

Sports and Diplomacy: Strategic Employment of Sports for Foreign Policy and Security

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Sport has become a modern-day phenomenon that has revamped global dynamics and international relations. There is a strong link between sports and diplomacy, where sports function as an arena for power, strategy and statecraft. At the same time, globalization has signified the waning effect of traditional diplomacy, calling for the need to redefine the scope of diplomacy. Today, states incorporate sports to a certain extent in diplomacy and power but rather haphazardly. Further, there is a lack of scholarly research in the study of sports and diplomacy in academia. The overall objective of this paper was to explore the sports-diplomacy nexus and to ascertain the methods of the strategic employment of sports for foreign policy and security. First, the study found a strong connection between sports and diplomacy in several key dimensions. Secondly, it observed how states have used sports for diplomacy. Although states have practiced sports to a certain extent in diplomacy, the employment of sports as a modern strategic element has been largely unexplored. In relation, thirdly, the paper explored the strategic employment of sports to achieve foreign policy and security objectives of a state. The paper determines that whilst sport is often used as a tool of diplomacy, the strategic employment of sports can propel state strategy beyond diplomacy and influence other elements of national power which strategy and statecraft are built upon and executed for foreign policy and security objectives. It further elucidates that sports can even impact as a hard power element in certain contexts and not merely a soft power element as it is often perceived. Thus, sports can be strategically employed, as both soft and hard power means for foreign policy and security, making it a 'smart power' element. There is a need to re-evaluate the sports-diplomacy nexus and the strategic employment of sports for foreign policy and security objectives, and rethink and employ sports in strategy and statecraft. Discerning sports' true potential and strategic employment will allow a state to emerge from global complexities in a transforming international system.

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