

Sports Diplomacy—Mitigating Ideological and Religious Conflicts between Neighbouring Countries

Jizhe Yu

Beijing Sport University, Beijing 100084, China.

Abstract: In the real world, sports diplomacy falls under the umbrella of public diplomacy, which seeks to achieve foreign policy objectives by influencing the public to improve medium and long-term relations between countries. The sports diplomacy strategy is aimed at establishing a favorable international political and international security environment, with a country, multiple countries or international organizations as the initiators, using sports means to integrate the strategic design and diplomatic implementation of the target country or international sports organizations. At present, the United States, France, Australia, Japan, South Korea and other countries have established special sports diplomacy strategic goals and institutions. Based on the influence and diversified value of sports diplomacy, integration into the national grand strategy has become a development trend

Keywords: Sports Diplomacy; Conflicts; Ideological

Introduction

In the real world, sports diplomacy falls under the umbrella of public diplomacy, which seeks to achieve foreign policy objectives by influencing the public to improve medium and long-term relations between countries (Gilboa, 2008). This paper focuses on the North-South Korea and India-Pakistan rivalries to demonstrate the effectiveness of sports diplomacy. The first case deals with the way in which sports diplomacy can be used as an effective means of mitigating ideological rivalries, while the second case will deal with the way in which sports can mitigate conflicts between countries of different religions.

1. Background

It can be said that the examples of North and South Korea and India-Pakistan are very similar in that both were divided from the same country due to political factors or differences in religious beliefs to become two separate sovereign states at present.

It is well known that North Korea follows a socialist system while South Korea develops its society according to a capitalist system, so Lee (2013) states that the main factor in the conflict between South Korea and North Korea is the ideology of the two countries. This was caused by the division of the Korean peninsula into two halves administered by the US and the Soviet Union after the Second World War (lieu, 2005). The governments of North and South Korea used their respective national ideologies as a tool for political domination, promoting the identification of each country's citizens by promoting the superiority of their own national ideologies and belittling the other, thus increasing the hostility of the citizens of North and South Korea towards each other (Hyun, 2015). This has severely hampered diplomacy between North and South Korea, resulting in the national boundary on the Korean peninsula remaining in a state of wartime alert (Stueck, 2004).

In addition to political ideologies, differences in religious beliefs can also lead to the division of nations and societies, as religions draw boundaries between people of their different faiths and can likewise be used as instruments of political struggle (Willander, 2020). Of course, the reasons behind the division of British India into two states, India and Pakistan, are complex (Cohen, 2002), and the following analysis will focus on the religious factor in the conflict between the two countries, thus demonstrating the role of sporting diplomacy from the side.

2. Sports Diplomacy: De-escalates Ideological Conflicts

In the first case study, the focus is on how sports diplomacy can be used as a means to reduce antagonistic tensions between North and South Korea based on ideological differences. Firstly, Medlicott (2005) argues that North Korea's ultra-dogmatic socialist ideology sees South Korea and the capitalist representative state behind it, the United States, as the greatest obstacle to its own national security and development, while the Western capitalist states, led by the United States, also see North Korea's nuclear weapons as the greatest destabilising factor for global security and have imposed sanctions on North Korea (Moore 2008). In the field of sport, not only have many countries banned North Korea from participating in international events, but the DPRK has also protested against Western sanctions through international sporting platforms (Merkel, 2012) in the form of boycotting participation in influential sporting events around the world, such as the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics and the 1988 Seoul Olympics.

However, as Abdi et al. (2019) claim, when sport is used as a diplomatic tool, it can be used as a soft power to achieve desired outcomes. With the arrival of a new young leader in North Korea and the globalisation of the economy, North Korea seeks to engage with the outside world in a limited space in order to increase global acceptance of North Korea (Kim, 2008). This is because in today's interconnected global economy, even a very closed North Korea cannot manage to completely cut off its economic ties with other countries (Cumings, 2005). When the North Korean authorities have such intentions, the handling of relations with neighbouring South Korea is the most direct manifestation of such intentions. As Houlihan (2003) argues, an important factor in the development of sports is the behaviour of the state, which in part drives the interaction between states through sport.

A typical example of South and North Korea is the story of the joint participation of the South and North Korean women's ice hockey teams at the 2018 PyeongChang Winter Olympics, which was seen as a goodwill gesture by North Korea, not only as a step towards inter-Korean peace and reconciliation but also as an opportunity to help change the international community's stereotype of North Korea (Choi, 2022). At the same time for the people of North and South Korea, there is no doubt about the ethnic purity and homogeneity of their politically divided countries (Cumings, 2004). This event also reflects a strong and clear belief in the common ancestry and common descent of both countries (Myers, 2010; Shin, 2006). Nevertheless, it is unlikely that the conflict between the two countries populations can be completely overcome by a single sporting event, as there are still many South Koreans who have expressed their dissatisfaction with this North-South Korean sporting cooperation (Choi, 2021). But from the point of view of sports diplomacy alone, North and South Korea are trying to use sport to transcend ideological conflicts and thus emphasise a homogenous national identity in order to enhance the aim of peaceful diplomacy between the two countries. On the other hand, North Korea is also actively seeking opportunities in the global sports arena for its own national interests and using it as a foreign policy tool (Choi, 2002). In conclusion, just as Simons (2021) argues that all these activities demonstrate the power of sports diplomacy to promote diplomatic relations.

3. Diplomacy to Ease Religious Conflicts in Neighbouring Countries - Cricket

In the second case, sports diplomacy played an effective role in defusing religiously motivated hostility between neighbouring countries. Although the two countries are still in dispute over the border, sports diplomacy can be used as a means to provide a platform for people of different faiths in both countries, which in turn creates opportunities for dialogue and exchange between the two countries.

Differences in religious beliefs can divide societies and exacerbate national conflicts (Grim, 2012). The religious conflict between India and Pakistan is rooted in complex political and socio-historical factors (Guttman, 2003), and when Pakistan was established as an independent Muslim state, mistrust between Hindus and Muslims rose to the national level (Hassan, 1987). At the same time, the division of ethnic societies was inevitably accompanied by violent conflict, which in turn fuelled historical hatred between the two peoples (Hilali, 2005). And religious antagonism can be used as a political tool to inflame domestic sentiment while serving politicians' own political interests (Billings & Scott, 1994), with politicians in India and Pakistan accusing each other of failing to protect their religious minorities, thus deepening popular hostility towards the other country (Orens, 2003).

In this context, the 2004 cricket match between India and Pakistan could be seen as an important step towards easing relations between the two countries. This is because competitive sports can reflect or sustain a collective psyche, the mythic structures in sports can help generate collective identity and most importantly sports can also be a means of political motivation (Guha, 2002; Sengupta,

2004), so it is not surprising that the 2004 cricket match became a tool for political engagement between India and Pakistan. Whereas Khan (2005) argues that cricket matches between India and Pakistan can act as a 'peace bridge' for multi-track diplomacy, Chatterjee (2004) highlights the importance of cricket as a peaceful joint effort between the middle political, economic and bureaucratic elites of the two countries, which can mitigate not only political and military conflicts, but also the animosity of people of different faiths. 2004 s match was followed by astonished Indian fans and journalists at the hospitality they received from their former 'enemies', which had a very positive impact on mutual understanding between the two countries' interfaith populations (Khan, 2005).

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, the case studies of North and South Korea and India and Pakistan demonstrate the effectiveness of sports diplomacy in mitigating ideological and religious conflicts between countries. Through sports, countries have been able to transcend their differences and engage in peaceful interactions, promoting dialogue and understanding between conflicting parties. The joint participation of North and South Korea in the 2018 PyeongChang Winter Olympics is an example of how sports diplomacy can be used as a tool for peace and reconciliation, while cricket matches between India and Pakistan have also played an important role in promoting peace and understanding between people of different faiths. Overall, sports diplomacy can be a valuable addition to traditional diplomatic efforts and can contribute to building trust and relationships between countries. As the world becomes increasingly interconnected, it is important to explore and utilise all possible means of promoting peace and understanding, and sports diplomacy is an effective way to achieve these goals.

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