



By: *Tomorrow's Affairs Staff*

Who will Putin attack in July 2024 - perhaps the International Olympic Committee knows



Vladimir Putin associates his aggressive policy towards his neighbours and his passion for sports, which he cherishes personally and promotes as a national value, in a perverse way.

The last three times that Putin invaded neighbouring countries with his army, annexing parts of them, he did so during or immediately after the Olympics.

In 2008, he attacked Georgia on the opening day of the Olympic Games in Beijing. He occupied the Ukrainian peninsula of Crimea during the Olympics in Sochi, Russia, and finally annexed it on March 18, three weeks after the Olympics ended.

Finally, he invaded Ukraine just four days after the Winter Olympics in Beijing closed.

The concurrence of Putin's war plans with the calendar of the Olympic Games is far from coincidental, so July 26 next year, the opening day of the Olympic Games in Paris, might bring some new Russian aggression.

The tainted purity of the Olympic mission

The International Olympic Committee and its president Thomas Bach do not deal with such dark forecasts. They guard the political asepsis of the Olympic movement and fight to prove that politics do not interfere with the purity of their mission. Few are convinced that they have been sincere and successful in this.

The International Olympic Committee caused a lot of anger with its recent decision to open the way for participation of Russian and Belarusian athletes in next year's Paris Olympics, despite the ban it imposed on them at the start of the aggression against Ukraine.

"Attempts by the IOC to bring Russian athletes back into the Olympic Games are attempts to tell the whole world that terror is somehow acceptable", said the President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelensky in a video message.

While Ukraine threatens that its athletes will not come to Paris next year, the International Olympic Committee faces several important issues with regard to how they intend to implement the intended concessions to Russian and Belarusian athletes.

Russian athletes cannot be politically neutral

What has changed in the last year, since the IOC's decision to ban Russian and Belarusian athletes from international competitions?

The aggression against Ukraine, which was the reason the ban was introduced, has not ceased in the meantime. Since then, it has claimed hundreds of thousands of lives in Ukraine, destroyed entire cities and driven millions of civilians into exile.

How does the IOC imagine assessing the "neutrality" of Russian athletes towards their country's aggression against another sovereign country, which is set as a condition for their participation at the Olympics?

"Many representatives of their Olympic teams are part of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation, which is killing our people in our country and destroying our infrastructure", President of the Ukrainian National Olympic Committee, Vadym Guttsait, warned Thomas Bach.

The Ukrainian reminded Bach and the leaders of the other national Olympic committees that last year, the head of the Russian Olympic Committee, Stanislav Pozdnyakov, said that the athletes should be honoured to participate in the war against Ukraine.

Only a month ago, the two-year ban on Russian athletes competing under the national flag was completed. It was introduced after proof was established of the systematic and state-led doping at the Sochi 2014 Olympics.

Heavy state control over top sports, including doping, is not an invention and specialty of Putin's Russia. It is a legacy of the Soviet

Union.

Serious violations of the Olympic fair play credo and the strong influence of state politics on top sports when aggression against another independent state is still ongoing, does not give Russia any reasonable cause to be exempted from international sports sanctions.

Correctable IOC error

However, the Executive Board of the IOC last week opened the door for the return of Russian athletes to the Olympic stage. It also prescribed the criteria under which that return could take place, but so far the same criteria have been violated by the Russian competitors.

Therefore, it remains a mystery. Is the IOC confident that these Russian athletes, and particularly their fans, will comply with the conditions that “only those who have not acted against the peace mission of the IOC by actively supporting the war in Ukraine can participate”?

The president of the Russian Olympic Committee called on athletes to join the war of conquest. The Olympic swimming champion Evgeny Rylov participated in a pro-war rally in Moscow, along with Vladimir Putin. Gymnast Ivan Kuliak wore the war symbol, the letter “Z”, on his jersey at the international competition.

Among those mobilised on the Ukrainian front are former boxing champion Nikolai Valuev and football player Diniyar Bilyaletdinov.

Why did IOC officials become confident that Russian athletes would be able to go to Paris only if they “fully comply with the World Anti-Doping Code and all relevant anti-doping rules and regulations”? Their country and their Olympic Committee had just served a two-year sentence for widespread doping, which was a state project, not an individual offence. What kind of respect for the pacifist ideals of Olympism can we expect from the state that arrested and sentenced two-time Olympic champion Brittney Grinner to nine years in

prison?

Moscow is satisfied with the direction the IOC is taking. “I think it is already a success. Olympic society understands that the Olympic Games cannot be staged without Russia”, said Igor Levitin, an adviser to Vladimir Putin and one of the state officials who have been managing Russian sports for years.

Good news from the IOC reached Putin’s associate while he was in Iran negotiating “creating mechanisms to overcome the sanctions-related restrictions in the currency and banking spheres”. The International Olympic Committee still has time to correct its decisions, since qualifying competitions in some sports for competing in the Paris Olympic Games will begin in the spring.

If they allow the participation of Russian athletes, they will be able to see that they were wrong. The athletes on the field, on the podium, and particularly the fans, will show them that they came not for sports and the Olympic spirit, but because of a war victory in Ukraine.