

Do You Have to Be Brave to Attend this Year's Olympics?

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In 490 B.C.E., on the Plain of Marathon 26 miles northwest of Athens, Athenian citizen foot soldiers known as hoplites advanced on the run against an invading Persian army and defeated it. In 2004 C.E. the Greek enemy is terrorism threatening the security of the Olympic Games that will begin in Athens on Aug. 13.

The main question for many people has more to do with the movie *Marathon Man* than with the ancient battle that changed the course of Western history. Like Sir Laurence Olivier, they are asking again and again: "Is it safe? Is it safe?" And they are getting answers no better than those offered by the tortured, but clueless Dustin Hoffman.

The Greeks themselves have asked the Marathon Man question and come to us for answers. In late May, Prime Minister Costas Karamanlis visited the White House. The president will not attend the Games himself, but Prime Minister Karamanlis reasoned that it "constitutes a vote of confidence the fact that his father will in essence head the U.S. delegation."

His reasoning is quintessentially Greek, focusing on personal and family relations. Surely the president of the United States would not send his father into danger. The Greek prime minister was also heartened by the president's public thanks for his hard work and his intentions to have successful Games "in as secure an environment as possible."

But intentions often do not coincide with ultimate reality. Despite our preemptive invasion of Iraq and our continuing military presence, and losses, in recently democratized Iraq and all-but-forgotten Afghanistan, al Qaeda still operates and terrorist attacks occur regularly in Iraq and other countries.

So what can we make of such assurances? Right after the White House meeting, a Greek satirical political pamphlet calling itself the Column Foundation Course of Peace ran a crude cartoon mocking the hollowness of the president's and Greek prime minister's promises. Its satirical brilliance rivaled the ancient comic poet Aristophanes both in its creative ingenuity and in the seriousness of the political topic it was satirizing. I cannot even describe its sexual explicitness without offending readers.

Is it safe? One voice that I listened to carefully is that of Nicholas Gage, author of the autobiographical novel *Eleni*, which portrays the horrors of the Greek civil war after World War II and the blood-fueled passions for vengeance and justice that its violence created. Writing in the *New York Times*, Gage has declared that he is going to the Games with his wife and daughter because he knows that they all will be safe.

How does he know this? Because Greece has spent \$1.2 billion dollars on security (three times as much as for the Sydney Games). Because Greek authorities are cooperating with security experts from the United States, Israel, Great Britain and other countries. Because 70,000 Greek police will be on the alert. Because of a thousand security cameras and Nato AWACS planes and the personal security forces accompanying important foreign officials.

Gage is a brave man and he knows and loves Greece in all its tragic beauty and contradictions. He knows from his long familiarity with Greece what foreign ticket holders might want to read on the Council on Foreign Relations Web site on terrorism.

Gage, Prime Minister Karamanlis, President Bush and Olympic organizers do not speak about the terrorist organization called November 17 that operated with virtual impunity in Greece between 1975 and 2002, claiming responsibility for twenty-one murders including Athens' CIA station chief, a U.S. Navy captain, and a U.S. and a British defense

attaché. They surely know that November 17 expanded its targets in the 1980s to include ordinary citizens and property. They also know that Greece in 2002 clamped down on this terrorist organization and arrested some key members mainly in response to the soon-to-be-held Olympics.

If I were considering going to the Games, I would ask myself how safe their well-developed anti-terrorist measures make Israelis feel. I would ask what the chances are, with multinational anti-terrorist organizations assisting regular Greek police, of a friendly-fire accident taking place.

And I would go if I were as brave as Gage, his family, and the Athenian hoplites at Marathon.

We are all modern hoplites fighting a new kind of war.

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