions would enhance the government's position to be presented in Lake Placid.<sup>23</sup> Once Ali had consented to the request,<sup>24</sup> the State Department assembled its delegation and dispatched it to New Delhi to join him.<sup>25</sup> The time frame created two immediate problems. There was limited time available for briefing Ali on his mission and important areas of African concern. Second, and no less important, the Soviets were aware of the trip, via newspaper reports, before the team arrived in New Delhi.

While Frances Cook and her colleagues traveled to New Delhi, the Soviet ambassador to India, Yuli Vorontsov, requested a meeting with Ali in an attempt to discourage him from taking the trip. When Ali returned to his hotel on the afternoon of February 2<sup>nd</sup> after touring the Taj Mahal, he was unsure what action he should take with respect to Vorontsov's entreaty. Mission officers, who had arrived in the interim, decided not to restrict him from meeting Vorontsov, and Ali was "enthusiastic about the opportunity to use a Soviet attempt to dis[s]uade him from the mission with the press."<sup>26</sup> During a forty minute conference beginning at 11 PM, Vorontsov told Ali that the Soviets had been invited into Afghanistan, and that the Soviet leadership did not intend to pursue further interests in the Gulf region. Such action, Vorontsov conceded, might precipitate a war. He also encouraged Ali to visit Afghanistan if he doubted the veracity of his statements. Ali listened

attentively and exchanged a number of views with Vorontsov before the latter's departure. After further talks with mission officers and embassy officials, Ali decided to proceed to Tanzania the following day.<sup>27</sup>

Conflicting views have been presented as to the extent to which Ali considered abandoning the mission following his meeting with Vorontsov. Although the dispatch to Washington did not indicate Ali considered aborting the mission, there was some concern expressed as to the effect that Vorontsov's meeting might have had upon the strength of Ali's commitment to the State Department's policy. However, Howard Bingham, Ali's long time confidante and traveling companion, said Ali "almost didn't go." Frances Cook conceded that Bingham's version of events was plausible as Ali confided exclusively in his friend at the outset of the mission.<sup>28</sup>

Vorontsov had not succeeded in derailing the Ali mission in New Delhi. However, he contributed indirectly to the difficulties Ali faced upon his arrival in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. The party left New Delhi at approximately 8 AM on the morning of February 3<sup>rd</sup>.<sup>29</sup> Ali was exhausted. He was feeling the effects of his schedule and the late night meeting with the Soviet ambassador. Ali slept most of the flight, and there was insufficient time to brief him before his arrival, although State Department officials were able to pass on some verbal information.<sup>30</sup> Inadequate briefing was only one of a number of problems that Ali encountered in Tanzania.

Ali's itinerary had been hastily arranged so as to permit him to meet with influential heads of state as well as sport officials within countries which enjoyed athletic prominence. In Tanzania, Ali faced an uphill struggle. President Julius Nyerere resented the U.S. call for a boycott of the Moscow Olympics on moral grounds while its government ignored African desires for meaningful U.S. trade sanctions against South Africa. The major daily newspaper in Dar es Salaam had also shown itself to be opposed to the initiative in light of the U.S. decision not to support the African-led boycott of the 1976 Montreal Olympics. A staff sports writer had speculated, "if the Western countries had at least shown some understanding of the African argument in 1976, our use of the Olympics for peaceful protest against the barbarian Boers in the South, at least we would not be questioning their wisdom of involving the Olympics now in super power politics."<sup>31</sup> Advance discussions conducted by U.S. officials with their Tanzanian counterparts proved difficult.

U.S. embassy officials labored to obtain a Presidential audience. The question whether Nyerere would meet Ali was hotly debated within the upper echelons of the Tanzanian government. Some Tanzanian officials were stunned by Ali's selection considering "diplomatic heavyweights" such as Brzezinski and Christopher were handling U.S. efforts in other regions. One official derisively questioned whether the U.S. would send Chris Evert to London to initiate talks with the English? The State Department learned the day before Ali's arrival in Tanzania that a meeting with Nyerere was not possible.<sup>32</sup> Although U.S. officials viewed the decision as a "disappointment," it was also thought Ali could still do valuable work during the stay.<sup>33</sup>

Ali's initial press conference was strained. Following a greeting from thousands of fans on the airport tarmac,<sup>34</sup> Tanzanian reporters peppered him with a flurry of

questions regarding Soviet assistance of southern African liberation movements and the failure of the U.S. to support the boycott of the 1976 Montreal Olympics. Ali initially groped for answers. He admitted that he had no knowledge of Soviet support for the liberation groups:

They didn't tell me in America that Russia supports these countries. Maybe I'm being used to do something that ain't right. You have given me some questions which are good and which are making me look at this thing different.<sup>35</sup>

On the lack of a U.S. commitment to the Olympic boycott in 1976, Ali claimed, "I'm not representing America." Ali stressed that he was not a politician, and for him the boycott issue boiled down to freedom. "If you believe in freedom you are naturally offended when a country like Russia invades a country," he stated. The civility of the discussion was disturbed when Ali was asked if he was a puppet of the U.S. government. Ali testily responded, "are you calling me a liar... I'm free. Nobody made me come here and I'm nobody's Uncle Tom." Despite the exchange and Ali's early discomfit, at least one Tanzanian observer estimated that Ali had parried the stinging questions. Asked to comment on Ali's press conference performance by the *Daily News* of Dar es Salaam, the sport official offered, "he didn't score a knockout but perhaps he won on points."<sup>36</sup>

The "government puppet" label agitated Ali. The State Department's senior policy advisor on the mission, Lannon Walker, informed Washington of Ali's concern for his credibility. Yet, Walker believed no serious problem existed. In his mind, Ali had handled the press conference and subsequent questioning well. He informed Richard Moose:

I believe that Ali is handling the tough questions about his role and U.S. policy vis-a-vis Africa in just the right manner. In sum, he says that he is not on this trip to support all aspects of U.S. policy, past or present. In fact, he admits he is not up on the issues, but invites questioners to educate him and promises, if convinced, to use his influence to change U.S. policy. On Afghanistan and the Olympics, however, he is categoric, challenging his questioner to explain what the Soviets are doing in Afghanistan.

Walker also highlighted his lengthy discussion with Ali on African issues. He indicated that Ali would need to be convinced that the State Department was "hiding nothing" from him.<sup>37</sup> Soviet meddling disturbed this balance.

When Ali retired to his hotel room he was subsequently accosted by three African-American Marxists who lectured him on "U.S. imperialism in Africa."<sup>38</sup> Richard Moose confirmed that these people were "sent" to rattle him.<sup>39</sup> They were successful.<sup>40</sup> Ali was frustrated. He believed he was being asked to defend the U.S. government's entire approach to Africa.

Ali was nonplussed the following day during a meeting with Tanzania's Minister of Youth and Culture, Chediel Mgonja. Ali was slipped a note which decried him as "an agent of Jimmy Carter's racist imperialist policies." U.S. embassy officer David Fischer described the scene:

Up to that point I, for one, wasn't convinced that he wouldn't abort the whole mission and carry out his threat to stay in Dar until he found a commercial flight home. Ali read the letter to the assembled and in a very emotional speech made clear he wasn't about to be painted an administration stooge. He said he had learned a lot of things in Tanzania about what the U.S. had and had not done. He wasn't here to defend those policies but was prepared to talk about African participation in the Olympics.

Ali asked Mgonja and his associates if they believed he was being used or whether he should proceed with the mission. Mgonja responded that he was an excellent representative on this sport issue. He also stressed that the message might have been the work of the Soviets.<sup>41</sup> This candid and earnest exchange was not the focus of press treatment of Ali's visit to Tanzania. Similarly, U.S. readers were not informed of Mgonja's special effort to express his appreciation for Ali's honesty and frankness to U.S. embassy officials.<sup>42</sup>

Prior to his departure for Nairobi, Kenya, on February 4<sup>th</sup>, Ali ventured that if he had known of the continuing trade between the U.S. and South Africa he would not have come. On the super power struggle, Ali called the Russian white man and the American white man "the baddest two men in the history of the world."<sup>43</sup> Upon his arrival in Nairobi, Ali reiterated his belief concerning U.S.-South Africa trade and said he was not there "to take America's whipping." He pledged to gather all African grievances so as to be able to present them to President Carter at a later date. However, he remained resolute on the Moscow boycott. It was one viable means with which to clearly show the Soviet people the seriousness of their military's incursion into Afghanistan.<sup>44</sup> These statements drew marked criticism from the U.S. print media, however, Mgonja's encouraging words for Ali were ignored.

Sport columnists and editorial writers throughout the United States reacted negatively to Ali's initial efforts. The *Chattanooga News-Free Press* offered the following opinion:

The administration should for a change, concentrate on locating sound, qualified ambassadors who are equipped with insight about the Soviet record of snuffing out freedom by violent means throughout the world.

Less constructive criticism was forthcoming from the *Los Angeles Times*:

What has happened so far on the Ali mission to Africa, what may yet happen, is due to the ineptitude of those who conceived it. What a hell of a way to conduct the foreign policy of this nation.

Ali's fitness for the task was also questioned by the *New York Daily News* which labelled him an "amateur."<sup>45</sup>

Editorial opinions in Europe mirrored those of U.S. commentators. Great Britain's *Daily Express* judged that Carter's plan had "gone off like an exploding cigar." The *Daily Mail* and the *Daily Mirror* similarly chastised Carter. The

*Stuttgarter Zeitung* of West Germany believed that Ali's selection had reflected "a lack of political instinct in Washington." In the Soviet Union, *Pravda* regarded the mission as an attempt to undermine the Olympic Movement and concluded that Ali had been "drawn into an adventure."<sup>46</sup>

The State Department was perturbed by some of the press conference problems encountered by Ali. Openly for the domestic press, as well as behind the scenes, officials worked to minimize the damage and prevent future difficulties. Spokesperson Hodding Carter hinted to reporters that some of the questions directed to Ali had been "planted by interested parties." The true measure of the success of Ali's effort was revealed by the popular response in Africa which had been astounding, said Carter.<sup>47</sup> President Carter's prepared response for a question dealing with the progress of Ali's mission was also aimed at deflecting the U.S. media's criticism. In part, it read:

Muhamm[a]d Ali's credentials as a special . . . indeed unique envoy... are obvious. He is a world champion boxer and Olympic gold medal winner. He demonstrates a profound concern for the welfare of Africans and for the Muslim faith. In addition, his candor and independence of mind are self-evident. Nobody can seriously accuse Muhamm[a]d Ali of expressing views other than his own.

The Presidential vote confidence was forwarded to Ali who had been upset by his reception in Tanzania.<sup>48</sup> Meanwhile, John E. Reinhardt, Director of the State Department's International Communications Agency which supervised "The Voice of America," assured Zbigniew Brzezinski that its correspondent "was able to put some of the more sensational aspects of the trip (as reported by the commercial networks) into perspective."<sup>49</sup> Actions in Washington showed a distinct level of concern on the part of the State Department.

Richard Moose was worried about continued Soviet interference. He conceded that publicity was crucial to the success of the mission, and Ali assuredly enjoyed the public exposure, but advised the U.S. ambassadors in Nigeria, Liberia, and Senegal:

No attempt should be made to gag him or restrict press. This would only backfire. It may well be that if we have the guts to ride it out, Ali will have a positive impact. We must keep reminding ourselves that the remarks which give us heartburn enhance the credibility of Ali's basic message. As long as he keeps slamming the Russian[s], it's useful. Posts should be aware that Ali is obviously a priority target for every Marxist bushwhacker around.<sup>50</sup>

Embassy officials and mission officers remained upbeat.

David Fischer, for one, was not discouraged. Ali's visit to Tanzania had been an incredible popular success. He was quite confident that Nyerere was in favour of participation, but the American message on the Moscow Olympics had been forcefully delivered by Ali. Still, he sent a telex to embassy contacts in Kenya which indicated the roller-coaster nature of Ali's first stop. "Good luck and

Godspeed to our colleagues down the line. This visit should keep AF [African Affairs] staff meetings in stories for at least six months. Believe me, they're all true," he stated.<sup>51</sup> Even Ali's wayward initial statements in Nairobi failed to shake Lannon Walker's commitment. In a subsequent press conference Ali had voiced his support for President Carter, and referred to him as a "good man."<sup>52</sup>

The Nairobi stop represented a turning point for Ali and his party. President Daniel arap Moi's announcement the day prior to their arrival that he supported President Carter was welcome news.<sup>53</sup> Although Ali's visit did not have a direct effect on Moi's decision, the visit was significant because Ali conducted positive discussions with sport officials and became more comfortable with his role. Lannon Walker reported Ali's growing confidence with his unique "diplomatic rope-a-dope strategy."<sup>54</sup> Ali told the African delegations that their views were new to him (despite previous briefing on African concerns), and promised to alert President Carter of his findings. However, Ali showed unwavering resolve on the issue of the Olympic boycott and responded forcefully to any challenges on that subject. Ali was his own man on the trip, Walker acceded, and he had discarded any hope of altering Ali's basic pattern even if he was so inclined. In Walker's estimation, Ali had enjoyed success with this method.<sup>55</sup> The popular response for Ali paralleled that found in Tanzania. At one point, Ali was forced to direct cars from the top of a truck in order to alleviate a traffic jam caused by admirers. He provided a forceful and convincing interview with Nairobi's major newspaper, the *Daily Nation*.<sup>56</sup> Hurt by the refusal of Julius Nyerere to receive him, Ali's meeting with Moi, which had been in some doubt, further boosted his confidence.<sup>57</sup> It was a necessary result from this stop as he would find less support for Carter's policy in Nigeria.

U.S. ambassador Stephen Low warned Ali's party about the Nigerian government's resentment of the mission on behalf of Carter which was viewed, he said, as a "strong-arm, pressure tactic."<sup>58</sup> Rigid maintenance of its non-aligned status would dictate any Nigerian decision, a fact which Ali realized during his subsequent meetings.<sup>59</sup> Hostile press questioning could be anticipated, and the lack of U.S. support of the 1976 Olympics boycott would attract attention.<sup>60</sup> The Nigerians were also stalling in providing a commitment regarding an audience with President Alhaji Shehu Shagari, a meeting which did not transpire.<sup>61</sup>

While similar developments had discouraged Ali in Tanzania, he did not appear flustered by Shagari's decision,<sup>62</sup> nor did the press or aggressive questioning from government officials aggravate him. Richard Moose praised Ali for "magnificently holding his ground." <sup>63</sup> Ali rhetorically asked his audience whether they would appreciate an appropriate expression of abhorrence in the event their country had been invaded.<sup>64</sup> Later, a small-scale demonstration, which Frances Cook described as a Soviet-organized affair, did not deter him.<sup>65</sup> Despite immense popularity with the Nigerian citizens, his views won him few friends in the national media.<sup>66</sup> Ali and his party soldiered on. In Liberia, the Carter boycott initiative found more fertile ground. Prior to Ali's arrival, President William Tolbert, who also served as the President of the OAU, voiced his approval of Carter's policy.<sup>67</sup> Liberian officials in Washington had pledged to Richard Moose that Ali would be warmly received. The promise provided comfort to Moose who had foreseen the Nigerian problems and realized Ali's group might benefit from the welcome.<sup>68</sup>

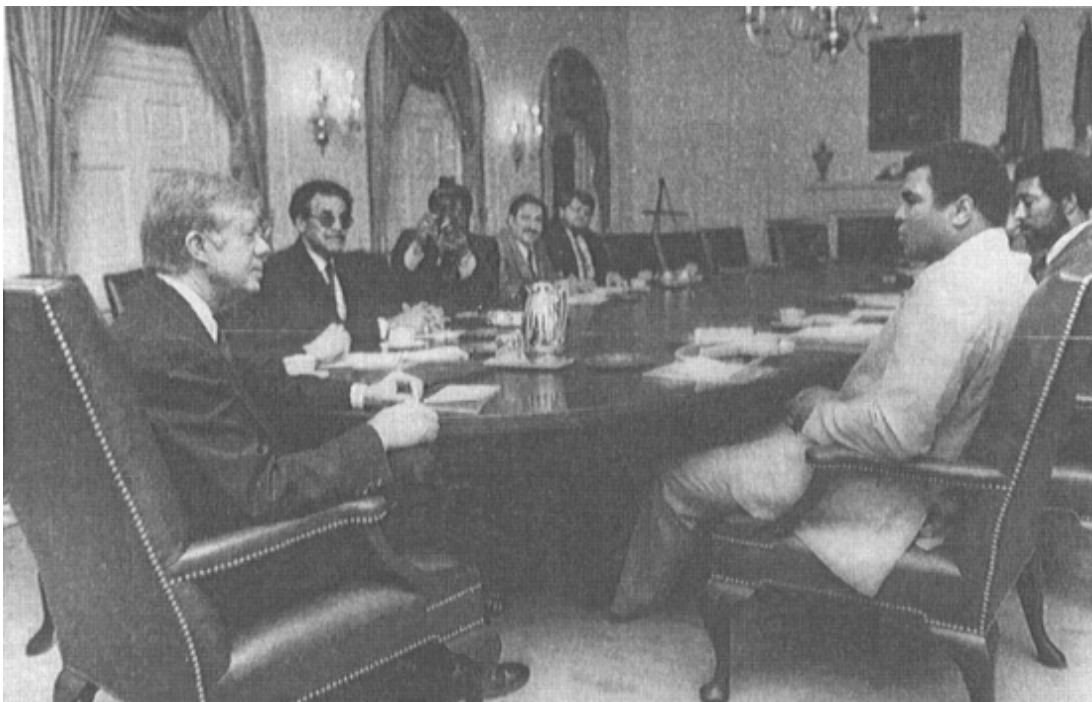
Tolbert agreed with Carter on the Olympic boycott question, however, he used

the meeting with Ali as an opportunity to lobby for increased U.S. aid. Liberia needed help in its battle against poverty and disease. Similar to other officials in Tanzania, Kenya, and Nigeria, Tolbert stressed his country's commitment to sport, and he advocated enhanced ties with the U.S. in the sphere of athletics. As President of the OAU, Tolbert invited the U.S. to assist African countries in their campaign for economic development.<sup>69</sup> Buoyed by these talks, Ali proceeded to Dakar, Senegal.

The Senegalese government had vehemently reproached the Soviet Union following its military intervention in Afghanistan. However, U.S. officials in Dakar were well aware of the Senegalese tradition of keeping sport separate from politics. The country had defied the African-led boycott of the 1976 Montreal Games, and its participation in Moscow was effectively assured. In preparation for his initial press conference, Ali was told to emphasize his desire to carry on a dialogue with the Senegalese on a wide variety of sport issues, including the Moscow Games. This approach promised to placate members of the media who believed Ali was being exploited by his government.<sup>70</sup> As events unfolded it was a Soviet reporter, rather than Senegalese writers, who provided Ali with his greatest challenge. In their continuing bid to hamstring Ali's efforts, the Soviets attempted to embarrass him by engaging a *Pravda* reporter to insinuate Carter had deceived Ali on the subject of South Africa, and to repeat Ali's concerns expressed in Tanzania on this matter. The reporter smugly asked Ali to board his plane and visit Afghanistan in order to see if the U.S. government had been less than honest with him on Soviet intentions. According to the *Daily News* of Dar es Salaam, Ali's rapid-fire, shoot-from-the-hip style served him well. Perhaps frustrated by previous Soviet ploys, Ali proceeded to verbally undress his questioner. He did so in such an embarrassing fashion that the vanquished scribe quickly left the reporters' dais and sat with Soviet embassy officials who had accompanied him.<sup>71</sup> Ali provided a very spicy diatribe on the evils of communism, and accused (accurately) the Soviets of attempting to interfere with his trip and its purpose. "Why is [a] powerful country like Russia worried about a little black boy's activities," he queried, while drawing attention to the encounter with ambassador Vorontsov.<sup>72</sup> In the minds of U.S. officials, Ali had scored a signal victory.<sup>73</sup>

Ali's meeting with President Leopold Sedar Senghor was one of the highlights of the entire African odyssey. The two men spent an enjoyable hour exchanging views over champagne at Senghor's beach-side villa with his family.<sup>74</sup> Although supportive of Carter's economic sanctions against the Soviet Union, Senghor reiterated his country's well-articulated policy on mixing sport with politics. Senegal was committed to participation in the Moscow Games. Senghor, a classical scholar, shared Carter's desire for a permanent site for the Olympics in Greece.<sup>75</sup> In a touching scene, Ali and Senghor read poetry to each other before the former's departure.<sup>76</sup>

The trip had encompassed eight days and its merit was viewed differently by the U.S. press and State Department officials. In its assessment of the initiative, the U.S. press adopted a box score approach. Ali had been successful in two countries, while three heads of state had ignored Carter's effort to rally support for the boycott. Julius Nyerere of Tanzania and Alhaji Shehu Shagari of Nigeria had effectively snubbed Ali. According to the press, Carter's selection of Ali had



President Jimmy Carter and U.S. State Department Officials confer with Muhammad Ali at a debriefing session held in the White House on February 11, 1980. Photograph courtesy of the Jimmy Carter Presidential Library, Atlanta, Georgia, U.S.A.

insulted these African leaders and compounded U.S. problems in this diplomatic theatre.<sup>77</sup> Ali's early troubles received wide U.S. press attention, and his criticism of some elements of American foreign policy were also thought to be unbecoming of a Presidential envoy. The U.S. print media's claim that the mission had encountered difficulties, as we have seen, possessed merit. Still, President Carter and some State Department observers did not agree with the one-sided assessment.<sup>78</sup>

Even though "the press gave us the slow-boat down the river without a paddle," as Mal Whitfield of the State Department suggested,<sup>79</sup> the Ali endeavour had accomplished a number of objectives from a State Department perspective. African leaders and their people had been informed as to the earnest position of the U.S. government regarding the circumstances in Afghanistan. Ali enjoyed unprecedented access to the people of the countries he visited, and the mission had raised the level of debate in Africa with respect to the Soviet military operation. If the State Department was concerned solely with a public relations coup it could have sent Ali to more sympathetic countries on the continent, as 17 of the 36 African states supporting an Olympic program refused the Soviet invitation to attend the Moscow Olympics. The Soviets, who monitored the progress of the discussions and actively interfered on a number of occasions, also bore witness to the seriousness of the U.S. stance. Undoubtedly, it is for these reasons that President Carter considered the mission a success.<sup>80</sup>

In terms of results with respect to the boycott initiative, Frances Cook has ventured that a trained diplomat would not have fared better.<sup>81</sup> Richard Moose was even more emphatic, stating that the employment of a conventional envoy would have been a "complete waste of time."<sup>82</sup> African heads of state were preoccupied with South Africa and the level of concern displayed by the U.S., while many of the African sport officials vividly recalled U.S. intransigence regarding the African-inspired boycott of the previous summer Olympics in Montreal. They expressed anxiety regarding the welfare and motivation of their athletes who had been absent from those games. Still, Ali had presented forcefully the basic U.S. position on Afghanistan and the Moscow Games, and the merit of his personal performance had been underestimated by members of the U.S. press.<sup>83</sup>

Little attention was paid to several events that reflected well on Ali. His cordial discussions with William Tolbert of Liberia and Leopold Sedar Senghor of Senegal were ignored. Ali's encounter with the *Pravda* reporter in Dakar, an episode which highlighted his commitment to an Olympic boycott and his opposition to Soviet intervention in Afghanistan, was neglected. Similarly, the U.S. press did not address Ali's strongly worded report to President Carter that, among other things, urged a reassessment of U.S. policy towards South Africa and encouraged Carter to increase U.S. sport ties with Africa.<sup>84</sup>

There were also personal attacks on Ali which lacked credibility. Red Smith of the *New York Times* echoed many U.S. editorial writers and sport columnists of the day when he commented that Ali was "totally uninformed and widely uninformed." He also ventured that "when State Department attachés accompanying him [tried] to brief him, he [interrupted] with a lecture on foreign policy." <sup>85</sup> It is true that Ali lacked adequate preparation for the mission. Still, Ali's difficulties were exacerbated by time pressures upon those entrusted with the task of providing him with background information. During the course of the mission, Ali

was briefed; however, according to Lannon Walker, Ali occasionally feigned a lack of knowledge as a technique for dealing with difficult questions on U.S. foreign policy. Upon return to Washington, Ali honoured his promise to the African leaders and people. He presented his findings, and their expressed concerns, in his comprehensive written report to Carter. Smith's assertion that Ali was argumentative with members of the mission party is not supported by the individuals contacted or State Department documents. Jimmy Carter and the State Department believed that Ali had forcefully presented the U.S. position on Afghanistan and the Moscow Olympics to African politicians, citizens, and interested Soviet observers.

This analysis must be tempered by an admission of some unfavourable developments for Carter and the State Department. The time pressure which the State Department faced due to the looming IOC Session in Lake Placid prevented the necessary pre-analysis of the initiative. Ali was ill-prepared for the trip in the sense that he lacked adequate briefing prior to his hostile welcome in Dar es Salaam. Early problems received substantial attention in the U.S. and African press, providing Washington with a number of headaches. President Carter and the State Department miscalculated the level of resentment in Africa with respect to Ali's selection as his envoy.<sup>86</sup> Carter also received a scathing review in the U.S. at a time when he faced mounting criticism from his Democratic primary rival Senator Edward Kennedy and Republicans on his handling of foreign policy, especially the Iran hostage crisis. When asked to rate the success of the mission as a whole, Frances Cook while acknowledging the mixed results, maintained it was a positive, while Richard Moose regarded it as a draw.<sup>87</sup>

With one exception, the leaders of the five countries implemented their expressed policies with respect to participation in the Moscow Olympics. Tanzania, Nigeria, and Senegal sent athletes to Moscow. Kenyan athletes did not participate. Two months after Ali's visit, Liberia's President, William Tolbert, who had supported the boycott, was assassinated in a Presidential *coup d'état*. The change in government ushered in a new approach to Liberian participation in the Moscow Games. Liberian athletes traveled to Moscow but did not compete.<sup>88</sup>

This assessment of Muhammad Ali's mission to Africa has relied upon various sources including U.S. and African press reports, secondary works, State Department and White House documents, as well as personal communication with Richard Moose, Frances Cook, and Jimmy Carter. State Department documents and recent communications with Moose and Cook provide a consistent account of Ali's mission. The confirmation of the State Department's contemporary assessment of Ali's personal performance provided by Moose and Cook is noteworthy. First, both Moose and Cook have extensive foreign policy experience under different administrations.<sup>89</sup> Second, they appear to lack motivation for providing an unduly favourable assessment of Ali's performance. Neither Moose, who is now a business executive, nor Cook had a role in conceiving the idea of employing Ali as Carter's envoy.<sup>90</sup> The media focused its intense criticism of the mission on Carter and Ali, leaving Moose, Cook and others connected with the mission out of the spotlight. Moose was outnumbered within the U.S. political establishment based on his opposition to an Olympic boycott. More than a decade later, his view remains unchanged as shown by his statement that "our [Olympic boycott] policy was wrong."<sup>91</sup> He forwarded for approval, with some reluctance, the proposal brought

forward by Malvin Whitfield, Arthur Lewis, and Bryant Salter. Frances Cook, assigned to the mission at the eleventh hour, acknowledges that the State Department did not give due consideration to the potential ramifications of Ali's selection. "If more thought had been given to the idea, it's the kind of thing that wouldn't have happened," Cook observed.<sup>92</sup> Despite their views on the shortcomings of the planning process, both complimented Ali on his presentation of the U.S. position and his determination under difficult circumstances.

Muhammad Ali returned to the United States somewhat disillusioned and disappointed in the fashion that some of the African politicians had regarded him. His confidante, Howard Bingham sadly noted that it discouraged Ali to the point that he temporarily discarded further notions of sculpting out a role for himself as an "unofficial" ambassador. Wounded pride and financial considerations contributed to Ali's regrettable decision to challenge Larry Holmes later in the year.<sup>93</sup>

Upon return to the United States, Ali was asked to explain his motivation for accepting the President's request. "I'm not a diplomat, I'm just a private citizen who is doing what I think is right," he responded.<sup>94</sup> Thirteen years later, few could question the strength of Ali's commitment to the cause of freedom. In Ali's opinion, the cause of freedom was best served by opposing Soviet intervention in Afghanistan through a boycott of the Moscow Olympics. Despite numerous obstacles Ali persevered in his mission, consistently assailing the Soviet incursion and promoting a boycott, while demonstrating receptiveness to African concerns.

## Acknowledgements

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## NOTES

1. Ali's wife, Lonnie, attempted to describe the extent of Ali's continuing popularity. In 1989, Ali visited Senegal, Yugoslavia, Saudi Arabia, Switzerland, Pakistan, England, and India. He also took 67 trips within the United States and found himself on the road for 236 days during the year. See Thomas Hauser, *Muhammad Ali: His Life and Times* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1991), pp. 472-475, 477-479.

2. For example, Ali visited the Kremlin and discussed issues pertaining to world peace with Leonid Brezhnev in 1978. Later, he traveled to Iraq prior to the outbreak of the Persian Gulf conflict and negotiated the release of 15 American hostages. *Ibid.*, pp. 395, 482-483.

3. "Carter's News Conference Text," *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report*, 38 (February 16, 1980), p. 409.
4. Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith: Memoirs of a President* (London: Collins, 1982), pp. 474, 482.
5. "Muhammad Ali Club Agrees to a Boycott of Moscow Games," *New York Times*, January 18, 1980, pp. 15, 18.
6. Secretary of State to American Embassy Dar es Salaam (Tanzania), Department of State Telegram 028728, February 1, 1980, Department of State Central Foreign Policy Records [hereafter cited as *CFPR*]; and *New York Times*, January 26, 1980, p. 3.
7. Letter, Richard M. Moose (former Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs) to the authors, December 27, 1991.
8. Julius Nyerere and Alhaji Shehu Shagari of Nigeria refused to meet Ali. The *White House News Summary* reveals numerous U.S. newspaper articles which condemned the mission. See clippings from the *Los Angeles Times*, February 6, 1980; *Atlanta Constitution*, February 6, 1980; and *New York Daily News*, February 6, 1980, *White House News Summary*, February 8, 1980, pp. 11-12, Jimmy Carter Library. See also the *Detroit News*, February 6, 1980, *White House News Summary*, February 10, 1980, p. 13. *Time* and *Newsweek* also panned the diplomatic effort. See, "Ali's Whipping: Trouble on a Mission Implausible," *Time*, February 18, 1980, pp. 34, 37; and "Muhammad Ali, Diplomat," *Newsweek*, February 18, 1980, p. 58.
9. For Ashbrook's remarks, see the *Proceedings and Debates of the 96th Congress, Second Session*, Vol. 126 (16), *Proceedings* 5, 1980, p. H534; For Bauman's comments, see the *Proceedings and Debates of the 96th Congress, Second Session*, Vol. 126 (18), p. H731.
10. Derick Hulme referred to Ali's selection as an "unconventional tactic." Derick L. Hulme Jr., *The Political Olympics: Moscow, Afghanistan, and the 1980 U.S. Boycott* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1990), pp. 46-47; Laurence Barton gave scant attention to the trip. Laurence Barton, "The American Boycott of 1980: The Amalgam of Diplomacy and Propaganda in Influencing Public Opinion," (Ph.D. Dissertation, Boston University, 1983), p. 80; Hauser relied upon a written statement from President Carter, the recollections of Ali confidante Howard Bingham, and U.S. newspaper reports. Hauser, *Muhammad Ali: His Life and Times*, pp. 396-398.
11. Carter, *Keeping Faith*, pp. 475-476; and "Soviet Afghanistan Invasion Ends Detente," *Congress and the Nation 1977-1980: A Review of Government and Politics*, Volume V (Washington: Congressional Quarterly Inc., 1981), p. 82.
12. *Ibid.*, pp. 481-482.
13. Early support for his stance would lend weight to his argument. The IOC Session witnessed U.S. efforts to realize this end. Hulme, *The Political Olympics*, p. 49. For Hodding Carter's remarks, see Secretary of State to American Embassy Moscow (Soviet Union), February 2, 1980, State Department Telegram 028884, *CFPR*.
14. "Pros Feel for Olympians but Back Boycott," *New York Times*, January 22, 1980, II, pp. 11, 14.

15. For Baker's comments, see "Senator Stennis Calls for Large-Scale Military Buildup in Persian Gulf Region," *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report*, 38 (February 2, 1980), p. 311; for Kennedy's criticism, see "Carter News Conference Text," *ibid.*, 38 (February 16, 1980), p. 409.

16. "Senator Stennis Calls for Large-Scale Military Buildup in Persian Gulf Region," *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report*, 38 (February 2, 1980), p. 311.

17. Hulme, *The Political Olympics*, p. 43.

18. Hauser, *Muhammad Ali: His Life and Times*, p. 396.

19. Memorandum, Louis Martin (Special Assistant to the President for Minority Affairs) to the President, February 11, 1980, White House Central File, Subject File Executive, "FG 1-2/CO 1-1 1/20/77 - 1/20/81," Box FG-11, Jimmy Carter Library.

20. Richard Moose confirmed that Ali's previously announced stand, and his popularity in Africa were key factors. Letter, Richard Moose to the authors, December 27, 1991.

21. *Ibid.*

22. Hauser, *Muhammad Ali: His Life and Times*, p. 396.

23. Secretary of State to American Consul Madras (India), State Department Telegram 026402, January 30, 1980, *CFPR*.

24. American Consulate Madras (India) to the Secretary of State, Department of State Telegram Madras 00189, January 31, 1980, *CFPR*.

25. Frances Cook recalled that she was informed about her role as Media Press Officer for the Ali mission at a morning meeting in Richard Moose's office. At the time Cook served as the Director of the Office of Public Affairs, African Bureau, at the State Department. Following the meeting, Cook departed for home in order to gather clothing appropriate for hot weather. She quickly left for the airport and the delegation departed for New Delhi that evening. Frances Cook, U.S. ambassador to the Cameroon, Telephone interview, May 11, 1992.

26. American Embassy New Delhi (India) to Secretary of State, State Department Telegram New Delhi 2295, February 2, 1980, *CFPR*.

27. *Ibid.*

28. *Ibid.* State Department concern can be gleaned from the options presented to Washington. The New Delhi staff suggested that Louis Martin should talk with Ali in order to sound him out. If Ali was still on board then he would be instructed to make a public statement about the meeting. If Ali appeared to be wavering, then further media contact would be avoided. A third possibility would be to have a senior Washington bureaucrat phone Ali to discuss the situation; For Howard Bingham's comments, see Hauser, *Muhammad Ali: His Life and Times*, p. 396; Frances Cook reported that the entire party grew very close as the mission proceeded. Frances Cook, Telephone interview, May 11, 1992.

29. American Embassy New Delhi (India) to Secretary of State, State Department Telegram New Delhi 2297, February 3, 1980, *CFPR*.

30. Frances Cook, Telephone interview, May 11, 1992. Despite a vast array of briefing books, officials quickly discovered that Ali "was not the type of person to

spend a lot of time reading them.” Discussion proved a more fruitful means of relaying information to Ali during the mission.

31. “Nyerere criticizes U. States,” *Daily News* (Dar es Salaam), February 7, 1980, p. 10. Nyerere’s views on the South Africa issue and continuing U.S. trade with the apartheid regime had been addressed extensively in an article prepared for *Foreign Affairs*. Julius Nyerere, “America and Southern Africa,” *Foreign Affairs*, 54 (July, 1977), pp. 671-684. For the statement of the columnist, see “Muhammad Ali punches in,” *Daily News* (Dar es Salaam), February 4, 1980, p. 12.

32. For the statement of the Tanzanian official, see “Ali’s Whipping, Trouble on a Mission Impossible,” *Time*, February 18, 1980, p. 37; On the morning of February 2<sup>nd</sup>, U.S. embassy officials in Dar es Salaam rated the chances of obtaining a meeting with Nyerere at the airport prior to his departure for Mwanza (Tanzania) at “fifty-fifty.” Some of Nyerere’s closest advisors feared such a meeting would imply support for the boycott, an issue which remained undecided. American Embassy Dar es Salaam to Secretary of State, State Department Telegram Dar es 00713, February 2, 1980, *CFPR*. Later in the day, the State House informed U.S. officials that Nyerere would not meet with Ali owing to his previous commitments with the state visit of the President of Ireland. American Embassy Dar es Salaam to Secretary of State, State Department Telegram Dar es 00716, February 2, 1980, *CFPR*.

33. American Embassy Dar es Salaam to Secretary of State, State Department Telegram Dar es 00716, February 2, 1980, *CFPR*.

34. Cook recalled that hundreds of enthusiastic Tanzanians ignored barricades and mobbed Ali when he emerged from the plane. She remains grateful that Ali himself returned to the plane and helped her through the surging crowd. Frances Cook, Telephone interview, May 11, 1992.

35. “I’m a whipping boy,” *Daily Nation* (Nairobi), February 5, 1980, p. 20.

36. “Muhammad Ali punches in,” *Daily News* (Dar es Salaam), February 4, 1980, p. 12.

37. American Embassy Dar es Salaam to Secretary of State, State Department Telegram Dar es 00731, February 3, 1980, *CFPR*.

38. American Embassy Dar es Salaam to Secretary of State, State Department Telegram Dar es 00753, February 4, 1980, *CFPR*.

39. Letter, Richard Moose to the authors, December 27, 1991.

40. *Ibid.*; and Frances Cook, Telephone interview, May 11, 1992.

41. American Embassy Dar es Salaam to Secretary of State, State Department Telegram Dar es 00753, February 4, 1980, *CFPR*.

42. *Ibid.*

43. “Ali uninformed on US policy,” *Daily News* (Dar es Salaam), February 5, 1980, p. 12.

44. “I’m a whipping boy - Ali,” *Dairy Nation* (Nairobi), February 5, 1980, p. 1.

45. *Chattanooga News-Free Press*, February 5, 1980, *White House News Summary*, February 11, 1980, p. 10; *Los Angeles Times*, February 6, 1980; and *New York Daily News*, February 6, 1980, *White House News Summary*, February 8, 1980, pp.

11-12. Other statements may be found in the *New Orleans Times-Picayune* and the *New York Times*. "It makes as much sense as putting Cyrus Vance in the ring with Larry Holmes." *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, February 5, 1980, *White House News Summary*, February 11, 1980, p. 10; and "Muhammad Ali's African Storm," *New York Times*, February 5, 1980, III, p. 21.

46. For the *Daily Express*, *Daily Mail*, *Daily Mirror*, and *Stuttgarter Zeitung*, see "Olympics—Press, 2/80," "Staff Offices—Counsel—Cutler," Box 104, Jimmy Carter Library. For *Pravda*, see *The Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, 32 (March 5, 1980), p. 7.

47. Secretary of State to American Embassy Nairobi, State Department Telegram 030778, February 4, 1980, *CFPR*.

48. Secretary of State to American Embassy Nairobi, State Department Telegram 030948, February 4, 1980, *CFPR*. Howard Bingham was glad to receive the information which he passed on to Ali. American Embassy Nairobi to Secretary of State, State Department Telegram Nairobi 02215, February 5, 1980, *CFPR*.

49. Memorandum, John E. Reinhardt to Zbigniew Brzezinski, February 15, 1980, White House Central File, Subject File, "FG 298-12/16/80-2/29/80," Box FG-219, Jimmy Carter Library.

50. Secretary of State to American Embassy Lagos, Monrovia, Dakar, State Department Telegram 030875, February 4, 1980, *CFPR*.

51. American Embassy Dar es Salaam to Secretary of State, State Department Telegram Dar es 00753, February 4, 1980, *CFPR*.

52. American Embassy Nairobi (Kenya) to Secretary of State, State Department Telegram Nairobi 02215, February 5, 1980, *CFPR*.

53. "Let us all boycott Moscow Olympics," *Daily Nation* (Nairobi), February 4, 1980, p. 6; and "Kenya Will Boycott Olympics in Moscow," *New York Times*, February 4, 1980, p. 10.

54. American Embassy Nairobi to Secretary of State, State Department Telegram Nairobi 02215, February 5, 1980, *CFPR*. The context of Walker's analogy revealed no attempt to denigrate African officials. He borrowed a phrase made famous by Ali six years earlier regarding his strategy used in defeating heavyweight champion George Foreman. Ali encouraged Foreman to expend a great deal of energy throwing punches early in the fight. Ali parried a great number of these blows, eluded others, and absorbed punishment. Ali mounted an impressive counter-attack that resulted in an eighth round knockout of an exhausted and demoralized Foreman. Walker described Ali's press conference tactics in a similar vein. Ali, reported Walker, side-stepped some difficult questions, refuted the premise of others, and acknowledged some U.S. shortcomings in its African foreign policy. Yet, Ali always responded forcefully on the subject of Soviet involvement in Afghanistan and the Olympic boycott.

55. *Ibid.*

56. "The Nation," *Daily Nation* (Nairobi), February 7, 1980, p. 6; and Frances Cook, Telephone interview, May 11, 1992.

57. Memorandum, Louis Martin (Special Assistant to the President for Minority Affairs) to the President, February 11, 1980, White House Central File, Subject File Executive, "FG 1-2/CO 1-1/20/77 - 1/20/81," Box FG-11, Jimmy Carter Library.

58. American Embassy Lagos to Secretary of State, State Department Telegram Lagos 01142, February 4, 1980, *CFPR*.
59. *Ibid.*; and Muhammad Ali, "Muhammad Ali Presidential Mission - Summary of my Findings," p. 5, White House Central File, Subject File Executive, "FG 1-2/CO 1-1 1/20/77 - 1/20/81," Box FG-11, Jimmy Carter Library.
60. American Embassy Lagos to Secretary of State, State Department Telegram Lagos 01142, February 4, 1980, *CFPR*.
61. American Embassy Lagos to Secretary of State, State Department Telegram Lagos 01183, February 5, 1980, *CFPR*.
62. Louis Martin (Special Assistant to the President for Minority Affairs) to the President, February 11, 1980, White House Central File, Subject File Executive, "FG 1-2/CO 1-1 1/20/77 - 1/20/81," Box FG-11, Jimmy Carter Library.
63. Richard Moose to the authors, December 27, 1991.
64. "Muhammad Ali Now Knows Better," *Daily Times* (Lagos), February 8, 1980, pp. 1, 20.
65. Frances Cook, Telephone interview, May 11, 1992. Previous experience of U.S. officials in Nigeria led to the conclusion that the Soviets had arranged the demonstration. Cook also reported that the Soviet ambassador to Nigeria calmly watched the proceedings from the comfort of his car.
66. "No-way, mate," *Daily Times* (Lagos), February 8, 1980, p. 31; and "Ali's spurious mission," *Daily Times* (Lagos), February 9, 1980, p. 3.
67. Memorandum, Louis Martin (Special Assistant to the President for Minority Affairs) to the President, February 11, 1980, White House Central File, Subject File Executive, "FG 1-2/CO 1-1 1/20/77 - 1/20/81," Box FG-11, Jimmy Carter Library.
68. Secretary of State to American Embassy Monrovia (Liberia), State Department Telegram 030595, February 3, 1980, *CFPR*.
69. Muhammad Ali, "Muhammad Ali Presidential Mission - Summary of my Findings," pp. 5, 8-9, White House Central File, Subject File Executive, "FG 1-2/CO 1-1 1/20/77 - 1/20/81," Box FG-11, Jimmy Carter Library.
70. American Embassy Dakar to Secretary of State, State Department Telegram 00955, February 5, 1980, *CFPR*.
71. "Ali 'knocks out' Russian reporter," *Daily News* (Dar es Salaam), February 11, 1980, p. 8. The *Daily News* reporter provided the following description of the Soviet writer's reaction to Ali's lecture. "The *Pravda* correspondent's smile began to slip. . . [and] anxious to end the tirade, the now grim-faced Russian, who had arrived with several Soviet embassy officials, left the stage and sat down."
72. *Ibid.*
73. Frances Cook, Telephone interview, May 11, 1992. In the words of Cook, "Ali handed him [the Soviet reporter] his lunch."
74. Memorandum, Louis Martin (Special Assistant to the President for Minority Affairs) to the President, February 11, 1980, p. 2, White House Central File,

Subject File Executive, "FG 1-2/CO 1-1 1/20/77 - 1/20/81," Box FG-11, Jimmy Carter Library.

75. Muhammad Ali, "Muhammad Ali Presidential Mission - Summary of my Findings," pp. 5-6, White House Central File, Subject File Executive, "FG 1-2/CO 1-1 1/20/77 - 1/20/81," Box FG-11, Jimmy Carter Library.

76. Frances Cook, Telephone interview, May 11, 1992.

77. For some background information, see for instance Davidson Nicol, "Africa and the U.S.A. in the United Nations," *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 16 (September, 1978), pp. 365-395.

78. Letter, President Carter to the authors, ca. March 15, 1992; Frances Cook, Telephone interview, May 11, 1992; Memorandum, Louis Martin (Special Assistant to the President for Minority Affairs) to the President, February 11, 1980, White House Central File, Subject File Executive, "FG 1-2/CO 1-1 1/20/77 - 1/20/81," Box FG-11, Jimmy Carter Library; and Letter, Richard Moose to the authors, December 27, 1991.

79. Malvin Whitfield to Louis Martin, June 8, 1980, Whitfield, L-P Name File, Jimmy Carter Library.

80. Letter, President Carter to the authors, ca. March 15, 1992.

81. Frances Cook, Telephone interview, May 11, 1992.

82. Richard Moose, Telephone interview, January 5, 1993.

83. Frances Cook, Telephone interview, May 11, 1992; and Letter, Richard Moose to the authors, December 27, 1991.

84. Carter and Ali met on February 11th at the White House in order to review the events of the mission. Ali prepared a written mission report, see Muhammad Ali, "Muhammad Ali Presidential Mission - Summary of my Findings," White House Central File, Subject File Executive, "FG 1-2/CO 1-1 1/20/77 - 1/20/81," Box FG-11, Jimmy Carter Library.

85. "Affairs of State," *New York Times*, February 10, V, p. 5.

86. The resentment was acute in the Tanzanian and Nigerian press. See also "Reasons for running in Moscow," *West Africa*, February 11, 1980, no. 3264, p. 236; and "Matchet's Diary," *ibid.*, February 18, 1980, no. 3265, pp. 305-306.

87. Frances Cook, Telephone interview, May 11, 1992; and Letter, Richard Moose to the authors, December 27, 1991.

88. "Coup in Liberia, Tolbert assassinated," *Daily Times* (Lagos), April 13, 1980, p. 1. Details concerning Liberian participation in the Moscow Olympics were supplied by Michèle Veillard, Head of the Archives and Documentation Department of the International Olympic Committee. Letter, Michèle Veillard to the authors, December 15, 1992.

89. For Richard Moose, see *Who's Who in America 1980-1981*, 41<sup>st</sup> edition, Volume 2 (Chicago: Marquis Who's Who, Inc., 1980), p. 2363. He began his civil service career under President Dwight D. Eisenhower. Other appointments included member of the staff of the National Security Council and member of the staff of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. For Frances Cook, see *Who's Who in America 1992-1993*, 47<sup>th</sup> edition, Volume 1 (New Providence, NJ: Reed Reference

Publishing Company, 1992) p. 686. She held the post of Director of Office of Public Affairs for the State Department's African Bureau during Carter's administration, ambassador to the Republic of Burundi under Ronald Reagan, and ambassador to the Cameroon under George Bush. Other postings have included Consul General Department of State, Alexandria, Egypt; Deputy Assistant Secretary of State, Washington, D.C.; and Director of Office of West African Affairs.

90. The originators of the idea, Malvin Whitfield, Bryant Salter and Arthur Lewis declined to respond to our written queries. Perhaps they shied away from any involvement because they felt that this treatment of Ali's mission would mirror the highly critical contemporary press accounts. Muhammad Ali also failed to respond to a series of written questions.

91. Letter, Richard Moose to the authors, December 27, 1991.

92. Frances Cook, Telephone interview, May 11, 1992.

93. Hauser, *Muhammad Ali: His Life and Times*, p. 398.

94. "Muhammad Ali Says African Trip Was a Success," *New York Times*, February 11, 1980, p. 3.