

## Distant voices

Of all the enemies to public liberty war is, perhaps, the most to be dreaded because it comprises and develops the germ of every other. War is the parent of armies; from these proceed debts and taxes ... known instruments for bringing the many under the domination of the few.... No nation could preserve its freedom in the midst of continual warfare.

**James Madison, Political Observations, 1799**

The meaning of words had no longer the same relation to things, but was changed by them as they thought proper. Reckless daring was held to be loyal courage; prudent delay was the excuse of a coward; moderation was the disguise of unmanly weakness; to know everything was to do nothing. Frantic energy was the true quality of a man. A conspirator who wanted to be safe was a recreant in disguise. The lover of violence was always trusted, and his opponent suspected.

**Thucydides c.460 BC – c.395 BC**

## the problem with truces

Peace Matters does not usually comment on sporting event but we can be flexible. Nor is it our brief to criticise the staggering cost of the forthcoming London Olympics from the original estimate of £2.37 billion to the now estimated £24 billion of which the cost to us taxpayers will be at least £10 billion – austerity indeed. All Olympic games in recent years have burdened unwilling taxpayers with fabulous sums, destroyed communities and enriched a few. London is unlikely to be an exception.

Our concern is both narrower and wider. It is not simply the cost to you and me of the £5.5 - £6 billion for extra 'counter terrorism' and 'security and intelligence services' but the implications these have on the creeping militarisation of our lives. Large swathes of London will become no go areas accessible only by special permission, through a battery of 'security' obstacles, and guarded by military and quasi military personnel.

The Royal Marines have already been practicing racing up and down the Thames in their gun ships and will no doubt offer some entertainment to those without tickets to the games. Unsurprisingly much of the military preparations are not made public. However the placing of anti aircraft missiles around London has not gone unnoticed but what little protest there has been has been about lack of consultation rather than objection at this lunatic plan. Shooting down a plane over London does not seem like a good plan and one has to wonder why it does to the planners. Maybe 'they' think the missiles will act as deterrents or maybe it might have occurred to any self-respecting terrorist to choose the Olympic period to do some dastardly deed well away from London?

Much has been said, though no evidence ever presented, about the Olympic spirit and its promotion of peace. To its credit the Olympic Movement does not repeat the hoary old myth that fighting cease during the Olympics in ancient Greece though the Foreign & Commonwealth Office website does a little bit of spinning. Writing about the original Greek games it says that the games were to 'encourage peaceful environment' and 'thus mobilising the youth of the world in support of peace'. Not quite.

The Olympic Games were primarily a religious festival held in honour of the Greek god Zeus, not a sports festival for peace and were only one of many occasions when Greeks competed assertively. These formal contests were manifestations of a competitive spirit that infused every aspect of Greek life (male life at least). It was this same competitiveness that led to continual political struggles and made so much of the history of Greece

the history of wars between the fiercely competitive state – Greeks killing Greeks.

There were no doubt good intentions behind the reinventing of the 'Olympic truce' in 1994 at the Winter Olympic Games in Lillehammer. The mortar shell that landed in the market square of the besieged former Olympic City of Sarajevo killing 89 and injuring hundreds a day before the games started however was not an auspicious beginning. Since then it is hard to see this truce as anything other than an attempt to add significance to what is in essence a vast corporate junket and a redistribution of money from the taxpayer to private companies.

In 2011 the British government sponsored UN Resolution on the Olympic Truce entitled "Building a peaceful and better world through sport and the Olympic ideal" has been co sponsored by all 193 UN Members. Even in the government some have called this truce at best 'worthless sentiment' and at worst 'dangerous appeasement'. Whichever is the case it is hard to see it as anything more than providing cynical opportunity for useful PR. What exactly is the government doing about what the Prime Minister calls an 'historic opportunity'? Well nothing much. Apparently it will be difficult to do very much as we 'only have one year' it was said at the time though it will not stretch our memory to remember that when it came to implementing other UN resolutions calling for military intervention vast resources and international resolve could be assembled and deployed over a single weekend. It's not a question of resources but resolve.

The ancient Olympic Games were in part a response to a question posed by a king of Greece in 774BC to the Oracle at Delphi: 'How can we end the perpetual state of war between the city states of Greece?' he asked. The response came: 'The problem is that fighting men and those that deploy them can't stop fighting because they are full of fear. They are fearful of looking weak to their opponents but even more so they are fearful of looking weak to their supporters. If you want to stop the fighting you need to find a way of allowing the fighting men to lay down their arms without looking weak.' More at [ppu.org.uk/pm](http://ppu.org.uk/pm)

The Olympic Truce is a Resolution of the United Nations General Assembly, which requires all signatories to 'pursue initiatives for peace and reconciliation in the spirit of the ancient Games for the period seven days before the Opening Ceremony of the Olympic Games until seven days after the end of the Paralympic Games'.

All 193 member states sign it, but no-one has ever implemented it for over twenty-five years. In 1994 the Olympic Truce was adopted as a full resolution of the United Nations General Assembly for the first time. The day before the Opening Ceremony of the Winter Olympic Games in Lillehammer, Norway a mortar shell landed in the market square of the besieged former Olympic City of Sarajevo killing 89 and injuring hundreds more. The Olympic Truce was invoked to broker a ceasefire in Sarajevo and to allow in much needed humanitarian aid saving many lives.

The modern Games have run for 112 years and have had to be cancelled because of war three times, been the subject of mass boycotts on five occasions, and been subject to terrorist attacks twice. The Truce has been violated on virtually every occasion. Surely we need a better plan?



**Oxleas Wood**  
**One of the possible sites for siting anti aircraft missiles around London.**