

Sports Organisations As Non-state Diplomatic Actors:

A Comparative Study of IOC, FIFA and ICC

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Foreword

Diplomacy has undergone a considerable expansion in its meaning and scope. Apart from the state, non-state actors are now functioning as diplomatic actors and influencing the behaviour of states. Sports diplomacy is one of the emerging fields that has started to gain significant academic traction recently. In simple terms, sports diplomacy is the use of sports to influence the relations among states or impact the overall functioning of States. Most academic studies on sports diplomacy have been from the states' perspective. The present monograph identifies that sports diplomacy is also multilayered, and non-state actors also exercise what can be called 'diplomatic' functions. This monograph first establishes the link between sports and politics and then delineates various characteristics of sports diplomacy. The monograph further undertakes a distinct stance of viewing and analysing diplomatic actions through the lens of sports and its regulatory bodies. It takes the case examples of three prominent sports organisations, namely the International Olympic Committee (IOC), FIFA (Fédération Internationale de Football Association) and the International Cricket Council (ICC), which shows how these sports organisations function as non-state diplomatic actors as well. The monograph looks at the non-traditional means of diplomacy and provides a distinguished viewpoint on the art and practice of negotiations between nations. Sports, historically used as a denominator of competition, physical activity, victory and defeat, abilities and skills, have been employed with a different understanding in which the actors involved seek cooperation and agreements based on shared values, cultures and symbols. This writing would emerge to be distinct in terms of the particular organisations that have been taken up as instruments of study and further analyses.

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Abstract

Sports and, by extension, sports diplomacy have become an important component of public diplomacy. Sports diplomacy can be defined as the “conscious, strategic use of sportspeople and sporting events by state and non-state actors to engage, inform and create a favourable image among foreign publics and organisations, to shape their perceptions in a way that is (more) conducive to the sending group’s goals”. Thus, it can be said that not only do states co-opt sports as a means of diplomacy, but the non-state actors do the same. The paper posits that it is mainly the sports organisations that are the leading non-state diplomatic actor, and they increasingly use their position to achieve diplomatic goals. The paper intends to do a comparative study of three prominent sports organisations as non-state diplomatic actors. The three sports organisations examined will be the International Olympic Committee (IOC), the International Federation of Association Football (FIFA) and the International Cricket Council (ICC). The paper posits that these three sports organisations acting as non-state diplomatic actors not only act as conciliators between conflicting interests but also leverage the power of sports for developmental projects. The paper examines historical and contemporary case studies on how these three sports organisations have functioned as diplomatic actors, interacted with states to influence decisions, and engaged in humanitarian aid.

Keywords: Public Diplomacy, Sports Diplomacy, IOC, FIFA, ICC

The Linkages between Sports and Politics

The role of sports in diplomacy has been relatively understudied within political science and international relations scholarship. However, before delving into the connection between sports and diplomacy, it is crucial first to establish the relationship between sports and politics. Traditionally, the realms of sports and politics—both domestic and international—have been considered separate and distinct. This view, however, has been increasingly challenged since the latter half of the 20th century. Lincoln Allison’s seminal work, *The Politics of Sport*, published in 1986, explored this intersection. Allison argues that sports cannot remain neutral regarding politics; even if they strive for neutrality, their impact on politics is inevitably significant.¹

Allison identifies two key reasons why the domains of sports and politics are not mutually exclusive. First, sports lead to the creation of politically valuable resources. Various governments have recognised sports as a vital tool for political socialisation. Political leaders worldwide have often reached out to and celebrated athletes who bring honour to their countries. In some cases, they have even shown solidarity with national sports teams after losses, publicly commending their efforts to share in the collective grief of ordinary fans. For instance, after the Indian women’s hockey team narrowly missed a historic bronze medal at the Tokyo 2020 Olympics, losing to Great Britain, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi called to console the team. The Indian hockey captain, Rani Rampal, broke down in tears upon receiving the call, to which Modi responded, “You all played very well. Though your four to five years of hard work couldn’t be converted to a medal, your hard work and sweat have become an inspiration to crores of daughters of the country. Don’t be disappointed.”²

Modi provided another, even more prominent example of consoling a sports team after a major sporting disappointment when he met with the Indian cricket team following their loss to Australia in the final of the 2023 ICC Men’s Cricket World Cup. The loss was particularly heartbreaking, as India had remained undefeated and had delivered a dominant performance leading up to the final. The sight of Modi

comforting Indian fast bowler Mohammad Shami, the tournament's leading wicket-taker, with a heartfelt hug was incredibly moving. Indian players described the Prime Minister's meeting with the team as highly motivating. The day after the meeting,

Mohammad Shami thanked Prime Minister Modi for visiting the dressing room to boost the team's morale and assured fans that the cricket team would bounce back.³

A few days later, Shami remarked: "When the Prime Minister encourages you like that, it gives a sense of confidence. Because your morale is already down. It is something really different."⁴ These examples illustrate how political leaders can use sports not only to celebrate victories but also to associate themselves with teams after losses, significantly impacting the morale of the team and the general public in the face of sporting failures.

The second reason propounded by Allison for the intertwining nature of sports and politics is that sports is divisive and an agent of social disorder. There is an inherent nature of conflict that is associated with sports. There are numerous examples of fierce sporting rivalries and cases where violence erupted on the field of play or among the rival sets of spectators. So, for Allison, sports and politics being compartmentalised in mutually exclusive autonomous domains is a myth. This entails that sports cannot be divested from international relations.

The neglect of sports in international relations primarily results from a narrow understanding of the discipline regarding nation-states vying for security and power. Sports' impact is not merely confined to the field of play. Once the state is involved, it becomes a subject matter of international relations. For example, one can cite the decision of the Indian government to refuse to allow the Indian cricket team to travel to Pakistan to participate in the Asia Cup Cricket Tournament 2023.

The recognition of a sports body or organisation entails a de facto recognition of the state authority within the ambit of which that body operates. This explains why sports bodies use flags and national symbols such as the national anthem in sporting events. Conversely, nations also want to monitor which sports team is representing them. A case in point is the participation of Taiwanese athletes competing in the Olympics under the name of Chinese Taipei since 1984. This was done at China's insistence.⁵

Further, like politics, sports have power structures with a defined hierarchy. Almost all organised sports have a hierarchical organisational structure with an international governing body at the apex, the rules formulated by which apply to national federations. Being formally organised, such bodies operate in a defined framework where “political activity can take place to resolve conflicts of interests, values and the acquisition of decision-making power.” Such apex governing bodies include the International Olympic Committee, the Federation Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) and the International Cricket Committee (ICC). The organisational structure of these three bodies is explained in detail later in this monograph.

Cha⁶ states that sports matter in world politics because they have the potential to create a diplomatic outcome (or even rifts), which may be possible through traditional diplomatic methods. Second, through sports, states project a positive image of themselves to the international community and their people. Third, sports can also serve as a facilitator of change within a country.

From the above discussion, it is clear that there are deep links between sports and politics, and as a result, sports are related to international politics. So, sports and diplomacy are also compatible, and sports demand an understanding of diplomacy. Before explaining the linkages, it is imperative to give a brief conceptual understanding of the term diplomacy.

Conceptualising Diplomacy

Diplomacy is one of the fundamental concepts of international relations, which shapes the interactions and outcomes among state and non-state actors in global affairs. Satow⁷ defines diplomacy as the “application of intelligence and tact to the conduct of official relations between the governments of independent states. Diplomacy is the conduct of business between states by *peaceful means*” (emphasis added). Satow’s definition of diplomacy was expounded at a juncture in history where the State was the leading actor in foreign communications. However, in recent years, international relations have ceased to be merely inter-governmental, and the concept of diplomacy has widened.

In this widening context, we need to conceptualise the term diplomacy. Thus, in a broader context, diplomacy can be defined as a process through which allies and adversaries resolve their disputes peacefully without resorting to force. Diplomacy is thus a peaceful instrument that drives international affairs. A State’s concerns and interests are asserted through diplomacy so as not to arouse the animosity of other States. Griffiths and Callaghan⁸ identify three main functions of diplomacy – intelligence gathering, image management and policy implementation. Diplomacy has expanded from its traditional form, characterised by the interface of conflict and peace-making, to much more than State and government interactions. For Bjoja and Kornprobst⁹, the core functions of diplomacy are representation, communication and negotiation. They define diplomacy as “the institutionalised communication among internationally recognised representatives of internationally recognised identities through which representatives produce, manage and distribute global goods.”¹⁰

This definition has three main features. First, diplomacy entails highly institutionalised communication. Second, States are not the sole actors in the domain of diplomacy. The question of who a recognised actor is changes with time, and the process of

double recognition makes an entity an actor in the diplomatic field. Third, diplomacy is about producing, managing and distributing public goods. The definition of global public goods is also undergoing a redefinition in the era of globalisation. While diplomacy traditionally dealt with war and peace, it now deals with a host of areas that were erstwhile considered in the domestic domain only. The authors identify six significant areas of global diplomacy: war and peace, economics, development, environment, health, and migration.¹¹

Since World War II, the notion of public diplomacy has emerged. This term was coined in 1965 by Edmund Gullien. Public Diplomacy “openly sponsors the interaction of private groups and interests in one country with those of another, facilitated by the transnational flows of information and ideas.”¹² Public Diplomacy is different from official diplomacy in three aspects. First, public diplomacy is transparent and widely disseminated compared to official diplomacy. Second, while official diplomacy is transmitted from one government to another, public diplomacy is transmitted by governments to a wider selected public. Third, the thematic issues of official diplomacy are concerned with the behaviour and policies of the government.

In contrast, in the case of public diplomacy, such matters deal with the issues and behaviour of the public. Gregory¹³ defines public diplomacy as “an instrument used by states, associations of states, and sub-state and non-state actors to understand cultures, attitudes and behaviour; to build manage relationships; and to influence thoughts and mobilise actions to advance interests and values.” For Lee and Ahyan,¹⁴ public diplomacy is a tool state and non-state actors use for objectives such as advocacy, influence, agenda-setting and mobilisation; reinforcing other foreign policy objectives; promotion and prestige; correcting misperceptions; dialogue and mutual understanding; and harmony based on universal values.

With the widening of the concept of diplomacy, new ideas have also emerged. Prominent among them is Track Two Diplomacy. This term was coined by Joseph Montville, who postulated that diplomacy should not be of only one type (i.e., from government to government) but also a second unofficial one that involves parliamentarians, private citizens, activists, scholars, religious communities, and other entities.

Another concept of great importance to public diplomacy discourse is soft power. The term soft power was coined by the US political scientist Joseph Nye and published in his book *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power*. Nye defined power as an ability to do things and control others, to get others to do what they otherwise would not have done. Nye distinguishes between hard power and soft power. For Nye, hard power was “the ability to get others to act in ways that are contrary to their initial preferences and strategies.”¹⁵ Nye posited that the emphasis on military force and conquest in the definition of power was now losing their focus, and factors of technology, education, and economic growth were now acquiring salience. Factors such as communications, organisational skills, and interdependence have now acquired significance. New issues were emerging that could be addressed only through cooperation.

Nye identified five trends for the diffusion of traditional structures of power- economic interdependence, transnational actors, nationalism in weak states, the spread of technology, and changing political issues. Nye remarked: “These trends suggest a second, more attractive way of exercising power than traditional means. A state may achieve the outcomes it prefers in world politics because other states want to follow it or have agreed to a situation that produces such effects. In this sense, it is just as important to set the agenda and structure the situations in world politics as to get others to change in particular cases. This second aspect of power, which occurs when one country gets other countries to want what it wants, might be called co-optive or soft power in contrast with the hard or command power of ordering others to do what it wants.”¹⁶

Nye called soft power the “staple of daily democratic politics,” which rests on three primary resources., namely “ its culture (in places where it is attractive to others), its political values (when it lives up to them at home and abroad), and its foreign policies (when they are seen as legitimate and having moral authority).”¹⁷ Soft power uses persuasion and attractiveness to influence others’ behaviour without competition or confrontation. Furthermore, employing hard power by States in the present day would

be more costly, both financially and politically. He explains the elements and structures of soft power in detail in the following table:

Sources of Soft Power	Referees for Creditability or Legitimacy	Receivers of soft power
Foreign Policy	Governments, media, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), intergovernmental organizations (IGOs)	Foreign governments and publics
Domestic Values and policies	Media, NGOs, IGOs	Foreign governments and publics
High Culture	Government, NGOs, IGOs	Foreign governments and publics
Low Culture	Media Markets	Foreign publics

Defining A Diplomatic Actor

As the traditional diplomatic structures have been dismantled, new diplomatic actors have also emerged.¹⁸ The foreign ministries of the States are no longer functioning as the “gatekeepers” of foreign affairs and coordinators of all areas of foreign activity. Other actors, including non-state actors, are now exercising functions that can be called ‘diplomatic’. Thus, the monopoly of foreign ministries and their overseas network over foreign policy is breaking up. There has been the emergence of supra-national actors (such as the European Union) and even multinational corporations, whose economic strengths and vast international networks make them more influential in international relations than many states.

For the conduct of diplomatic practice, the presence of a diplomatic actor is a prerequisite. In this context, Bull¹⁹ states that diplomacy is the conduct of international relations by persons who are official agents. The term diplomacy should not be applied only to official relations between states but also to other entities with a standing in world politics.²⁰ Hoffman has called for a radical reworking of the concept of diplomacy.

Sharp ²¹states that diplomacy needs to be thought of not just as a theory between sovereign states “but as what amounts to a theory of how human relations are and might be conducted between groups that work to live separately from one another and hold this separation to be both goods and desirable.”

Thus, The diplomatic actor is a broad concept encompassing “states, organisation, groups, individuals and their aggregations”. Before highlighting the main characteristics of a diplomatic actor, it is imperative to conceptualise what ‘actorness’ means in international relations. Christopher Hill posits that “true actorness” necessitates the construction of “a clear identity and self-contained decision-making system.”²² Another prerequisite of an effective actor, according to Hill, is its “practical capability to affect policy.” Gunnar Sjosdet (quoted in Hill) defined an international actor as one that is delimited from others and its environment; autonomous in the sense of making its own laws and decisions; possesses specific structural prerequisites for action on the international level, such as a legal personality and a set of diplomatic agents, and the capability to conduct negotiations with third parties; and has capacity for goal-oriented behaviour towards other international actor.²³

Bretherton and Vogler have devised what they refer to as the “behavioural criteria of actorness.” To quote them, “The attribution of actorness ... implies an identity that exhibits a degree of autonomy from its external environment, and indeed from its internal constituents, and is capable of volition or purpose. *Hence, a minimal behavioural definition of an actor would be an entity capable of formulating purposes and making decisions, thus engaging in some forms of purposive action*” (emphasis added).²⁴ This approach takes into account not only the international profiles of actors but also the introduction of the criteria of judging actorness based on purposive actions, which considers the rationale and influence of the actions of states or international organisations in the global arena.

Faizullaev classifies the diplomatic actors as predominantly political, moral, legal or social and posits that the political actors are interest-driven entities, morally motivated actors are value-driven entities, legally motivated actors are rights-driven entities and socially motivated actors are relationship-driven entities and states that “depending

on their driving forces and objectives, diplomatic actors can conduct politically determined, morally determined, legally determined, or socially determined diplomacies.”²⁵ Further, it is posited that any entity can be classified as a diplomatic actor if it engages in diplomatic missions and “constructively engages with other entities in the pursuit of friendly relations, problem-solving and making peace.”²⁶

Based on the above, States are not the only diplomatic actors. The presence of several non-state diplomatic actors also characterises the modern world. Non-state actors may be defined as entities participating in international relations. They are organisations with sufficient power to influence and cause change despite not belonging to any established state institution.

Non-state actors have played an important role in international relations since the latter half of the 20th century. Stienstra defines non-state actors as “those organisations or groups that are not affiliated with national governments including social movements, international or regional non-governmental organisations and multinational corporations.”²⁷ Charountaki states that non-state actors exhibit the following characteristics: 1) They are not organised into states; 2) They are characterised by the display of attributes present in a State; and 3) They consist of individuals with common goals who can interact in the international realm.²⁸ Jackson states that a non-state actor cannot fit into the State system and “must displace the politically, pragmatic and morally compromised arrangements of traditional diplomacy.”²⁹

The number of non-state actors is also increasing in what may be termed “developmental diplomacy.” Such actors are increasingly seeking a more significant role in international development policy-making. As part of this development diplomacy, non-state actors are increasingly raising awareness of human rights, environment, gender equality etc. They also collaborate with governments and other international organisations to promote development activities. Saner posits that non-state actors exercising “development diplomacy” fulfil certain basic objectives and tasks, which are influencing political, economic and social conditions to create the right conditions for development, working with rule-making political bodies whose decisions affect international development and development regulations and eliminating friction between governments to minimise political and economic risks.³⁰

Having defined diplomacy in a broader perspective and identified the role of non-state actors in international politics, the monograph will now focus on diplomacy through sports and using sports as a soft power. Sports diplomacy can be understood as a type of public diplomacy whereby sports are used as a soft power mechanism to achieve a favourable result.

Traditional Sports Diplomacy: Sports as Soft Power

Sports diplomacy is a subset of public diplomacy. Diplomacy through sports is one of the examples of soft power usage. Murray terms sports as “one of the most important time-honoured forms of unconventional diplomacy”. Thus, diplomacy through sports is one of the “many different channels” of diplomacy apart from the official missions. Murray defines traditional sports diplomacy as the “ opportunistic use, strategic exploitation, and in some cases, abuse of elite sports, sportspeople and sporting events to advance a States’s foreign policy objective. Governments tap into sports to complement, or sometimes scupper a diplomatic relationship, or to disseminate and amplify a diplomatic message.”³¹

Three forms of traditional sports diplomacy are discernible. First, sports project a favourable image of a country in the international sphere. Second, sports foster a cooperative international relationship with other states. The third form of traditional sports diplomacy is the sporting boycott of a nation that engages in behaviour detrimental to internationally accepted norms of peace and security or disregards human rights. These factors will now be examined in detail, citing historical and contemporary examples.

Sports Diplomacy and the Projection of a Country’s Image

States tend to use sports as a tool to project a desired image of themselves in the global arena. This can take the following forms:

1. Use of sports as a tool to increase international prestige
2. Use of Sports to Improve a Tarnished Image
3. Use of Sports to foster a cooperative relationship between States
4. Sporting Boycott as a form of diplomacy

Use of sports as a tool to increase international prestige

This primarily entails hosting Sporting mega-events by states to enhance their standing in the global arena. Mega-sporting events such as the Olympics, FIFA World Cup or the ICC Cricket World Cup can be defined as “ambulatory occasions of a fixed duration that attract a large number of visitors, have a large mediated reach, come with high costs and have large impacts on the built environment and the population.” The case of Tokyo hosting the 1964 and the 2020 Olympics is a prominent example. Japan effectively used the Tokyo Olympics to show its prowess as an emerging technological power and also showcased the economic growth it had achieved in the two decades since the end of World War II. Japan introduced many technical innovations at the 1964 Olympics. The Tokyo 1964 Olympic Games were the first Olympic Games that were broadcast live to an international audience. This was possible through a collaboration between the Japanese government and NASA that facilitated the launch of a communication satellite. Japan also introduced novel innovations such as close-pickup microphones and slow-motion replays during the 1964 Olympics. The practice of computers to record sports statistics and show athletes’ timing live on-screen was also introduced during the 1964 Olympics.³² The more recent successful hosting of the 2020 Olympic Games by Tokyo showed the world that Japan had emerged from significant setbacks, primarily the triple disasters of 2011—earthquake, tsunami and then a meltdown at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant.³³ The Tokyo Olympics successfully showed Japan’s resilience and how it had successfully rebuilt itself.

Another recent example is Qatar hosting the 2022 FIFA Men’s World Cup. Qatar was under the international community’s scrutiny for its human rights record once it was granted the hosting rights to the FIFA World Cup. The country was put under pressure by the international community to reform its laws. The FIFA World Cup also allowed Qatar to overcome its image as a country marred by scandals.³⁴ The Qatar government also used the FIFA World Cup as a channel to make substantial investments in infrastructure, tourism and the sports industry. Investments in general infrastructure also drove significant growth in the country’s non-hydrocarbon sector.³⁵ The fact that hosting significant sporting events boosts a country’s international profile was seen in India’s successful hosting of the 2023 ICC Men’s Cricket World Cup,

showcasing the country's image as a rising global power. Months before the start of the World Cup, cricket commentator Harsha Bhogle remarked, "The sun is rising in a nation incredibly vibrant and culturally rich. As the sights of the sporting world turn to one of its greatest stages, India welcomes us to join in with an exhilarating mix of heritage, diversity, expression, passion and energy."³⁶ The fact that India hosted a mega sports event successfully in less than a month after hosting the G-20 Summit demonstrated India's rising economic position on the global metric. India also used the ICC World Cup 2023 to promote its status as a tourism destination by showcasing its impressive infrastructural development and the country's cultural diversity. The tournament also benefited the Indian economy. In particular, it benefitted small businesses by spending on restaurants and online food delivery. Thus, the successful hosting of the event had a multiplier effect on the national and local landscapes³⁷ Allegories have also been drawn between the rise of India as a cricketing power and the country's economic ascent.³⁸

Use of sports as a tool to increase international prestige

Apart from countries using sports as an additive display of their rising economic stature, countries have also used sports to improve their tarnished international image. However, this may not always produce the desired result. Pakistan, which follows a dubious and lax policy on terrorism, is a prominent example. Terrorist groups have been allowed to operate freely in Pakistan and have often been used as a tool of foreign policy, targeting both its neighbouring countries on either flank³⁹. The monster of terrorism that Pakistan created came back to haunt it, and one of the theatres was a sports field in 2009. On March 3, 2009, the Sri Lankan cricket team that was touring Pakistan was attacked by rifles, grenades and rocket launchers as they were travelling in their team bus to play a match in the Gaddafi Stadium, Lahore.⁴⁰ Visuals of the gunbattle between the police and the attackers were displayed all over the world. Seven Sri Lankan cricketers: Thilan Samaraweera, Kumar Sangakkara, Tharanga Paranavitana, Ajantha Mendis, Chaminda Vaas, Mahela Jayawardene, and Suranga Lakmal sustained injuries, with Samaraweera and Paranavitana being admitted to hospital because of shrapnel injuries. The team's assistant coach, Paul Farbrace, and reserve umpire, Ahsan Raza, were seriously injured.⁴¹ The Sri Lankan

cricketers were airlifted from the stadium in the Pakistan Air Force helicopters and were put on the next available flight to Colombo. The attacks demonstrated the fragile security situation in Pakistan.

As a result of that attack, teams cancelled their tours to Pakistan. Pakistan was also stripped of the hosting rights of the 2011 ICC Cricket World Cup. International Cricket returned to Pakistan only in 2015 when Zimbabwe toured the country. Then, in 2017, Pakistan hosted a World XI cricket team and used the occasion to show its security capabilities to the world.⁴² Despite the return of international cricket in Pakistan, the country still fails to inspire the confidence of the entire cricket community, and there have been instances where teams have backed off from touring Pakistan due to security concerns. For example, in 2021, New Zealand cancelled its tour of Pakistan, citing security concerns.⁴³ India has constantly refused to travel to Pakistan to play cricket, citing security concerns.

Use of Sports to foster a cooperative relationship between States

Sports can also be used to foster cooperative relationships between States. The most famous example is the Ping-pong diplomacy that paved the way for the rapprochement of US-China relations. On the sidelines of the World Table Tennis Championship being held at Nagoya, Japan, in 1971, there was a chance encounter between Chinese captain Zhuang Zedong and US player Glenn Cowan—the image of both shaking hands and exchanging gifts made a lot of headlines in the media back then. Two days later, China invited the US table tennis team to travel to the country and play exhibition matches against the Chinese team. On April 10, 1971, 9 US players and four officials entered China. These were the first Americans who visited China since the communist takeover of the country in 1971. Then-Chinese President Chou En Lai welcomed the US visitors on April 14, 1971, who remarked: “You have opened a new chapter in the relations of the American and Chinese people. I am confident that this beginning again of our friendship will certainly meet with the majority support of our two people.”⁴⁴ On that same day, the US announced plans to remove a 20-year embargo on trade with China. The visit of the US table tennis team to China also paved the way for US President Nixon’s historic visit to China in 1972.

Another prominent recent example of the state using sports as a tool for fostering cooperation was seen during the 2022 FIFA World Cup hosted by Qatar. There was a narrowing of rift between Qatar and Saudi Arabia after four years since Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman had led a regional blockade of Qatar. This narrowing of a rift between Qatar and Saudi Arabia was visible during the opening ceremony of the 2022 FIFA World Cup, where Prince Mohammed donned a scarf in the colours of the Qatar flag while the late emir of Qatar, Sheikh Tamim, draped his shoulder in scarf covered in the flag of Saudi Arabia. Hence, Qatar was able to use its status as the host of a mega sporting event to reconcile with its Gulf neighbours.

Sporting Boycott as a form of diplomacy

A sporting boycott of a nation is another form of traditional diplomacy that States practice. This boycott can take two forms: imposing a ban on a country's participation in a tournament or refusing to play with another country, either home or away. A sporting ban may be imposed on a country if its domestic or international policies violate acceptable norms.

The history of sporting boycotts in the context of the modern Olympic games goes back a century. After their defeat in World War I, Germany, Austria, Bulgaria, Italy and Turkey were not invited to participate in the 1920 Antwerp Olympics. 1948 Germany, Japan and Bulgaria were excluded from the 1948 Olympic Games held in London.⁴⁵ Sporting boycotts were common during the heyday of the Cold War, and the tensions between East and West reflected on the sporting field as well. Two well-known instances are the USA and its allies boycotting the 1980 Moscow Olympics as a sign of protest against the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the subsequent boycott of the 1984 Los Angeles Olympic Games by the Communist bloc. US President Jimmy Carter called the boycott of the Moscow Olympics. Explaining the rationale for the boycott, the then US Vice President Walter Mondale famously stated: "Above all, the decision you will make today is not a choice between a sports issue and a national security issue; for the President and Congress have made it clear that the Olympic boycott is a genuine element of America's response to the invasion of

Afghanistan... It is a keystone in our call to our allies for solidarity... And thus it is also a referendum on America's character and fundamental values." More than 60 countries joined this boycott in what is now regarded as a significant event, highlighting the impact of the Cold War on sports.⁴⁶ In retaliation for the 1980 boycott of the Moscow Olympics, the USSR and other countries of the Eastern Communist bloc decided to boycott the 1984 Olympic Games in Los Angeles.

The most potent sporting boycott of a nation was that of South Africa during the apartheid regime. In 1962, the United Nations General Assembly Resolution 1761 condemned the apartheid in South Africa and "implored member nations to halt all diplomatic, military and economic relations with South Africa". It said that the racial politics followed by the country "seriously endangered international peace and security".⁴⁷ This political and economic boycott spilled into the sporting arena, too. South Africa was barred from the Olympics in 1960, and this ban continued till 1988. The ban was lifted only when South Africa sent its first non-racial squad at the 1992 Barcelona Olympics.⁴⁸ FIFA suspended South Africa in 1961, and the ban lasted for 30 years. The sanctions imposed on South African sports played a significant role in ushering in an era of the unravelling of the apartheid regime. Murray remarks: "They [sporting bans] expressed the will of many countries better than any political speech, negotiated treaty, or a round of economic sanction ever could."⁴⁹

In recent times, the West (US and Europe) have called for a sporting boycott of Russia and Belarus due to the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine. In May 2023, a joint statement signed by 36 sports ministers from around the world said that "Russia must not be allowed to use sport to legitimise its barbaric and unprovoked invasion of Ukraine."⁵⁰

Another form of a sporting boycott is the refusal to engage with a country perceived to have a poor human rights record. Cricket Australia (CA), the apex body of cricket in Australia, has now thrice cancelled a cricket series with Afghanistan, citing the miserable plight of women and girls in the Taliban-ruled country. "CA continues its strong commitment to supporting participation by women and girls in cricket around the world and will continue to actively engage the International Cricket Council and work closely with the Afghanistan Cricket Board to determine what actions could be

taken to support the resumption of bilateral matches in the future”, Cricket Australia said in a statement on 19 March 2024 after it postponed a bilateral series.⁵¹ Australian politicians have also supported Cricket Australia’s stance on the human rights situation in Afghanistan. Anika Wells, the Australian sports minister, has welcomed the cricket boycott of Afghanistan, mentioning that the Taliban’s systematic removal of women and girls from public life is unacceptable.⁵²

This section examined how states used sports as a tool of public diplomacy. However, akin to a myriad of non-state actors engaging in public diplomacy on a conceptual level, many actors beyond the State are involved in sports diplomacy. The following section examines these non-state sporting actors and also attempts to outline the structural features of a sports organisation.

Sports Organisations as Transnational International non-governmental Organisations

While the state remains one of the critical stakeholders in sports diplomacy, it is not the only stakeholder. Sports organisations, particularly those that govern the sport globally, have emerged as the other major stakeholders in such diplomacy. The paper posits that sports organisations that dominate international sports governance exhibit the characteristics of international non-governmental and transnational international organisations. So, before examining this aspect, a short conceptualisation of both ‘International non-governmental Organisation’ and ‘Transnational Organisation’ is required.

International organisations may be classified into Intergovernmental organisations (IGOs) and International NGOs (INGO). IGOs are associations of states established by a treaty to pursue the common aims of their member states. An intergovernmental organisation has a legal personality separate from its member states and can enter legally binding agreements with other IGOs or states. INGOs do not enter into treaties or lawfully binding international agreements. Resolution 288 (X) 27 February 1950 of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) defines INGO as “any organisation which is not established by inter-governmental agreement”. ECOSOC Resolution 1296 (XLIV) of 23 May 1968 states that “any international organisation which is not established by intergovernmental agreement shall be considered as a non-governmental organisation for the purpose of these arrangements, including organisations which accept members designated by governmental authorities, provided that such membership does not interfere with the free expression of views of the organisation.”

Huntington identified three characteristics of a transnational international organisation: First, they have a relatively large, hierarchically organised, centrally directed bureaucracy. Second, transnational organisations perform a set of specialised functions,

which sometimes may be technical. Third, transnational organisations operate beyond national boundaries and, in many cases, disregard these national boundaries. Huntington further states that while international organisations require identifying and creating a common interest among national groups, transnational organisations have their interests, which may not necessarily align with those of national groups. While international organisations embody the principles of nationality, transnational organisations tend to ignore it. Huntington remarks, “In this sense, the emergence of transnational organisations on the world scene involves a pattern of cross-cutting cleavages and associations overlaying those associated with the nation-state.”⁵³

Having examined the concepts of an International Non-governmental Organisation and a transnational international organisation, the monograph will now discuss the salient features of a sports organisation. Forster defines global sports organisations as “supreme organs of governance in sport whose authority is global”.⁵⁴ Thus, global sports governing organisations have a supra-national reach. Cutait identifies specific generic characteristics of an International Sports Organisation. They are structurally organised, whereby functions and objectives at each level of governance are clearly defined. In terms of compliance, international sports organisations adhere to rules, legal regulations, guidelines, and ethical frameworks, providing increased security, predictability, transparency, and moral standards. International sports organisations also frame the technical specification of their respective sport, establishing rules of competition and safety requirements in such a manner as to ensure a fair, clean and balanced participation of athletes. International sports organisations are representative and ensure that sports management is done legitimately to serve the community’s larger interest.

Further, International Sports Organisations have a vision for growth and a strategic plan identifying the current situation and a desired outcome. They also have the power to recognise an athlete and maintain relationships with commercial entities such as sponsors.⁵⁵

International Sports Organisations can be called transnational in the sense that the reach of their powers and functions defies the legal regulations of a single state. The rules, standards, and regulations formulated by international sports organisations must

be adhered to by all athletes and national sports organisations, irrespective of their nationality. International Sports Organisations also operate independently of the jurisdiction of any government and maintain a fair degree of autonomy in their decision-making process.

Forster categorises global international sports organisations into three categories based on their governance function. The first category comprises global sports organisations that govern sport at a global level, such as the FIFA and the International Cricket Council (ICC). The second category includes groups that govern a specific sporting event. The International Olympic Committee (IOC) fits in this category. The third category comprises global sports organisations that perform a specialist function. The World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) and the Court of Arbitration for Sports (CAS) are prominent examples of this category.⁵⁶

Some of the larger International Sports Organisations have also been engaged in diplomacy and display the characteristics of non-state diplomatic actors that have increased their influence in international politics in the 21st Century. The work of ISOs as non-state diplomatic actors also dispels the myth that sports and politics do not mix. Instead, as Murray states (emphasis added), “sports and politics- and by extension, diplomacy, do mix, all the time.”⁵⁷

International Sports Organisations as non-state diplomatic actors have also played a vital role in supporting human security. UNGA Resolution 66/290 defines human security as an “approach to assist member states in identifying and addressing widespread and cross-cutting challenges to the survival, livelihood and dignity of their people.” It calls for “people-centred, comprehensive, context-specific and prevention-oriented responses that strengthen the protection and empowerment of all people.”⁵⁸ Human Security is thus an analytical tool that focuses on ensuring the security of the individual and not the state. “In line with the expanded definition of human security, the causes of insecurity are subsequently broadened to include threats to socio-economic and political conditions, food, health, and environmental, community and personal safety. Policy initiatives generated through the application of the human security framework have incorporated considerations far beyond the traditional focus on military force, greatly reducing the emphasis on armies, if not replacing them

altogether. Human security is, therefore, people-centred multidimensional interconnected.”⁵⁹

The United Nations recognises the role of sports in promoting human security. In 2001, the United Nations Office on Sport for Development and Peace (UNOSDP) was created. The objective was to “raise awareness about the use of physical activity, sport and play as powerful development tools in advancing development and peace objectives.” On August 23, 2013, the United Nations General Assembly adopted Resolution 67/296, which proclaimed April 6 as the International Day of Sports and Peace. The adoption of this day signified the increasing recognition by the UN of the positive influence that sport can have on advancing human rights and social and economic development. The Resolution “invited States, the United Nations system and, in particular, the United Nations Office on Sport for Development and Peace, relevant international organisations, and international, regional and national sports organisations, civil society, including non-governmental organisations and the private sector, and all other relevant stakeholders to cooperate, observe and raise awareness of the International Day of Sport for Development and Peace.” The UNOSDP was closed in 2017 as the UN announced a direct partnership with the IOC.⁶⁰ The role of sports in promoting human security also entails its use as a development tool and its role in post-conflict societies. This paper posits that diplomacy by sports organisations can be seen within this perspective, referred to as the Sports for Development and Peace (SDP) framework.

Sports organisations, as non-state actors, can thus exercise a diplomatic role because sports is a generally positive phenomenon, and narrow national interests do not limit sports organisations to being transnational organisations.

International Olympic Committee (IOC) as a Diplomatic Actor

The Olympic Games have been inextricably linked with international relations at several levels. If we look at the history of the modern Olympic Games since 1894, we find that it reflects some major fundamental trends of international politics of that era; for example, the Olympic Games of 1916, 1920 and 1944 were cancelled due to the two world wars. During the Cold War, the Olympic Games became a theatre of conflict between the US-led Western bloc and the USSR-led Communist bloc. This has been examined in some detail in an earlier section. Espy aptly remarks that the Olympic Games echoed the international scenario. According to Espy⁶¹, “The Olympic Games, when viewed as a microcosm and an actor in international relations, provide a unique opportunity to examine the numerous forces on the international scene at once. The (Olympic) Games play an interacting role, representing the international structure while remaining a part of that structure”.

Structure of the IOC

The Olympic Movement is composed of three main constituents: the International Olympic Committee (IOC), the International Sports Federations (IFs) and the National Olympic Committees (NOCs). In addition to these three constituents, the Olympic Movement is made up of all the organisations which recognise the IOC’s authority: the Organising Committees for the Olympic Games (OCOGs), the athletes, judges and referees, associations and clubs, as well as all the IOC-recognised organisations and institutions.

The IOC was founded at the Sorbonne University in Paris on 23 June 1894 at the first-ever Olympic Congress, organised by Baron Pierre de Coubertin. Initially based in Paris, the IOC moved near Lake Geneva in 1915, establishing itself in Lausanne, Switzerland. Since its inception, the IOC has functioned as a distinct organisation

and has been the supreme authority in the Olympic Movement. This has been acknowledged in the Olympic Charter, in the Preamble, which states that the IOC has the “Supreme authority and leadership” over the Olympic Movement. The Olympic Charter states that the IOC can grant formal recognition to the constituent of the Olympic Movement. The IOC is the sole authority that recognises a NOC. According to the Olympic Charter, “The IOC may recognise as NOCs national sports organisations, and the activities linked to its mission and role. The IOC may also recognise associations of NOCs formed at the continental or world level. All NOCs and associations of NOCs shall have, where possible, the status of legal persons. They must comply with the Olympic Charter. Their statutes are subject to the approval of the IOC.” Currently, the IOC has recognised 206 NOCs. The Olympic Charter states that any person or organisation belonging in any capacity whatsoever to the Olympic Movement is bound by the provisions of the Olympic Charter and shall abide by the decisions of the IOC. The Charter also states that the IOC has the power to recognise IFs and to establish associations with IFs. The IOC is the final authority on the Olympics. It is responsible for coordinating the relations and actions of all members of the Olympic movement, including the National Olympic Committees (NOCs), International Federations (IFs), athletes, Organising Committees for the Olympic Games, broadcasting partners and agencies of the United Nations.

The consequences of recognition are determined by the IOC Executive Board, which assumes the general overall responsibility for the administration of the IOC and monitors compliance with the Olympic Charter. The Executive Board, founded in 1921, consists of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) President, four Vice-Presidents and ten other members. The IOC President is elected by secret ballot by the IOC members at the Session. The President’s term of office is eight years and can be renewed once, for four years. The duration of the terms of office of the Vice-Presidents and the ten other IOC EB members is four years. A member may serve for a maximum of two successive terms and be elected again as a member of the IOC EB after a minimum period of two years.

The IOC Executive Board manages the affairs of the IOC. Its functions are: 1) To conduct the procedure for acceptance and selection of candidatures for the organisation of the Olympic Games; 2) To enact, in the form it deems most appropriate,

all regulations necessary to ensure the proper implementation of the Olympic Charter and the organisation of the Olympic Games; 3) To present a report to the IOC session on any proposed change of the Olympic Charter, one of its Rules or bye-laws; 4) To take responsibility for the management of the IOC's finances and prepares an annual report; 5) To assume the general overall responsibility for the administration of the IOC.⁶²

The IOC members can be elected only during IOC sessions. They are elected as independent individuals, active athletes, presidents, or persons with an executive or leadership function within an IF or a NOC. Currently, the IOC has 107 members, including IOC President Thomas Bach. During the 2023 IOC session held in Jio World Centre, Mumbai, India, in October, eight officials were elected, increasing the membership to 107.⁶³

The IOC may be classified as a transnational and international non-governmental organisation. The governing structure of the IOC fits within the premise of Huntington's notion of a transnational organisation. Since all the members of the IOC as a transnational organisation are non-state actors, it can also be called a genuine non-government organisation. Roche calls the IOC the biggest and probably the most important cultural, international non-governmental organisation in the global system, as well as outside world religions and scientific associations.⁶⁴

The International Olympic Committee has been instrumental in garnering support for international cooperation by promoting the Olympic idea and has achieved a fair degree of success. Through the governance of the Olympic system, the IOC has successfully brought the world's nations together, contributing in some ways to promoting world peace. Currently, the IOC is regarded as the most influential sports organisation in the world.

Bayle states that the governance of the IOC can be characterised into three interconnected forms: The first is systematic governance, under which the IOC exercises control over the NOCs, IFs and OCOGs and deals with other stakeholders in the Olympic Movement. The second form is political governance, which concerns the IOC's relationship with intergovernmental organisations, national governments and cities/regions that support sports and sports events organised by official sports

bodies. The third form is organisational governance, which entails the activities of the IOC member constituents.⁶⁵

The second form of governance mentioned above lends the IOC's creditability as a rising non-state international diplomatic actor. As a critical actor in the Olympic movement, the IOC has increasingly engaged in diplomatic discourse and has evolved from a mere sports organisation. Throughout its history, the IOC has had internationalist aspirations that have underscored its commitment to using sport to promote unity, understanding, and cooperation among nations, transcending political, cultural, and social differences. It has increasingly embraced the role of promoting peace and reconciliation through sports. Pierre De Coubertin, the founding father of the modern Olympic Games, wrote a letter to the President of the League of Nations in 1920 stating that the principles upon which the Olympics rested were similar to those on which the League of Nations was organised. Coubertin wrote: "Twenty-six years ago, our committee [IOC] introduced and applied, as regards sporting activities, the very principles upon which the League [of nations] was organised and using their Olympiads they brought into existence an international collaboration which is getting closer and more effective."⁶⁶ However, with the decline of the League of Nations, attempts to have a more significant role for the Olympic Movement within the international political system also took a backseat.

IOC and the Recognition of East Germany

In the Cold War era, the IOC sought to navigate the complex interplay between politics, ideology, and sport on the global stage. An example of this was the IOC's role in determining the participation of either the German Democratic Republic (East Germany) or the Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany) in the Olympic Movement. In 1951, the IOC gave the NOC of the Federal Republic of Germany the sole authority to represent Germany at the Olympic Games. While East Germany wanted formal recognition within the Olympic Movement, the IOC's solution to the 'German Question' from 1951 to 1968 was forming a unified German team. Although East Germany refused to participate in the 1952 Olympic Games, it joined, albeit with reservations, the West German team and both competed under a unified Germany at the 1956 Melbourne Olympics. Avery Brundage, the then President of the IOC,

remarked: “We have obtained in the field of sport what politicians have failed to achieve so far”. In the 1960 Olympics, the diplomatic efforts of the IOC ensured that both East and West Germany marched under a compromise flag of the IOC.⁶⁷ Finally, at the IOC Madrid session in 1965, the IOC recognised the NOC of the German Democratic Republic (GDR).

One factor contributing to the IOC’s shift in stance was the GDR’s firm stance against the one-team policy and a change in leadership within the IOC. Additionally, East Germany intensified its efforts with various international sports federations to gain formal recognition. If these federations granted legitimacy to East Germany, it would undermine the IOC’s authority as the primary global sports governing body. In 1968, the IOC acknowledged East Germany’s request for a national committee. However, the IOC’s involvement in establishing a unified German team during the early Cold War years underscored its ability to shape relations among competing parties. This instance also illustrates the IOC’s capacity as a transnational entity to pursue its objectives in relation to nation-states and exert influence on the international stage.⁶⁸ The example also highlights the diplomacy of recognition by the IOC.

In the overall context of the Cold War period, although the IOC attempted to maintain a position of neutrality and promote the Olympic Games as a symbol of international cooperation and sportsmanship, the reality was that the Cold War had significant implications for the Olympics. The Olympics became an arena for rival ideologies to show their superiority; the boycotts of the 1980 Moscow Olympics by the USA-led Western bloc and the subsequent boycott of the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics by the USSR-led Communist bloc showed that the IOC was caught in maintaining the apolitical status of the Olympics. When the administration of US President Jimmy Carter mooted the idea of moving the Olympic Games away from Moscow, the IOC did not entertain the idea to avoid being perceived as showing political favouritism to the US.⁶⁹

IOC’s Diplomacy in Post -Cold War Era

This paper posits that the IOC’s role as a diplomatic actor has grown since the end of the Cold War. This role was conspicuous in the IOC’s position on the participation of the athletes of the now-disintegrated Yugoslavia in the 1992 Barcelona Olympics.

Following the Balkan Wars, the United Nations Security Council passed Resolution 757 on 30 May 1992, which imposed an embargo and sanctions on Yugoslavia. The resolution was passed due to the role of Yugoslavia as an aggressor in the Balkan War. One of the points in the Resolution called for “taking the necessary steps to prevent the participation in sporting events on their territory of persons or groups representing the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro)”. The IOC devised a formula to ensure that athletes of Yugoslavia could compete in the 1992 Barcelona Olympics. Juan Antonio Samaranch, the then IOC President, brokered a formula whereby the athletes from Yugoslavia could compete under the Olympic Flag and be known as the Independent Team⁷⁰. On May 22, 1992, the United Nations decided that its resolution calling for a ban on sporting contact with Yugoslavia allowed individual athletes from the country to compete in the Barcelona Olympics but not team events. However, the Security Council agreed to the compromise formula given by the IOC.⁷¹

A day later, Yugoslavia agreed to restrict participation in the 1992 Olympics. Juan Antonio Samaranch called Yugoslavia’s acceptance a victory for the Olympic Movement. This agreement received the seal of approval from the IOC Executive Council. Consequently, 52 erstwhile Yugoslavia athletes participated in 13 sports under the Olympic Flag. Thus, the IOC successfully negotiated with the United Nations to ensure the participation of Yugoslavian athletes at the 1992 Olympics.

In 1992, the IOC also appealed for the observance of ekecheria⁷² or Olympic Truce. Resolution 48/11 of the UN General Assembly, dated October 25, 1993, marked the first UN Resolution on the observance of Olympic Truce. The Resolution recognised the efforts of the IOC in restoring the ancient Greek tradition of ekecheria or “Olympic Truce” in the interest of contributing to international understanding and maintaining peace. The Resolution urged the UN Member States “to observe the Olympic Truce from the seventh day before the opening and the seventh day following the closing of each of the Olympic Games, in accordance with the appeal launched by the International Olympic Committee.”⁷³ In 1994, the President of the UN General Assembly issued a solemn appeal for the observance of the Truce during the Olympics.

The role of the IOC as a diplomatic actor was once again visible when it succeeded in having North and South Korea marching together under a flag depicting Korean unification. In 2000, Juan Antonio Samaranch, the IOC President, sent letters to South Korean President Kim Dae-Jung and North Korean leader Kim Jong Il proposing that all Korean athletes march jointly under the Olympic flag, which the flags of each country would follow. Both countries accepted this proposal.⁷⁴ At the 2004 Athens Olympics, North and South Korea again marched under the Korean unification flag. However, both competed as separate countries at these Olympics.

Diplomacy by the IOC in the Aftermath of Russia-Ukraine War

The IOC's involvement in international affairs can be studied by analysing its response to the Russia-Ukraine War. In the aftermath of the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the IOC condemned Russia for violating the Olympic Truce. The IOC also said that it had established a task force to monitor the situation closely and to coordinate humanitarian assistance to members of the Olympic Community in Ukraine where possible.⁷⁵ On February 25, 2022, the IOC Executive Board urged all international sports federations to relocate or cancel their planned sports events in Russia or Belarus.⁷⁶ On February 28, 2022, the IOC Executive Board issued a resolution recommending that International Sports Federations and sports event organisers not invite or allow the participation of Russian and Belarusian athletes and officials in international competitions. The IOC Executive Board also urged International Sports Federations and organisers of sports events worldwide "to do everything in their power to ensure that no athlete or sports official from Russia or Belarus can participate under the name of Russia or Belarus. Russian or Belarusian nationals, be it as individuals or teams, should be accepted only as neutral athletes or neutral teams. No national symbols, colours, flags or anthems should be displayed." The IOC also withdrew the Olympic Order given to Russian President Vladimir Putin in 2001 and also to Dmitry Chernyshenko, Deputy Prime Minister of Russia and Dmitry Kozak, Deputy Chief of Staff of the Presidential Executive Office of Russia, given in 2014/ IOC. The Executive Board also established a solidarity fund for Ukraine.⁷⁷

The 11th Olympic Summit held in December 2022 discussed in detail the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The participants at the Summit were unanimous that the sanctions imposed on Russia and Ukraine remain firmly in place. The Summit also rejected calls by certain governments not to invite any athletes from Russia and Belarus. According to a statement by the IOC: “The Summit strongly rejected these measures by governments as unacceptable interference in the autonomy of sports organisations and their political neutrality. The Summit emphasised that participation in sports competitions must be based exclusively on the sporting merits of an athlete and respect for the rules of sport.”⁷⁸

In February 2023, Ukraine’s sports minister threatened to boycott the Paris 2024 Olympic Games if Russia and Belarus were allowed to compete. The leaders of three Baltic countries, Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia, also urged the IOC to ban Russian athletes from the Paris 2024 Olympic Games. However, the IOC remained firm regarding the participation of athletes from Russia and Belarus at the 2024 Paris Olympics and dismissed any boycott talks. The IOC said that “this threat of a boycott only leads to further escalation of the situation, not only in sport but also in the wider context. It is regretful that politicians are misusing athletes and sports as tools to achieve their political objectives.” The IOC further said to the countries contemplating boycotting: “Why punish athletes from your country for the Russian government starting the war?”⁷⁹ The IOC was also critical of the reaction of some of the European governments, such as Poland, the United Kingdom and the Czech Republic, to its plan to reinstate the Russian and Belarus athletes. The IOC President, Thomas Bach, remarked that it was “deplorable to see that some governments do not want to respect the majority within the Olympic movement and all stakeholders, nor the autonomy of sport.” Bach said it cannot be up to governments to decide which athlete can compete in which competition, as it would signal the end of the sports world as we know it today.

On 26 July 2023, the IOC invited 203 out of 206 NOC to participate in the Paris Olympics 2024.⁸⁰ Two of the three NOCs that did not receive the invitation were from Russia and Belarus.⁸¹ On October 12, 2023, the IOC suspended the Russian Olympic Committee over the latter’s decision to include, as its members, the regional sports organisations which are under the authority of the NOC of Ukraine (namely

Donetsk, Kherson, Luhansk and Zaporizhzhia). The IOC said that this action by Russia constituted a breach of the Olympic Charter as it violated the territorial integrity of Ukraine, as recognised by the IOC. It may be mentioned here that in 2016, when Crimea and Sevastopol were included as members of the Russian Olympic Committee, the IOC did not suspend Russia. As a result of this ban, Russia moved the Court of Arbitration for Sports (CAS) against the ban. However, the CAS upheld the suspension of the Russian Olympic Committee. The CAS ruling, which came out in March 2023, stated: “A NOC can only exercise territorial jurisdiction within the limits of the boundary of an independent State recognised by the international community. If the international community recognises the regions as part of Ukraine, then the ROC’s decision to admit sports organisations from those regions as members violated the territorial integrity of the Ukrainian NOC, as protected by the Olympic Charter.”⁸²

Despite calls for a complete blanket ban by Ukraine, the IOC remained firm on allowing the Russian and Belarus athletes to compete as neutrals in the Paris 2024 Olympics. The Ukraine Foreign Ministry, in a statement, said that by allowing Russian and Ukrainian athletes to compete at the Olympics, the IOC has given the “green light to Russia to weaponise the Olympics”. The Ukraine Foreign Ministry said that “Moscow will not be raising white neutral flags, but will be demonstrating the triumph of its ability to avoid responsibility for the largest armed conflict in Europe since World War II”⁸³ Ukraine President Mykhailo Podolyak accused the IOC, by allowing the participation of Russian athletes in any form, of promoting “violence, mass murders, destruction” and that Russia’s presence at the Paris 2024 Olympics will give the country “a platform to promote genocide.” The IOC had earlier already rejected this criticism calling such statements “defamatory” and said that such statements could not form “the basis of any constructive decision.”⁸⁴

The IOC has also condemned Russia’s plans to organise the so-called ‘Summer Friendship Games’ in Moscow and Ekaterinburg in September 2024 and ‘Winter Friendship Games’ in Sochi in September 2026. These ‘Friendship Games’ are seen as a direct rival to the Olympics. The IOC has urged political leaders not to participate in these ‘Friendship Games.’ On March 19, 2024, the IOC issued a strongly worded Declaration “against the politicisation of Sports.” The Declaration termed such attempts by Russia as cynical and violating the Olympic Charter. The IOC Declaration

stated that the “Russian government has launched a very intensive diplomatic offensive by having government delegations and ambassadors, as well as ministerial and other governmental authorities, approaching governments worldwide. They deliberately circumvent the sports organisations in their target countries to make their political motivation even more apparent. This is a blatant violation of the Olympic Charter and an infringement of the various UN resolutions.”⁸⁵

The IOC decided to exclude Russian and Belarusian athletes to participate in the Paris 2024 Olympics Opening Ceremony. The IOC laid out a two-step vetting procedure for granting neutral status to individual athletes from Russia and Ukraine. In the first step, such athletes were required to get the approval of the governing bodies of their respective sports, and then in the second step, by an IOC-appointed review panel. The IOC has also laid out the conditions that neutral athletes should not be supportive of the Russian invasion of Ukraine and not be affiliated with the military or security agencies.⁸⁶ The IOC’s firmness to ensure that athletes comply with these conditions was manifested when it decided to ban two-time Olympic freestyle wrestling champion and captain of the Russian wrestling team Abdul-Rashid Sadulayev as he did not meet the neutrality criteria and took part in an event called The Republican Freestyle Wrestling Tournament dedicated to the memory of the soldiers coming from Kazbek (Dagestan, Russia) killed during the military operations in Ukraine. The IOC deemed this event as a propaganda event organised in support of the Russian war in Ukraine.⁸⁷

The IOC’s final decision was that athletes from Belarus and Russia could compete as individuals under the AIN (Athlètes Individuels Neutres, French for Individual Neutral Athletes) in the Paris Olympics. The IOC stated that AINs with a Russian or a Belarusian passport may only participate in the 2024 Olympics in an individual and neutral capacity. The IOC also made it clear that teams of athletes with a Russian or Belarusian passport cannot compete in the Paris 2024 Olympics. The IOC formed the Individual Neutral Athlete Eligibility Review Panel (AINERP) to evaluate the eligibility of each athlete with a Russian or Belarusian passport who obtains, or who could obtain, a qualification place for the Olympic Games Paris 2024 and that of their support personnel. On 19 March 2024, the IOC Executive Board also decided on the terms on which the AIN athletes would participate in the Paris 2024 Olympics.

The essential terms were as follows: 1) The IOC designated a special flag and anthem to the AIN; 2) Medals won by AIN would not be displayed at the points table; 3) Athletes and support persons who actively support the war on Ukraine will not be allowed to participate; 4) Athletes or support staff who are contracted to the Russian or Belarusian military or national security agencies will not be eligible to be entered or to compete; 5) No flag, anthem, colours or any other identifications whatsoever of Russia or Belarus will be displayed at the Olympic Games Paris 2024 in any official venue or any official function; 6) No Russian or Belarusian government or state officials will be invited to or accredited for the Olympic Games Paris 2024.⁸⁸

At the Paris 2024 Olympics, 32 athletes accepted the invitation to compete as AIN and competed. Another 28 athletes were offered to participate as AIN, but they declined.⁸⁹

Thus, the IOC is a diplomatic actor in the context of the Russia-Ukraine War. It has been firm in the rejection of demands by Ukraine and other European nations to impose a blanket ban on the participation of Russian and Belarusian athletes. At the same time, the IOC has also been proactive in imposing sanctions on Russian athletes and the Russian Olympic Committee. By imposing such sanctions, the IOC has overcome academic criticism that its initial stand on the Russia-Ukraine War was confined to an appeal of the observance of the Olympic Truce only.⁹⁰ The IOC's stand on the impact of sports on the Russia-Ukraine war can thus be termed as balancing the varying interests.

The IOC's relationship with the United Nations

The IOC has engaged with the United Nations since the 1990s. The IOC's engagement with the United Nations to ensure the participation of athletes from Yugoslavia in the 1992 Barcelona Olympics has been examined above. However, the soft power of the IOC was recognised in 2009 when the IOC was granted observer status at the United Nations. This allows the IOC to take an active part in the UN agenda and attend the meetings of the UN General Assembly. However, the IOC cannot exercise a vote.⁹¹ The granting of observer status to the IOC shows its importance in the UN network. In April 2014, the IOC and the UN signed a Memorandum of Understanding

on the role of sports in development and peace. On the same day, the then UN Secretary-General Ban ki-Moon announced the appointment of Jacques Rogge of Belgium, the former IOC President, as the US Special Envoy for Youth Refugees and Sport.⁹² In a significant milestone for the IOC, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a consensus resolution that recognised the autonomy of sports. The Resolution recognised that “major international sports events should be organised in the spirit of peace, mutual understanding, friendship, tolerance and inadmissibility of discrimination of any kind and that the unifying and conciliative nature of such events should be respected.”⁹³

The role of the IOC as an influential non-state diplomatic actor can also be seen through the creation of the Olympic Refugee Team ahead of the Rio Olympics in 2016. In the aftermath of the 2015 global refugee crisis, the IOC announced the creation of the Olympic Refugee Team at the 70th session of the UN General Assembly. The IOC President Thomas Bach stated that the Refugee Olympic Team highlighted the ideals that united the IOC and the UN. “Both organisations are built on the same foundation of the shared values of tolerance, solidarity and peace. Their common goal is the peaceful development of humankind.”⁹⁴ In a historic first, the Olympic Refugee Team at the Rio Olympics consisted of 10 athletes chosen by the IOC. Creating the Refugee Team has provided a platform for non-refugees worldwide to recognise refugee communities. The IOC continued with the Refugee Team at the 2020 Tokyo Olympics, where 29 refugees competed for the team.

At the 2024 Paris Olympics, 37 athletes competed under the banner of the Olympic Refugee Team. The UN Commissioner for Refugees, Filippo Grandi, stated that “the [Olympic Refugee] team is “a symbol of inclusion, of equality, of achievement for a large community around the world of refugees and displaced people.” During the Opening Ceremony of the 2024 Paris Olympics, Filippo Grandi was awarded the Olympic Laurel - an award to honour those who have “made significant achievements in education, culture, development and peace through sport,” for “his dedication to supporting refugees recognising the power of sport.”⁹⁵

Before the opening ceremony of the Paris 2024 Olympic Games, IOC President Thomas Bach met United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres. The UN

Secretary-General expressed gratitude to the IOC for allowing a refugee team to compete at the Olympics. It said that “it’s important to leave no one behind, and not to leave behind those that were forced to flee, to leave their countries, and have the same rights to practice sports as any other citizen of the world.”⁹⁶

Another significant initiative by the IOC is the launch of the Olympic Refugee Foundation. Launched in September 2017, the Olympic Refugee Foundation aims to support the protection, development and empowerment of children and youth in vulnerable situations through sport. The objectives of the Olympic Refugee Foundation are to create safe, basic and accessible sports facilities in areas where there are refugees, a displaced migrant population or internally displaced people, where all children and young people can play sports and take advantage of sport’s multiple benefits and develop sporting activities that can be successfully implemented within these safe environments. As part of the IOC’s efforts towards helping the displaced communities, the IOC has also created a Sport for Protection toolkit to guide the work of the Olympic Refugee Foundation. The UNHCR has also worked closely with the Olympic Refugee Foundation since it was created in 2017. Another landmark in this cooperation was signing a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the IOC and UNHCR on June 1, 2022. The MoU aims to deepen UNHCR’s cooperation with the Olympic Movement in providing opportunities for refugees and other forcibly displaced people to participate in sports at all levels.⁹⁷

Creating the Olympic Refugee Team has significantly enhanced the IOC’s international standing. The IOC made a sports team that is not managed by a NOC. Athletes who do not fit into a model of national representation have been allowed to participate in the Olympic Games. This reflects the IOC’s diplomatic acumen. Thus, creating the Olympic Refugee Team proves that the IOC has negotiation skills that no other entities or institutions have.

FIFA as a Diplomatic Actor

FIFA is a transnational international organisation involved in the governance of one of the world's most popular and lucrative sports—football. Founded in Paris in 1904, FIFA is ‘an association registered in the Commercial Register of the Canton of Zurich’ according to its current statutes.

Structure of FIFA

There are currently 211 member states of FIFA. These member states are from six confederations: regional confederations. These are:

- CONMEBOL—Confederación Súdamericana de Fútbol—responsible for the countries of South America except for Guyana and Suriname, linked to CONCACAF, and French Guiana, not affiliated to FIFA;
- UEFA—Union des Associations Européennes de Football—responsible for the countries of Europe, plus Kazakhstan and Israel;
- CONCACAF—The Confederation of North, Central America, and Caribbean Association Football—responsible for the countries of North America, Central, Caribbean, Guyana and Suriname; CAF—Confédération Africaine de Football—responsible for African countries; AFC—Asian Football Confederation—responsible for Asian countries plus Australia;
- OFC—Oceania Football Confederation—is responsible for the countries of Oceania, except for Australia, which applied for membership in the AFC in 2005 and was accepted in 2006.⁹⁸

The FIFA Congress is the organisation's supreme legislative body, and all the 211 member associations have a vote. The FIFA Congress meets annually. Members of Congress propose candidate countries that can host the FIFA World Cup, as well as individual candidates that run for the presidency of FIFA. To be eligible to vote, each Member Association must have an effective internal governance structure and be free from state intervention. The FIFA Council can be called the executive organ of the organisation. The final composition of the FIFA Council consists of 37 members: one President, elected by the FIFA Congress; eight vice presidents; and 28 other members elected by the member associations – each for four years. A minimum of one female representative must be elected per confederation.

FIFA Statutes are the organisation's governing document. They establish a framework within which FIFA's operations are carried out. FIFA's hierarchical structure controls the actions conducted by its member associations. There have been instances where FIFA has been able to influence the behaviour of states. This can be studied from the following perspectives: stopping states from making political decisions that can impact sports, considering a country's human rights record, and being capable of making states that want to host FIFA-related events adopt specific laws.

Article 15 of the FIFA Statutes states that its Member Associations must be neutral in politics and religion and independent of political interference. If Member Associations do not comply with this, FIFA can suspend them. Such suspensions can lead to a change in policy by the governments of that Member Association. Upon FIFA's satisfaction that changes have taken place in the desired direction, FIFA can lift the suspension. Thus, in such circumstances, FIFA is indirectly capable of influencing the behaviour of a state, although there is no negotiation or dialogue directly with the state. This can be illustrated by the example of the suspension of the All India Football Federation (AIFF) by FIFA, which led to a change in the sports governance policy of the Indian government. On August 16, FIFA banned the AIFF, citing a 'third party' intervention, constituting a breach of FIFA Statutes. A couple of months earlier, on May 18, 2022, the Supreme Court of India had appointed a Committee of Administrators (CoA) to oversee the functions of the AIFF. FIFA perceived this CoA as third-party interference in the governance of Indian football. After the ban was imposed, the Indian government moved the Supreme Court to address the matter.

On August 22, 2022, the Supreme Court terminated the CoA and transferred the governance responsibility to the AIFF creation. On August 26, 2022, FIFA lifted the ban on AIFF and said in a statement that the “decision was taken after FIFA received confirmation that the mandate of the committee of administrators that was set up to assume the powers of the AIFF Executive Committee had been terminated and that the AIFF administration had regained full control of the AIFF’s daily affairs.” This suspension of the ban also meant that India could host the FIFA Under 17 World Cup as planned in October 2022.⁹⁹

FIFA can also exert pressure on States regarding their human rights record. A classic example of this is the ban imposed on South Africa during its apartheid era. In 1961, FIFA suspended South Africa for its apartheid policy, which entailed a prohibition of mixed-race sporting teams in the country. The FIFA ban on South Africa was imposed after days of discussion in London, where 67 Member States discussed their positions on the South African apartheid policy. This ban was significant as it marked the first major indictment of the apartheid regime and was done in the world’s most popular sport. The FIFA ban on South Africa lasted for 30 years and was lifted only after the end of the apartheid regime. FIFA has also referred to the state of human rights in recognition of national federations. For example, when the sports bodies in the newly formed independent states in the aftermath of the dissolution of the USSR and the breakup of Yugoslavia applied for international recognition, FIFA’s then President Sepp Blatter said that a prerequisite for the sporting recognition of these newly formed independent nations was their observance of human rights.¹⁰⁰

In 2017, FIFA also published its landmark human rights policy, which is enshrined upon the principles stated in Article 3 of the FIFA Statutes: “FIFA is committed to respecting all internationally recognised human rights and shall strive to promote the protection of these rights”. The strategy states that FIFA is committed to the protection of human rights in accordance with the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.¹⁰¹ The strategy also reaffirmed FIFA’s commitment to stand against discrimination. It stated: “Article 4 of the FIFA Statutes prohibits discrimination of any kind against a country, private person or group of people on account of race, skin colour, ethnic, national or social origin, gender, disability, language, religion, political opinion or any other opinion, wealth, birth or any other status, sexual orientation or

any other reason. Furthermore, FIFA emphasises identifying and addressing differential impacts based on gender, promoting gender equality, and preventing all forms of harassment, including sexual harassment.”¹⁰²

FIFA says that its human rights strategy is built on four pillars. First, FIFA publicly commits to upholding its human rights responsibilities and takes measures to embed respect for human rights within its bodies, administration, and member associations. Second, FIFA continuously identifies potential and actual adverse human rights impacts associated with its activities and addresses such risks through adequate prevention and mitigation measures. Third, FIFA helps protect those who advocate respect for human rights related to its activities and is committed to contributing to providing remedies where individuals have been adversely affected by activities associated with FIFA. Fourth, the human rights strategy calls on FIFA to regularly engage and communicate with external stakeholders about its efforts to ensure respect for human rights.¹⁰³ FIFA also established an independent Human Rights Advisory Board in 2017 with a four-year mandate.

FIFA’s Pressure on Iran to allow entry of women into football stadiums

An example of FIFA’s successful diplomacy concerning the human rights framework is allowing women in Iran to be welcomed to football matches as spectators. After the Iranian revolution in Iran, women were banned from attending football and sporting contests as spectators. After publishing FIFA’s human rights strategy, calling for the organisation to address discrimination in all its forms, it stepped up its engagement with sporting and political authorities in Iran. On March 1, 2018, FIFA President Gianni Infantino met Iranian President Hassan Rouhani, and the latter assured that women would be allowed to attend soccer matches in the country, although it would take some time.

Since that meeting, FIFA has continued its engagement with the Iranian authorities concerning the issue. So, when Iran played its FIFA World Cup matches in 2018 in Russia, Iranian women were also allowed to enter the Azadi Stadium in Tehran, where the live television broadcast of the match was taking place on a big screen for

the Iranian public. In November 2018, the Human Rights Advisory Board of FIFA published its second report, which described this as an ad-hoc decision and did not constitute a formal end to the ban on women in soccer stadiums. In the report, the Advisory Body called on FIFA to set a deadline for Iran by which the country was expected to end the ban on Iranian women attending male sports events. The report also urged FIFA to warn Iran of anticipated sanctions.¹⁰⁴

In September 2019, FIFA mounted pressure on Iran following the self-immolation of Sahar Khodayari, a female football fan. According to reports, she set herself on fire after learning that she may face six months in prison after trying to enter a football stadium.¹⁰⁵ In the aftermath of this, a FIFA delegation visited Iran. The delegation met with Iran's Deputy Minister of Sport and Youth and representatives of the Football Federation of the Islamic Republic of Iran (FFIRI). FIFA reiterated its firm and clear position that women must be allowed to enter football matches freely and that the number of women who attend the stadiums must be determined by demand, resulting in ticket sales. The delegation also discussed opening stadiums for women to attend national matches.¹⁰⁶ In a statement, FIFA President Infantino said that FIFA had contacted the Iranian authorities several times to “address this unacceptable situation ... Our position is clear and firm. Women have to be allowed into football stadiums in Iran,” Infantino said.¹⁰⁷

In a small but significant victory of FIFA, the Iranian government allowed the women to attend a football match for the first time in decades. Approximately 4500 women got a ticket for the FIFA World Cup qualifying match between Iran and Cambodia at the Azadi Stadium in Tehran. Visuals of the women spectators draped in the Iranian national flag around their soldiers and over their heads made international headlines. However, the human rights organisations criticised the Iranian decision to cap the number of female spectators in the stadium. Human Rights Watch said in a statement that any concessions by FIFA to limit the number of women who can attend stadiums only empowered Iran's hardliners who have previously pre-selected women to attend while keeping the discriminatory restrictions in place, and this restriction was in contravention to the FIFA Statutes.¹⁰⁸ In February 2020, FIFA said that FFIRI should provide relevant facilities for women to attend three forthcoming major soccer events in the country.¹⁰⁹

With the accession of hardliner Ebrahim Raisi as the President of Iran in June 2021, the ban on female spectators in stadiums was once again reinstated. In September 2021, the FIFA President told FFIRI head, Shahaboddin Azizi, that the Iranian regime had to allow women into the stadium to watch Iran's 2022 World Cup qualifier against South Korea on October 12. However, the match was held behind closed doors using the pretext of COVID-19-induced spectator restrictions. It was alleged that Iran was using the COVID-19 crisis as a cover for ignoring the repeated warnings by FIFA.¹¹⁰

On March 30, 2022, Iranian women who had bought tickets were not allowed to attend a World Cup qualifier game at Imam Reza Stadium in Mashhad. Pepper spray was even sprayed to keep the women out. Reacting to this incident, FIFA issued a stern warning to FFIRI against “turning back” on the policy of allowing entry of women into the stadiums: “FIFA’s position ... is clear: historic progress has been achieved – as exemplified by the milestone in October 2019, when thousands of women were allowed into the stadium ... and more recently when some women were allowed again at the FIFA World Cup qualifier match in Tehran in January – and FIFA expects this to continue, as there can be no turning back,” FIFA said in a statement after the incident.¹¹¹ Under pressure from FIFA, a limited number of Iranian women were permitted to watch a domestic league football match for the first time in August 2022.¹¹² In July 2023, Iran’s Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) approved women’s entry into stadiums. The SNSC formed a committee of representatives from the Interior Ministry, the Ministry of Sports and Youth, the Football Federation, and two intelligence organisations to plan the implementation of women’s entry into stadiums. This decision of the SNSC was a direct response to the pressure exerted by FIFA.¹¹³ It is also because of FIFA pressure that women, for the first time in 44 years, were allowed to attend a football match outside of the Iranian capital city of Tehran.

Thus, FIFA’s handling of this issue shows it can pressure national governments and modify their human rights policies. FIFA President Infantino followed a policy of personal engagement and met Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi in New York City in September 2023 to discuss the progress made regarding the presence of women in football stadiums. ““Thanks to the ongoing dialogue between FIFA and the Islamic Republic of Iran Football Federation, progress is being made,” Infantino remarked.¹¹⁴

FIFA's support to human rights campaigners in Russia

Another example of FIFA's success in diplomacy was the support offered to human rights campaigners and journalists in Russia, the host country of the FIFA 2018 World Cup. FIFA strengthened and implemented its event-time systems to identify adverse impacts on people during the 2018 FIFA World Cup, such as through the Anti-Discrimination Monitoring System in the area of discrimination or the complaints mechanism for human rights defenders and media representatives in fundamental freedoms. FIFA also consulted with international experts regarding human rights in Chechnya (FIFA Human Rights Advisory Board 2018). However, some criticism has been that FIFA's human rights record in Russia was unsatisfactory. One of the criticisms was that FIFA made Grozny, the capital of Chechnya, a potential training site for the teams participating in the World Cup. FIFA was also criticised for being silent on the anti-LGBT policy followed by the Russian government.¹¹⁵

FIFA's Influence on Labour Law Changes in Qatar

FIFA President Gianni Infantino also claimed that another successful example of FIFA's diplomacy was inducing changes in the labour laws of Qatar, the host of the 2022 FIFA World Cup, aimed at protecting the workforce. Infantino said that these changes were praised by both the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC).¹¹⁶ This aspect may be examined now. FIFA selected Qatar as the host of the 2022 World Cup. This highlighted the labour laws in Qatar, especially the Kafala system, a sponsorship system that binds migrant workers to one employer (a sponsor). Human rights organisations documented that this system facilitated abuse and exploitation and granted employers disproportionate power and control over migrant workers' immigration and employment status and, thereby, their lives.¹¹⁷ FIFA and international organisations such as the ILO pressured Qatar regarding its human rights record and changes to the labour laws.¹¹⁸

This pressure significantly impacted the adoption of Law No. 2020 in Qatar, which removed the need for migrant workers to obtain their employer's permission to change jobs while establishing a non-discriminatory minimum wage for the first time in the

region. FIFA President Gianni Infantino congratulated Qatar on this significant step and said that it demonstrates the capacity of the FIFA World Cup to foster positive change and build a lasting legacy.”¹¹⁹

The ILO and the ITUC also welcomed this change. The ILO said this new law, coupled with some changes, effectively dismantled the Kafala system. At the same time, the ITUC called the changes a break from the past that offers a future for migrant workers in Qatar underpinned by laws that respect workers and grievance and remedy systems.¹²⁰ Thus, these examples show that FIFA, functioning as “transnational private regulators, can confront public authorities by relying on strong enforcement mechanisms.”¹²¹

Besides influencing state behaviour, FIFA has also realised the broader human security agenda. FIFA President Infantino remarked that the “new FIFA is a responsible body and a sustainable organisation. It is an organisation that is aware that football goes beyond playing competitions. Football is much more than that.”¹²² In 2018, the FIFA Foundation was created to tackle social issues and help people in countries marred by conflict. For example, since the beginning of the Ukrainian war, the FIFA Foundation has helped the victims of the war. In 2022, FIFA allocated US \$ 1 million to help those affected by the Ukraine War. FIFA also transported first-aid medical kits to Ukraine.¹²³ FIFA and UNHCR also issued a global appeal to raise funds for the people displaced by the conflict in Ukraine.¹²⁴

International Cricket Council and Diplomacy

The International Cricket Council (ICC) is the governing body for cricket. Its membership currently comprises 108 member countries. The ICC was founded as the Imperial Cricket Council in 1909. Its membership was initially comprised of three countries—England, Australia, and South Africa—and has grown to over a hundred. The ICC changed its name to the International Cricket Conference in 1964 and the present International Cricket Council in 1989.

Structure of the ICC

The ICC membership is of two types: The first type are Full Members, those which are recognised by the ICC, or nations associated for cricket purposes, or a geographical area from which representative teams are qualified to play official test matches. These comprise the following 12 countries- England, Australia, South Africa, New Zealand, West Indies, India, and Pakistan. Sri Lanka, Zimbabwe, Bangladesh, Afghanistan and Ireland. The second category is that of Associate Members. These are the governing bodies for cricket of a country recognised by the ICC, countries associated for cricket purposes, or a geographical area not qualifying as a full member but where cricket is firmly established and organised. These associate members are 96 in number.

The ICC governs and administers the game of cricket globally and works with its members to grow the sport. It is responsible for staging all ICC events, presiding over the ICC code of conduct, playing conditions, the Decision Review System, and other ICC regulations. The ICC can appoint match officials in all internationally sanctioned matches. The ICC is also responsible for protecting ethics through its anti-corruption unit, which tracks and tackles corruption and match-fixing.

The ICC's membership is significantly smaller than the two sports organisations discussed in the paper. The paper suggests that the ICC's role as a non-state actor should be studied within the Sports for Development and Peace (SDP) framework.

Role of ICC in the promotion of cricket in post-conflict Afghanistan

In this context, a prominent example is the ICC's aid in promoting cricket in post-war Afghanistan since 2001, and cricket has been used as a tool to support reconciliation efforts. It has supported the Afghanistan Cricket Board (ACB), which was established in 1995 and gave it affiliate membership in 2001, a short time before the fall of the Taliban regime. In 2003, the ACB was granted associate membership of the Asian Cricket Council (ACC). Wagg remarks that "Cricket, it was thought, could be politically important in building a secular, modern, Westernised hegemony to counter the Islamised severity of the Taliban and the equally brutal traditional authority of the nation's warlords."¹²⁵ In 2003-04, the ICC earmarked US\$46,294 for Afghan cricket; in 2004-05, this rose to US\$115,451; in 2005-06 to US\$165,605; in 2006-07 to US\$121,961 and a further US\$107,453 was set aside in 2007.¹²⁶

In 2011, the ACB came out with its strategic plan 2011-2015. The ACB stated that the plan's objective was not just to promote the development of cricket but to stimulate national unity, contribute to peacebuilding and stability, and contribute to health, unity and development (Afghanistan Cricket Board 2011). In 2013, the ACB was awarded US \$422,000 from the ICC's targeted assistance and performance programme.¹²⁷ In 2014, Afghanistan was awarded the top prize at the ICC Development Program awards. In the same year, the then ACB CEO, Dr Noor Mohammad Murad, acknowledged that ICC had played a vital role in the rise of Afghanistan cricket and was collaborating with ACB in making a valuable contribution to peace, unity and development in the country.¹²⁸ Afghanistan's cricket team has regularly competed in ICC men's global events since 2015. Thus, from playing cricket in refugee camps in 2001 to playing the highest level of competitive cricket, the rise of Afghanistan cricket has been meteoric. The ICC has been one of the significant actors fuelling this meteoric rise.

However, the return of the Taliban to power in Afghanistan in 2021 has led to greater scrutiny of the role of the ICC. Upon its return to power, the Taliban banned Afghan women athletes from playing sports. An analysis of the response of the ICC to this

development thus far reveals that compared with the two sports organisations studied in this paper, the ICC needs to do more to enforce positive change concerning human rights. Many Afghanistan women sportspersons, including cricketers, fled from the country when the Taliban acquired power in 2021. In November 2021, the ICC set up a working group to observe and review cricket in Afghanistan after the Taliban takeover. The ICC Chairman Greg Barclay stated then that “Cricket is fortunate to be in the position to influence positive change in Afghanistan.”¹²⁹

At this point, the ICC is in a conundrum. One of the ICC Membership criteria clearly states that its full and associate members should have a satisfactory women’s pathway structure in place. The ICC has not suspended the ACB, saying that it cannot penalise the cricket board or players for abiding by the laws set by the government of their country.¹³⁰ Currently, it does not look like the ICC will suspend the ACB. The lax response of the ICC to this situation has come with heavy criticism from many quarters. Such views state that since the UN has said that access to sports is a fundamental human right.¹³¹ Denying opportunities for women to participate in sports, including cricket, violates this right. Such critics of the ICC’s stand on this issue allege that the ICC does not feel that the “rights of women are worth making a stand about.”¹³²

ICC’s Activities within the Sports for Development and Peace Framework

Another prominent example of the ICC’s role as an actor within the framework of SDP was visible when it organised the World Cricket Tsunami Appeal match to raise funds for supporting the humanitarian efforts following the Indian Ocean Tsunami of December 26, 2004. Member associations of the ICC also donated heavily to the relief effort.¹³³ The charity match held at the Melbourne Cricket Ground raised \$11 million.

The ICC has partnered with UN programs and UN-affiliated organisations within the SDP framework. Such partnership has involved activities pertaining to peace as well as development. In 2003, the ICC entered into a partnership with UNAIDS, the

UN program, which is the leading advocate for accelerated, comprehensive and coordinated global action on the HIV/AIDS pandemic. The partnership aimed to increase awareness about HIV/AIDS in cricket-playing countries.¹³⁴ UNICEF also joined the partnership in 2006, and the Global Media AIDA initiative joined the partnership in 2007. Together, the partnership launched the THINK WISE initiative, which aimed to use the spirit of cricket to end the AIDS epidemic. This continued in the 2011 Men ODI World Cup under the Get the Facts, Protect Yourself initiative.¹³⁵ The final of the ICC Champions Trophy 2013 was dedicated to awareness of AIDS.¹³⁶

The ICC has also partnered with the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF). The partnership between the two began in 2015 as part of the ICC's global outreach program named "Cricket 4 Good", which agreed to collaborate in specific areas of nutrition and child development, water and sanitation hygiene, quality education, empowering adolescents, child protection and child health, all aimed at improving children's lives.¹³⁷ In 2019, the ICC announced the extension of its partnership with UNICEF with a focus on empowering women and girls through cricket. It was announced that money raised during the ICC Women T20 World Cup 2020 would go to an innovative programme to promote girls' participation in cricket in Sri Lanka and build peace in communities.¹³⁸

Since 2022, the ICC partnership with UNICEF has focused on empowering women and girls and promoting inclusion and gender equality through cricket.¹³⁹ In September 2023, ICC, the Board of Control for Cricket in India, the Ministry of Education, the Government of India and UNICEF with 1000 children, launched CRIIO 4 GOOD, an online life skills learning module, to promote gender equity among girls and boys. The Indian Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan remarked at the launch that empowerment of women and girls was one of the key objectives of the NEP 2020 launched by the Narendra Modi government with India and appreciated that "the power of sports and popularity of cricket is being used as a medium to empower the girl child and spread awareness about gender equity."¹⁴⁰ During the time India hosted the ICC Men ODI World Cup in 2023, Cricket teams from Afghanistan, Australia, Bangladesh, England, India, New Zealand, Pakistan, South Africa, Sri Lanka and the Netherlands played cricket with 50 young boys and girls each at stadiums in Ahmedabad, Bengaluru, Chennai, Dharamshala, Kolkata, Lucknow, Mumbai, New

Delhi, and Pune from 10 October to 3 November 2023. Along with these matches, cricket clinics were organised to help young girls and boys learn valuable skills that can help them become more confident, work together and be leaders in the future.¹⁴¹The ICC and UNICEF also organised the “One Day for Children” campaign to support children’s issues. During the 2023 India-Sri Lanka World Cup fixture at the Wankhede Stadium, Mumbai, UNICEF South Asia Regional Ambassador and Indian cricket legend Sachin Tendulkar, along with Sri Lankan cricket legend Muttiah Muralitharan pressed a button, after which the Wankhede Stadium was lit in UNICEF’s cyan blue colour.¹⁴²

On June 28, 2024, the ICC extended its partnership with UNICEF until 2027. According to UNICEF, this partnership will promote girls’ participation in cricket over the next four years and build leadership and cooperation skills through the ICC’s major cricket events in the West Indies, the United States, Bangladesh, Pakistan, India, South Africa, and Sri Lanka.¹⁴³

Thus, the ICC is also involved in a more significant role than just regulating and organising cricket matches. It also performs the role of a humanitarian actor with the Sports for Development and Peace framework.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The paper has examined that sports cannot be divested from politics and how states have co-opted sports as a soft power tool. At the same time, the paper found that sports organisations functioning as non-state actors have also been functioning as non-state diplomatic actors. Through their organisational structure, the paper argued that sports organisations also exhibit the characteristics of a transnational organisation. The paper then showed that these sporting organisations could influence the behaviour of states.

The paper demonstrated this by undertaking a case study of three major sporting organisations: the IOC, FIFA, and the ICC. Using these three case studies, the paper argues that sports organisations wield significant power due to their global reach and ability to mobilise resources, making them influential players in politics, economics, and social change. In other words, international sports organisations display the traits of a non-state diplomatic actor capable of influencing state behaviour.

The paper recommends that national governments work with sports organisations and leverage the power of sports, extending much beyond the field of play, to further their diplomatic goals. A prominent example of a sports organisation working in conjunction with a government's diplomatic endeavours can be seen in India, where the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) has offered its full assistance to the 'cricket diplomacy' pursued by India in its neighbourhood. For example, in Afghanistan, India has consciously employed building sports facilities in war-torn Afghanistan as part of the High Impact Community Development Program (HICDP). The BCCI has provided Indian stadiums as 'home grounds' for the Afghanistan cricket team upon the request of the Afghanistan Cricket Board to the Indian Sports Minister. Another example can be taken as that of Nepal. During his visit to Nepal in 2018, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi remarked that sporting ties were one of the ways to stay connected. India has been aiding Nepal in the development of cricket. The BCCI has offered to extend infrastructure and exposure-related assistance to Nepal cricketers.

A third example is that of Maldives. India has been using cricket diplomacy as a soft power to balance its growing hard power. Since 2019, the Indian and the Maldives government have been working closely with BCCI to construct a state-of-the-art training and international stadium in Hulhumalé. This paper also recommends that the government of India leverage the power of BCCI to raise concerns regarding the human rights situation in some volatile neighbouring countries. The Government of India should also strengthen other sporting associations so that they can have a more significant say in their respective global organisations and better pursue the country's interests.

These examples show that states must interact more constructively with non-state actors in sports diplomacy. Due to the global reach and increasing economic clout of sports organisations, states can extend their reach and leverage additional resources. States and non-state actors can utilise sports strategically to address global challenges and promote positive values. Effective sports diplomacy requires collaboration between states and non-state actors. This collaboration can broaden the scope and impact of sports diplomacy programmes, allowing them to address complex global concerns more fully and effectively.

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