



# ***CASE STUDIES OF NON-EU SPORT DIPLOMACY:***

***UNITED KINGDOM, UNITED STATES,  
AUSTRALIA, CHINA & QATAR***

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# ***CASE STUDIES OF NON-EU SPORT DIPLOMACY: UNITED KINGDOM, UNITED STATES, AUSTRALIA, CHINA & QATAR***

## ***INTRODUCTION***

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The following section discusses the approach selected by non-European Union (EU) countries to sport diplomacy. Its purpose is to identify how states employ sport within broader public diplomacy approaches. This will highlight to the EU and its Member States good practices and associated risks. Five countries were selected, each with a different approach. The United Kingdom (UK) has a long tradition of attempting to shape international perceptions through sport and it stands as a useful European comparator. The United States (U.S.) is selected due to its long engagement with public diplomacy and being one of only a few states with a well-developed sport diplomacy strategy. Australia's inclusion is justified as it is believed to be the first country to have created and adopted a formal sport diplomacy strategy. China and Qatar provide non-European and non-democratic points of comparison. They are included to highlight the diplomatic use of sport from an Asian and Middle Eastern perspective and to demonstrate the approach of a super-power and a small state, albeit in Qatar's case, a disproportionately influential and wealthy one.

# 1. CASE 1: THE UNITED KINGDOM, FROM RULE BRITANNIA TO COOL BRITANNIA

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From the start of the twentieth century, the UK's global power has been in relative decline. The humiliation of the 1956 Suez Crisis confirmed the trajectory and re-oriented UK foreign policy in a European direction with the first of its applications to the European Economic Community coming in 1961. Despite this, the UK has maintained a strong image internationally. The Royal Family, the BBC news network, the British Council, globally prominent universities and iconic sporting events, such as Wimbledon, Royal Ascot and the FA Cup Final have contributed to the UK remaining culturally relevant in the world.<sup>1</sup>

Some of this cultural relevance can be attributed to government departments/institutions/services. Two prominent public diplomacy services are state funded – the BBC World Service and the British Council. Since 1932, the BBC World Service has been broadcasting multi-lingual radio programmes to the world “as a provider of news, information and entertainment, and as a tool of public diplomacy”.<sup>2</sup> According to a House of Commons Select Committee, the World Service has made a “unique contribution to the United Kingdom’s public diplomacy as a world class international broadcaster”.<sup>3</sup> Historically funded directly from the Foreign Office, it now derives the majority of its income from the BBC license fee scheme. Launched in 2000, the BBC Sport website forms a central part of the organisations news site, which in 2020 boasted a global readership of 438 million.<sup>4</sup>

Originally called the British Committee for Relations with Other Countries, the British Council was founded in 1934 with overseas offices opening four years later. At a time of financial depression and the rise of fascism, the UK government considered it necessary to establish a body that would promote in other countries “knowledge and understanding of the people of this country, of their philosophy and way of life, which will lead to a sympathetic appreciation of British foreign policy”.<sup>5</sup>

In recent years, the British Council has recognised the value of sport diplomacy and it has worked in partnership with sports bodies to deliver significant projects across the world. For example, Premier Skills is a project run with the Football Association Premier League designed to empower grassroots coaches and referees to help young people through football. Using the global appeal of the Premier League as a key attraction, the programme has delivered projects in 29 countries since its establishment in 2007.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, Try Rugby is a partnership with Premiership Rugby in which British coaches deliver development activities in schools and communities in Brazil.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Maguire, J. (2011), Power and Global Sport: Zones of Prestige, Emulation and Resistance, *Sport in Society*, 14(7/8), p.1023.

<sup>2</sup> Gillespie, M. & Webb, A. (2012), *Diasporas and Diplomacy: Cosmopolitan Contact Zones at the BBC World Service (1932-2012)*, Taylor and Francis, p.2.

<sup>3</sup> House of Commons (2006), *Public Diplomacy*, Select Committee on Foreign Affairs, Third Report of Session 2005-06, p.8. Accessed at: <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200506/cmselect/cmfaff/903/903.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> ‘BBC News reaching highest ever global audience’, BBC News Website, 23/07/20, accessed at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-53517025>

<sup>5</sup> Annual report 1940-41, quoted at <https://www.britishcouncil.org/about-us/history>

<sup>6</sup> See: [https://premierkills.britishcouncil.org/?\\_ga=2.23057074.805265198.1618694598-1369009541.1618694598](https://premierkills.britishcouncil.org/?_ga=2.23057074.805265198.1618694598-1369009541.1618694598)

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.britishcouncil.org/society/sport/current-programmes/try-rugby>

The British Council's Gulf Sport and Culture Programme, funded by the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, helps governments in the Gulf to invest in the creative, cultural and sports sectors with the aim of promoting "a deeper understanding of positive core values underpinning UK sport".<sup>8</sup> International Inspiration was London 2012's sports legacy programme<sup>9</sup>. In addition to its UK focussed activities, this sport for development programme targeted policymakers, practitioners and children in 20 countries worldwide to inspire broader participation in sport. The programme ended in 2014 and was positively reviewed for impact.<sup>10</sup>

While the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (previously the FCO) has long deployed soft power through its public diplomacy, its "embrace of sport as an element in its soft power repertoire is both recent and tentative".<sup>11</sup> The 2002 Wilton review of public diplomacy identified a lack of co-ordination in the UK's approach to public diplomacy and recommended the adoption of "an overarching public diplomacy strategy".<sup>12</sup> Soon after, and on the initiative of the Foreign Secretary, a second public diplomacy review was carried out by Lord Carter of Coles. Unlike Wilton, the Carter review acknowledged the role sport could play in UK public diplomacy. It stated, "it is possible that sport remains an area of untapped potential... and the use of sport in public diplomacy should continue to be explored".<sup>13</sup>

The staging of mega-events has offered the UK an opportunity to tap the potential of sport diplomacy, particularly as a source of nation branding. Although the 2002 Commonwealth Games held in Manchester can be regarded as one of the first UK major events which "can be analysed through its image building significance",<sup>14</sup> it is the London 2012 Olympic Games that stands out as an overt act of UK sport diplomacy. Through the 'London 2012 Legacy Promises', the UK government committed, amongst other things, to "make the UK a world-class sports nation" and "demonstrate that the UK is a creative, inclusive and welcoming place to live in, to visit and for business".<sup>15</sup> The Department for Culture, Media and Sport added, that staging the Olympics will "allow millions of new, international visitors to enjoy the UK's culture and heritage" and it "will generate new business opportunities and boost the UK's inward investment and export capacity".<sup>16</sup> The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) stated that "London 2012 will have a profound impact on the UK's international reputation".<sup>17</sup>

Whether the impact was 'profound' is a matter for debate, although Horne and Houlihan reported that in 2013, the UK was ranked third in the Nation Brand Index, an improvement from fourth in 2009<sup>18</sup> and that a survey of international newspapers conducted by Grix and Houlihan in 2013 indicated very positive perceptions of the image of Britain, particularly projected by the opening

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.britishcouncil.org/gulf-sport-and-culture-programme>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.britishcouncil.org/society/sport/current-programmes/international-inspiration>

<sup>10</sup> Ecorys (2014), Final Evaluation of the International Inspiration Programme, accessed at: [https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/ecorys\\_international\\_inspiration\\_final\\_review\\_2014\\_1.pdf](https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/ecorys_international_inspiration_final_review_2014_1.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> Grix, J. & Houlihan, B. (2013), Sports Mega-Events as Part of a Nation's Soft Power Strategy: The Cases of Germany (2006) and the UK (2012), *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 16(4), 584.

<sup>12</sup> House of Commons (2006), Public Diplomacy, Select Committee on Foreign Affairs, Third Report of Session 2005-06, p.13.

Accessed at: <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200506/cmselect/cmfaff/903/903.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> The Carter Report, 2005, quoted in Grix, J. & Houlihan, B. (2013), Sports Mega-Events as Part of a Nation's Soft Power Strategy: The Cases of Germany (2006) and the UK (2012), *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 16(4), 584.

<sup>14</sup> Kobierecki, M. (2020), *Sports Diplomacy: Sports in the Diplomatic Activities of States and Non-State Actors*, Lexington Books, p.128.

<sup>15</sup> Department for Culture, Media and Sport (2007), *Our Promise for 2012: How the UK Will Benefit from the Olympic and Paralympic Games*, accessed at: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/77720/DCMSLeafletAdobev5andlaterTPL.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/77720/DCMSLeafletAdobev5andlaterTPL.pdf)

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Quoted in Horne, J. & Houlihan, B. (2014), London 2012, in Grix, J. (ed), *Leveraging Legacies from Sports Mega-Events: Concepts and Cases*, Palgrave Macmillan, p.113.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

ceremony and by the organisation and delivery of the Games themselves.<sup>19</sup> By 2013, it was estimated that the staging of the Games boosted the UK economy by £9.9 billion and by 2021, the UK had staged 25 major sporting events using 2012 infrastructure providing additional revenues.<sup>20</sup>

Closely associated with the staging of mega-events is the question of the performance of UK athletes at such events. The dismal performance by British athletes at the 1996 Atlanta Olympics was considered an “embarrassment”.<sup>21</sup> This partly reflected the “non-interventionist” sports model operating in the UK which saw the government take an arms-length approach to sports policy.<sup>22</sup> The prevailing attitude at the time was that it was not the place of government to run sport. By the end of the Thatcher regime in 1990, however, that attitude began to change as the state recognised the public interest in sport and realised that sport could be employed to deliver wider public policy goals. In November 1994, the state National Lottery was launched and public investment into sport increased significantly through the so-called ‘good causes’ distribution mechanism, one of which was sport. Despite this, it was only since London was awarded the Olympic Games in 2005 that the government turned its attention to using sporting performance to promote the British brand.

Within government, sport policy falls within the remit of the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS). It assumes primary responsibility for distributing National Lottery and government funds to sport, which it does through a devolved model involving UK Sport and the four Home Country Sport Councils from England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. These bodies are responsible for giving effect to overall government sport policy within their respective jurisdictions. In addition to its role as lead government agency for the attraction of major sporting events, UK Sport’s mission is to develop world class athletes capable of achieving high-level results at major sporting events. To achieve this, UK Sport has distributed hundreds of millions of pounds to national governing bodies and individual athletes that are earmarked for success.<sup>23</sup> Success is largely measured by medals won and results of this investment have been impressive. Having finished 36th in the Atlanta Olympic medal table in 1996, Great Britain finished 2nd in the Olympic and Paralympic medal table at Rio in 2016, even eclipsing China.<sup>24</sup>

The level of investment into elite sport has not been without criticism. Each medal won at the Rio Olympics “cost” approximately £4.1million.<sup>25</sup> Critics argue that whilst the status of the UK on the international stage has been enhanced, little else has been achieved. For example, participation in sport in the UK has not been significantly increased,<sup>26</sup> some sports have had funding withdrawn due to the focus on medal attainment<sup>27</sup>, and a win-at-all costs mentality has damaged athlete wellbeing.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Grix, J. & Houlihan, B. (2013), Sports Mega-Events as Part of a Nation’s Soft Power Strategy: The Cases of Germany (2006) and the UK (2012), *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 16(4), 572-596.

<sup>20</sup> Lewis, A. & Taylor, J. (2021), *Sport: Law and Practice*, Bloomsbury Professional, p.106.

<sup>21</sup> Kobierecki, M. (2020), *Sports Diplomacy: Sports in the Diplomatic Activities of States and Non-State Actors*, Lexington Books, p.130.

<sup>22</sup> Chappellet, J.L. (2010), *Autonomy of Sport in Europe*, Council of Europe, p.19-20.

<sup>23</sup> For example, £352 million is earmarked for the run up to Tokyo 2021 through to Paris 2024. See: UK Sport (2020), UK Sport outlines plans for £352million investment in Olympic and Paralympic sport (18/12/20), accessed at: <https://www.uk sport.gov.uk/news/2020/12/18/paris-cycle-investment>

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.uk sport.gov.uk/about-us>

<sup>25</sup> ‘How many millions each Olympic medal has really cost Britain’, *The Independent*, 21/08/16. Accessed at: <https://www.independent.co.uk/sport/olympics/rio-2016-great-britain-secures-second-olympic-medal-table-sporting-superpower-tokyo-2020-a7202761.html>

<sup>26</sup> ‘Olympic legacy: Did £1bn after 2012 get any more people doing sport?’, *BBC Online*, 17/08/17, accessed at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-40817063> See also Weed, M. et al (2015), *The Olympic Games and raising sport participation: a systematic review of evidence and an interrogation of policy for a demonstration effect*, *European Sport Management Quarterly*, Vol 15 (2), 195-226.

<sup>27</sup> For example, five sports initially had UK Sport funding withdrawn for Tokyo 2020, although some later received a reprieve.

<sup>28</sup> ‘UK Sport denies win-at-any-cost Olympic mentality after testing revelations’, *The Guardian*, 13/07/2020, accessed at: <https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2020/jul/12/uk-sport-denies-win-at-any-cost-olympic-mentality-after-testing-revelations>

It should also be noted, and particularly since the introduction of the Devolution Acts of 1998, the devolved administrations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have begun to consider the diplomatic potential of sport.<sup>29</sup> In 2019, the Scottish Government was advised to consider the potential of sport diplomacy to advance Scotland's cultural relations, although it is yet to take its first significant steps.<sup>30</sup> First out of the blocks is Wales. In 2020, the British Council published a report on how sport could play a role in its international engagement and diplomatic activities.<sup>31</sup> The report made a series of recommendations for the Welsh Government and competent sports bodies to consider. In the report, the authors described Wales as “a small nation with a very large sporting footprint”.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> The Devolution Acts, subsequently amended, are the Scotland Act 1998, the Government of Wales Act 1998 and the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

<sup>30</sup> Scottish Government (2019), A Review of the Scottish Sporting Landscape – The Jarvie Report. Accessed at: <https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/corporate-report/2019/09/review-scottish-sporting-landscape/documents/review-scottish-sporting-landscape-jarvie-report-2019/review-scottish-sporting-landscape-jarvie-report-2019/govscot%253Adocument/review-scottish-sporting-landscape-jarvie-report-2019.pdf>

<sup>31</sup> British Council (2020), Towards a Welsh Sports Diplomacy Strategy. Report commissioned by the British Council and written by Dr. Stuart Murray and Mr. Gavin Price. Accessed at: [https://wales.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/towards\\_a\\_welsh\\_sports\\_diplomacy\\_strategy\\_0.pdf](https://wales.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/towards_a_welsh_sports_diplomacy_strategy_0.pdf)

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, p.40.

## **2. CASE 2: THE UNITED STATES, SPORT DIPLOMACY – THE BEST KEPT SECRET OF U.S FOREIGN POLICY**

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Since the end of World War 2 (WW2), the United States has been active in the field of public diplomacy. The United States Information and Educational Exchange Act of 1948 (known as the Smith-Mundt Act) sought to “promote a better understanding of the United States in other countries, and to increase mutual understanding between the people of the United States and the people of the countries”.<sup>33</sup> It did so through establishing a statutory information agency to disseminate abroad information about the U.S. and its people and an educational exchange service that facilitated reciprocal exchanges in the field of education, the arts and sciences.

By 1953, President Eisenhower had established the United States Information Agency (USIA) as a tool to influence foreign publics and in 1956, he signed the International Cultural Exchange and Trade Fair Participation Act which provided for the promotion and strengthening of international relations through cultural and athletic exchanges and participation in international fairs and festivals. The Mutual Educational and Cultural Exchange Act of 1961, commonly known as the Fulbright-Hays Act, established the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) to oversee educational and cultural exchanges, including in the field of sport.

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, the Cold War preoccupied U.S. foreign policy, with image building being a prominent feature of 1960s U.S. sport diplomacy.<sup>34</sup> Between 1954 and 1963 more than 60 groups of athletes such as Jesse Owens and Althea Gibson, travelled to more than 100 countries on sport diplomacy missions.<sup>35</sup> Other Cold War sport diplomacy initiatives included sending sports equipment and sports books to other countries, harnessing the appeal of celebrity athletes, such as the private basketball team the Harlem Globetrotters, and the staging of sports events, for example through the Global World Series, a series of baseball events.<sup>36</sup>

During the 1970s, U.S. sport diplomacy had become synonymous with ‘ping-pong’ diplomacy, a reductive connection many scholars have since tried to dispel. Sino-American relations were poor since the establishment of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, but the deteriorating nature of Sino-Soviet relations offered some prospect for U.S. China rapprochement and on entering the White House, President Nixon made China his “top priority”.<sup>37</sup> Table tennis became the unlikely vehicle through which prospects of new relations were tested.

China agreed to participate in the table tennis world championships in Japan in 1971, having broken with its previous policy of not engaging with international organisations or events that included Taiwan, a country China retained a territorial claim over. At the tournament an impromptu meeting between Chinese world champion Zhuang Zedong and U.S. player Glenn Cowan resulted

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<sup>33</sup> United States Information and Education Exchange Act of 1948, Sec 2

<sup>34</sup> Kobierecki, M. (2020), *Sports Diplomacy: Sports in the Diplomatic Activities of States and Non-State Actors*, Lexington Books, p.110.

<sup>35</sup> Faulkner, O (2017), *CultureConnect and the US Department of State: A Gateway to the Future of Sport Diplomacy* in Esherrick, C et al (eds) (2017), *Case Studies in Sport Diplomacy*, FIT Publishing, p.41.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*, p.110.

<sup>37</sup> Xu, G. (2008), *Olympic Dreams: China and Sports 1895-2008*, Chapter 5: The Sport of Ping-Pong Diplomacy, Harvard University Press, p.119.



the U.S. team being invited to China to participate in two exhibition matches. The tour was a success and soon after, the U.S. lifted a trade embargo, currency controls and visa requirements on China.<sup>38</sup> A matter of months later, U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger visited China, paving the way for Nixon's visit in early 1972.

Many have reflected on the value of ping-pong diplomacy, and the balance sheet is largely positive. Ping-pong diplomacy “remarkably changed the political climate concerning Sino-American relations”<sup>39</sup>, it played a role in “transforming” these relations<sup>40</sup>, it “heralded in a new era in Sino-American relations”<sup>41</sup>, and it paved “the way for peaceful conversations between two previously warring countries”.<sup>42</sup>

The U.S. continued to practice sport diplomacy in the 1980s but just as ping-pong diplomacy came to define its approach in the 1970s, so the Olympic boycotts did likewise in the 1980s. The Carter administration boycotted the 1980 Moscow Olympics in response to the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan<sup>43</sup>, a move reciprocated by the Soviet Union's boycott of the Los Angeles Games of 1984.<sup>44</sup> In the run up to the L.A. Games, the President of the Games' Organising Committee made a plea for the US to “catch up with the rest of the world”, through for example, adopting a more strategic approach to US sport diplomacy by using athletes and coaches and “envoys as emissaries of peace”.<sup>45</sup>

By the 1990s, the Soviet Union had dissolved but the U.S. continued with ad hoc sport diplomacy initiatives, such as practicing wrestling and soccer diplomacy with Iran. Prior to the two national sides meeting in the 1998 FIFA World Cup in France, President Clinton stated that he hoped the game would be a “step toward ending the estrangement between our nations”.<sup>46</sup> However, U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East, commencing with the Gulf War of 1991, tarnished the image of the U.S. in the 1990s in some strategically important regions, necessitating a rethink of US soft power. With the passage of the Foreign Affairs Reform and Restructuring Act (1998), the US Information Agency was merged with the Department of State, and responsibility placed with the Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy.<sup>47</sup> However, just two years after the reforms came into effect, the US suffered the 9/11 attacks.

9/11 necessitated a rethink on U.S. soft power, akin to the reflection that took place after WW2. The U.S. State Department established *CultureConnect*. This exchange program sent cultural figures

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<sup>38</sup> Kobierecki, M. (2016), Ping-Pong Diplomacy and its Legacy in the American Foreign Policy, Polish Political Science Yearbook, Vol.43(1), p.310

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, p.311.

<sup>40</sup> Xu, G. (2008), Olympic Dreams: China and Sports 1895-2008, Chapter 5: The Sport of Ping-Pong Diplomacy, Harvard University Press, p.163.

<sup>41</sup> Hong, F. & Zhouxiang, L. (2014), Politics First, Competition second: Sport and China's Foreign Policy in the 1960s and 1970s, in Dichter, H. & Johns, A. (eds) (2014), Diplomatic Games: Sport, Statecraft, and International Relations Since 1945, University Press of Kentucky, p.397-398.

<sup>42</sup> Lecrom, C., & Ferry, M., (2017), The United States Government's Role in Sport Diplomacy, in Esherick, C et al (eds) (2017), Case Studies in Sport Diplomacy, FIT Publishing, p.28.

<sup>43</sup> Sarantakes, N. E. (2010), Dropping the Torch: Jimmy Carter, the Olympic Boycott, and the Cold War, Cambridge University Press.

<sup>44</sup> Kobierecki, M. (2015), Boycott of the Los Angeles 1984 Olympic Games as an Example of Political Play-Acting of the Cold War Superpowers, Polish Political Science Yearbook, Vol.44, pp.93-111. See also, Tulli, U. (2018), “They Used American, All Painted and Polished, to Make the Enormous Impression They Did”: Selling the Reagan Revolution Through the 1984 Olympic Games, pp.223-242, in Rofe, S. (ed) Sport and Diplomacy: Games Within Games, Manchester University Press.

<sup>45</sup> Peter Ueberroth, quoted in Faulkner, O (2017), CultureConnect and the US Department of State: A Gateway to the Future of Sport Diplomacy in Esherick, C et al (eds) (2017), Case Studies in Sport Diplomacy, FIT Publishing, p.41-42.

<sup>46</sup> Chehabi, H.E. (2001), Sport Diplomacy Between the United States and Iran, Diplomacy and Statecraft, 12:1., p.99.

<sup>47</sup> US Department of State (1999), Reform and Restructuring of US Foreign Affairs Agencies: Public Diplomacy in the Department of State, Fact Sheet released by the Bureau of Public Affairs, Washington, 30/09/99. Accessed 08/04/21 at: [https://1997-2001.state.gov/outreach/publicaffdip/fs\\_990930\\_merger.html](https://1997-2001.state.gov/outreach/publicaffdip/fs_990930_merger.html)

and sports stars abroad as Cultural Ambassadors and soon after the Cultural Envoys program employed lesser-known athletes. A particular focus was to use sport and the appeal of American culture to counter the negative image of the U.S. in strategically important regions, notably the Middle East. Ongoing overseas military interventions and reports of human rights abuses in U.S. military detention camps highlighted the limits of soft power when faced with ongoing expressions of hard power. Yet despite some scepticism within the State Department, soft power was not jettisoned<sup>48</sup>.

Also a creature of 9/11 was SportsUnited, the U.S. sport diplomacy initiative with the task of reforging the image of the U.S. in estranged cultures and societies in Africa, the Middle East and Asia. Renamed the Sports Diplomacy Division in 2019, the Department is housed within the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs which itself sits within the Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs branch of the U.S. Department of State<sup>49</sup>. With an annual budget of over \$5 million<sup>50</sup>, Sports Diplomacy manages four programmes:<sup>51</sup>

*Sports Visitors Program:* Through this program, non-elite sports coaches, athletes and administrators from around the world are funded to visit the U.S. for a period of around two weeks. Activities are linked to U.S. sports and focus on issues including nutrition, strength and conditioning, gender equality, disability and team building. The purpose is to allow non-U.S. citizens to experience U.S. culture, society and values as a means developing cross-cultural understanding with participants “hopefully returning home with a more positive image of America”.<sup>52</sup>

*Sports Envoy Program:* Whilst the Visitors Program facilitates inward exchanges, the Sports Envoy Program sends U.S. athletes and coaches to the world. The program works in partnership with the U.S. Olympic Committee, U.S. Sports federations and professional leagues with the U.S. participants running programmes developed by U.S. embassies and consulates.

*Sports Grants Program:* Within the International Sports Programming Initiative, U.S. non-profit organisations receive grants to manage one-way and two-way exchange programmes for underserved youth athletes and/or coaches and administrators of youth sports.

*Global Sports Mentoring Program:* Added in 2012 by Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, this program is the most recent addition with a focus on gender equality (the empowerment of girls and women) and disability rights. The program is based on a five-week mentorship scheme whereby twice annually, participants with leadership skills and experience in sport are selected by U.S. Embassies to visit the U.S.<sup>53</sup>

In 2013 the U.S. Department of State published an evaluation of SportsUnited’s programs. It found, inter alia, that the vast majority of Sports Visitor and Sports Grants survey respondents reported that their views of the U.S. Government and the American people were more positive after participating in the program. In particular, over half of the respondents characterized their views of the American

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<sup>48</sup> Faulkner, O (2017), CultureConnect and the US Department of State: A Gateway to the Future of Sport Diplomacy in Esherick, C et al (eds) (2017), Case Studies in Sport Diplomacy, FiT Publishing, p.40-43.

<sup>49</sup> Note that, in common with many other countries, the U.S. favours the term ‘sports diplomacy’, whereas the EU institutions have thus far referred to the practice in the singular.

<sup>50</sup> Lecrom, C., & Ferry, M., (2017), The United States Government’s Role in Sport Diplomacy, in Esherick, C et al (eds) (2017), Case Studies in Sport Diplomacy, FiT Publishing, p.22.

<sup>51</sup> For further information consult the website of the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA): <https://eca.state.gov/about-bureau>

<sup>52</sup> Murray, S. (2018), Sports Diplomacy: Origins, Theory and Practice, Routledge, p.100.

<sup>53</sup> For a discussion see: McDonald, M. (2015), Imagining Neoliberal Feminisms? Thinking Critically About the US Diplomacy Campaign, ‘Empowering Women and Girls Through Sports’, Sport in Society, 18(8), p.909-922.

people as “much more favorable” after the program.<sup>54</sup> Other findings reported included improved knowledge of American popular culture, sport, history, philanthropy, democratic values and political institutions. The Sports Envoys who were surveyed considered the programme “very effective” in creating goodwill and improved attitudes and beliefs about the American people<sup>55</sup>. On returning home, the vast majority of foreign participants (98%) shared their experiences and/or new knowledge with others, especially friends and community members. The report concluded that the SportsUnited programs “had a profound impact on respondents”.<sup>56</sup> Observing the programs, and considering their relatively low cost, Murray concluded that “the simplicity and power of sport to boost a nation’s diplomacy is self-evident”.<sup>57</sup>

The programs run by the Sports Diplomacy Division fulfil Murray’s definition of ‘new’ sports diplomacy as they relate to the “[c]onscious, strategic and regular use of sport, sportspeople, sporting events and non-state sporting actors... in order to create collaborative, long-term and mutually beneficial partnerships”.<sup>58</sup> But the U.S. government also practices “more specific, less institutionalized, or ad hoc bilateral sports exchanges”, such as basketball programmes.<sup>59</sup> Elsewhere, U.S. athletes have been known to act in a private capacity, with varying degrees of success. In 2012, tennis players, Venus and Serena Williams, staged exhibition matches in Nigeria and South Africa as part of the ‘Breaking the Mould’ programme. Less well received was former NBA player, Dennis Rodman’s 2013 visit to North Korea followed by his offer to “straighten things out” between President Trump and Kim Jong-un.<sup>60</sup>

The staging of mega-events is a common feature of national sport diplomacy strategies due the global coverage and interest these events attract.<sup>61</sup> The U.S. has staged a number of prominent mega-events “although they are rarely considered from the perspective of sports diplomacy” due to the limited steer from the state and the private profit motive that often underpinned such events.<sup>62</sup> This is not to say that the U.S. government does not recognise the benefits of such events for external image building, even if the external image being portrayed concerns the vibrancy of the private capitalist system rather than the state’s public sector image.<sup>63</sup> The U.S. government has supported the staging of mega-events, even committing some federal funds to them, although such support generally falls short of a strong strategic commitment.<sup>64</sup> It is yet to be seen whether the approach to the 2026 FIFA World Cup, co-hosted by the U.S., will alter this approach, or how the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs intends to capitalise on the event.

Elite level sporting success, such as topping medals tables at international tournaments, can also project a positive image of a country. Throughout the Cold War, the U.S. State Department expressed concern about the declining performances of U.S. athletes vis-à-vis those from the

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<sup>54</sup> U.S. Department of State, (2013), Study of ECA’s SportsUnited Program, Dec 2013, p.4. Accessed at: [https://eca.state.gov/files/bureau/studyofsportsunited\\_report.pdf](https://eca.state.gov/files/bureau/studyofsportsunited_report.pdf)

<sup>55</sup> Ibid, p.7.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid, p.7.

<sup>57</sup> Murray, S. (2018), *Sports Diplomacy: Origins, Theory and Practice*, Routledge, p.102.

<sup>58</sup> Murray, S. (2018), *Sports Diplomacy: Origins, Theory and Practice*, Routledge, p.94.

<sup>59</sup> Kobierecki, M. (2020), *Sports Diplomacy: Sports in the Diplomatic Activities of States and Non-State Actors*, Lexington Books, p.112.

<sup>60</sup> “Dennis Rodman offers to “straighten things out between Trump and Kim Jong-un”, *Daily Intelligencer*, 06/09/17.

<sup>61</sup> The term ‘mega-event’ can probably only be employed to describe the Olympics and FIFA World Cup. .Major-events. is term that captures second order tournaments such as the UEFA European Football Championships, the cricket and rugby World Cups and the Commonwealth Games. For discussion see: Grix, J. & Houlihan, B. (2013), *Sports Mega-Events as Part of a Nation.s Soft Power Strategy: The Cases of Germany (2006) and the UK (2012)*, *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 16(4), 573.

<sup>62</sup> Kobierecki, M. (2020), *Sports Diplomacy: Sports in the Diplomatic Activities of States and Non-State Actors*, Lexington Books, p.115.

<sup>63</sup> A theme developed by Umberto Tulli in: Tulli, U. (2018), “They Used American, All Painted and Polished, to Make the Enormous Impression They Did”: Selling the Reagan Revolution Through the 1984 Olympic Games, pp.222-242, in Rofe, S. (ed) *Sport and Diplomacy: Games Within Games*, Manchester University Press.

<sup>64</sup> For example, according to Umberto Tulli, the U.S. government played an active role in the organisation of the 1984 Olympic Games. Ibid, p.224.

Soviet Union in international sporting events.<sup>65</sup> In response, the Ford administration established the 1975 Commission on Olympic Sports and later, President Carter marked the “politicization of American athletics” with the passage of the Amateur Sports Act 1978, which was overtly a “product of the Cold War”.<sup>66</sup> The reforms were organisational and financial and even though this might be considered a specific Cold War intervention, it highlights the willingness of the U.S. government to take steps to protect its sporting image on the world stage.

In recent years, the U.S. has performed well in medals tables and the focus on international image and prestige in international tournaments has become less of a federal concern, although the existence of the 1978 Act highlights the willingness of the state to act. The Act, first amended in 1998, has recently been revisited in response to sexual abuse scandals in U.S. sport. In 2020, Congress enacted the Empowering Olympic, Paralympic and Amateur Athletes Act 2020, amending the 1978 Act. Whilst the Act does not seek to advance sport diplomacy objectives, it strengthens Congressional oversight over sports governance and a new Commission will explore, amongst other things, whether the U.S. is performing as expected in international tournaments.<sup>67</sup>

In conclusion, the U.S. has a long tradition of practicing public diplomacy, with the strategic use of sport diplomacy being a prominent feature within it. Being home to many established and globally prominent sports, sport diplomacy has offered successive U.S. administrations a low cost and low risk means of achieving foreign policy objectives. Since 9/11, U.S. sport diplomacy has proven to be quite resilient. Whilst presidential changes have altered the focus of sport diplomacy priorities, the concept of sport diplomacy has been retained, even during the turbulent Trump administration. The U.S. has also managed to evaluate the impact of its strategy thereby allowing it to build on good practice. The risks are generally low<sup>68</sup>, but the risks of using diplomatically untrained sportspersons appears to be outweighed by the advantages. Of bigger concern is the risk that gains from U.S. soft power are fragile when expressions of U.S. hard power damage its overseas image. The chaotic withdrawal of U.S. forces from Afghanistan in August 2021 highlights these risks but also the importance of diplomatic re-engagement at some point in the future.

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<sup>65</sup> Kobiarecki, M. (2020), *Sports Diplomacy: Sports in the Diplomatic Activities of States and Non-State Actors*, Lexington Books, p.117-118.

<sup>66</sup> Hunt, T. (2007), *Countering the Soviet Threat in the Olympic Medals Race: The Amateur Sports Act of 1978 and American Athletics Policy Reform*, *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, Vol.24(6), pp.797 & 809.

<sup>67</sup> Conrad, M. (2021), *The Covid-19 Pandemic, Empowering Olympic, Paralympic and Amateur Athletes Act, and the dawn of a New Age of U.S. Olympic Reform*, *Journal of Legal Aspects of Sport*, Vol.31(1), p.30.

<sup>68</sup> Although note the financial fallout from the NBA’s tweet in support of the Hong Kong protestors. See, ‘China NBA: How one tweet derailed the NBS’s China game plan’, BBC News, 10/10/19, accessed at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-china-49995985>

### 3. CASE 3: AUSTRALIA, 'SPORTS' DIPLOMACY PIONEERS

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Given that Australia is widely regarded as the epitome of a sporting nation, it is perhaps surprising that it took until 2012 for sport to feature strategically in the country's public diplomacy.<sup>69</sup> In that year, the government published a White Paper on Australia in the Asian Century which recognised the value of sport in building Australia's regional policy and contributing to an improved international image and greater trade and tourism. Since then, Australia has been at the forefront of a strategic approach to sport diplomacy.<sup>70</sup>

According to Murray<sup>71</sup> and Murray and Price,<sup>72</sup> the path to a fully-fledged sport diplomacy strategy was itself strategically oriented. First, the case had to be made why sport fitted into the diplomatic toolkit and here the answer was obvious – if sport is so important to Australian society, why does it not feature in its diplomacy? Second, the diplomats themselves needed convincing. A series of workshops and information packs run and written by a team of diplomats and academics sought to convince “dinosaur” opinions within the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT).<sup>73</sup> Third, a small group of individuals working in DFAT drove the process without engaging a turf war with other government departments. Fourth, DFAT established a working group to coordinate a ‘whole-of-government’ approach and to engage other non-governmental actors. Fifth, discussion then took place on how sport diplomacy could relate to traditional foreign policy goals. Sixth, political support was sought, with the presence of a sports loving and receptive Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs greatly facilitating that task. Finally, the strategy was drawn up and launched by Prime Minister Abbott in 2015, a strategy believed to be the world's first Sport Diplomacy Strategy.<sup>74</sup> It focussed on the Indo-Pacific region and was based on four key goals:<sup>75</sup>

- 1 | *Connecting people and institutions:* The approach sought to assist target countries build their sports systems by way of people-to-people connections through a sports exchange programme, a sports fellowship scheme and through a sports leaders mentoring programme.
- 2 | *Enhancing sport for development:* The strategy here was to enhance development and public diplomacy activities through sport for development programmes such as the Pacific Sports Partnerships and Sports Volunteers Australia programmes.
- 3 | *Showcasing Australia:* A set of programmes falling under this goal sought to showcase Australian sporting capabilities, build bilateral relations and promote Australia. The Match Australia scheme was the government's international sports business programme focussing on major events, coordinated by a Major Events Taskforce. The International Media Visits programme was designed to provide accurate international media reporting on Australia and the Sports Envoys programme employed high-profile sports people to promote Australia.

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<sup>69</sup> Although, the hosting of the 2000 Sydney Olympics formed part of Australian sport diplomacy as did a Sports Outreach Program which started in the Pacific region in 2006. However, neither can be considered as constituting a ‘strategic’ approach.

<sup>70</sup> Murray, S. (2018), *Sports Diplomacy: Origins, Theory and Practice*, Routledge, p.99.

<sup>71</sup> Murray, S. (2017), *Sports Diplomacy in the Australian Context: Theory into Practice*, *Politics & Policy*, 10/2017 Vol. 45(4), 850-851.

<sup>72</sup> British Council (2020), *Towards a Welsh Sports Diplomacy Strategy*. Report commissioned by the British Council and written by Dr. Stuart Murray and Mr. Gavin Price, p.14-15. Accessed at: [https://wales.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/towards\\_a\\_welsh\\_sports\\_diplomacy\\_strategy\\_0.pdf](https://wales.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/towards_a_welsh_sports_diplomacy_strategy_0.pdf)

<sup>73</sup> Murray, S. (2018), *Sports Diplomacy: Origins, Theory and Practice*, Routledge, p.121.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid*, p.100.

<sup>75</sup> Australian Government (2015), *Australian Sports Diplomacy Strategy 2015-18*, accessed at: <https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/aus-sports-diplomacy-strategy-2015-18.pdf>

- 4 *Supporting innovation and integrity:* Activities based around this goal were designed to sustain Australia's sporting advantage by supporting innovative sports projects and partnerships between Australia and the Indo-Pacific region. The Sports Innovation Australia programme provide funding for collaborative projects. The Sports Memorandums of Understanding scheme was designed to establish bilateral governmental agreements and the Sports Integrity Program provided oversight, monitoring and co-ordination to advance and protect the integrity of sport in Australia with a particular focus on doping, match-fixing and corruption.

According to the Australian government, the 2015-18 strategy “achieved significant wins” including delivering two sports for development programmes in the Pacific and Asia, employing over 50 partnerships to enable 1.5 million to participate in sporting activities, reducing inequalities experienced by women, girls and those with disabilities and awarding ten sports fellowships.<sup>76</sup> Building on the 2015-18 strategy, in 2019 a second sport diplomacy strategy was launched – Sports Diplomacy 2030. The new strategy, which is designed to align with Australia's first national sport plan (Sport 2030), retains the previous focus on the Indo-Pacific and is again built around four key priority areas with the first phase of the strategy running to 2022<sup>77</sup>:

- 1 *Empower Australian sport to represent Australia globally:* This aspect of the strategy recognises that sport can play a role in promoting 'brand Australia'. The strategy seeks to promote Australian sports leaders' knowledge, skills and connections to represent Australia on the global stage. It seeks to increase Australia's representation on international sporting bodies and associations, and it attempts to develop tools to spread awareness of sport diplomacy across government and the sport industry.
- 2 *Build linkages with our neighbours:* In order to boost Australia's engagement with the Pacific, the government launched the Australia Pacific Sports Linkages Program, a people-to-people programme that provides for athlete exchanges, opportunities for emerging Pacific athletes to participate in high-performance training in Australia, and pathways opportunities for Pacific teams and athletes to participate in Australian and international sporting competitions.
- 3 *Maximise trade, tourism and investment opportunities:* In recognition that sport diplomacy can boost a country's economy, the Australian strategy seeks to showcase Australia's expertise in the sports industry, promote Australia as a host for major sporting events, employ Australian sports to advance economic interests in the region and provide education to athletes and sports representatives so they can promote Australia, including through trade missions and targeted sport diplomacy initiatives.
- 4 *Strengthen communities in the Indo-Pacific:* A sport for development focus was retained within the fourth pillar with the launch of the Australian Sports Partnerships Program. With an annual budget A\$6 million, the programme will deliver sport for development programmes in the Pacific region and in doing so will facilitate attainment of the UN's Agenda 2030 sustainable development goals.

Progress on the Sports Diplomacy 2030 strategy is reviewed every four years with a range of indicators cited determine success. A Sports Diplomacy Advisory Council assists with the delivery and monitoring of the plan.

<sup>76</sup> Australian Government (2019), Sports Diplomacy 2030 Strategy, p. 7, accessed at: <https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/sports-diplomacy-2030.pdf>

<sup>77</sup> Australian Government (2019), Sports Diplomacy 2030 Strategy, accessed at: <https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/sports-diplomacy-2030.pdf>

## 4. CASE 4: CHINA, THE COMING OUT PARTY

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Public diplomacy has long been employed by the Chinese government as a means of building influence, cultivating allies, and prompting its culture abroad. In doing so, China has attempted to counter concerns within the international community that it is a growing influence and threat in global affairs. Central to this strategy are the network of Confucius institutes that offer language and cultural programmes overseas. These institutes serve a similar role to those operating out of the UK (British Council) and Germany (Goethe-Institut), but they have attracted criticism in the West for being “propaganda tools”.<sup>78</sup>

Sport diplomacy features heavily in Chinese public diplomacy. The ping-pong diplomacy of 1971, discussed above, is perhaps the best-known example of how sport was employed to thaw frozen estranged relations with the U.S., but more recently, the hosting of major sporting events has been used as a tool for projecting a positive image of China on the world stage. Initially adopting a regional strategy with the hosting of the Asian Games in 1990, China made an unsuccessful bid for the 2000 Olympics, finally securing the Games in 2008. The Beijing Games were designed to confront the negative perceptions of China and present an image of a modern, developed, wealthy and peaceful country who was taking its place in the orderly international community<sup>79</sup>, not as a capitalist equal to western powers, but as a powerful state that has emerged using a different form of political association.<sup>80</sup> The 2008 Olympics were China’s “coming out party”<sup>81</sup>. As a nation-branding exercise, the Games increased China’s reputation in areas in which it was already strong but it didn’t improve its reputation in areas in which it was negatively perceived.<sup>82</sup> Some have suggested that China’s image actually declined following Beijing<sup>83</sup>, a view supported by those critical of China’s treatment of Uyghurs in Xinjiang, the clampdown on protestors in Hong Kong, and a perceived lack of transparency over the outbreak of Covid-19. In 2022, Beijing will host for the Winter Olympics. At the same time, the staging of mega-events serves domestic political objectives such as highlighting the success of the communist model to domestic audiences thus enhancing the legitimacy of the ruling elite.

As with the UK, China has invested in elite-level sport as a means of attracting a positive image with external audiences. Elite sporting success serves to highlight the modernisation of China and display the success of its form of political association. In the Summer Olympic Games, China performs consistently highly in the medal table, achieving first place in 2008, second in 2012 and 2020 and third in 2016. These achievements can be largely attributed to a reform of the elite sport system following a disappointing showing in the 1988 Seoul Olympics.<sup>84</sup> In recent years, China has broadened its investment strategy to include the development of its domestic football league and the ambition for the men’s and women’s national football teams to climb the FIFA rankings. After some huge investments, particularly to attract high profile overseas players, spending on football in

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<sup>78</sup> BBC (2019), Confucius Institutes: The growth of China’s controversial cultural branch, 07/09/2019, accessed at <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-china-49511231>

<sup>79</sup> Kobierecki, M. (2020), *Sports Diplomacy: Sports in the Diplomatic Activities of States and Non-State Actors*, Lexington Books, p.121.

<sup>80</sup> Grix J., Brannagan P.M., Lee D. (2019) *Entering the Global Arena. Mega Event Planning*, Palgrave Pivot, Singapore, p.74.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid*, pp.69-82.

<sup>82</sup> Panagiotopoulou, R. (2012), Nation Branding and the Olympic Games: New Media Images for Greece and China, *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 29:16, 2341.

<sup>83</sup> Manzenreiter, W. (2010) The Beijing Games in the Western Imagination of China: The Weak Power of Soft Power, *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 34 (1), p.40.

<sup>84</sup> Grix J., Brannagan P.M., Lee D. (2019) *Entering the Global Arena. Mega Event Planning*, Palgrave Pivot, Singapore, p.72.

China has undergone significant retrenchment. Investments have also been made by private Chinese entrepreneurs into European football, as a means of currying favour with the Chinese leadership.<sup>85</sup> This private dimension to public diplomacy reveals a form of self-coordination by private actors seeking to please the leadership. However, it is showing signs of stress. In recent years, the Chinese leadership has expressed concern at the levels of overseas spending and the self-coordinating forces have imposed retrenchment in this area as well.

China's use of sport exchanges "flourished" in the 1950s and 1960s and continued as a legacy of the 2008 Games.<sup>86</sup> China has also been active in area of sports development with considerable investment being directed into the building of sports stadia overseas. Such investment, whilst fostering a positive image of China in the target countries, is also a means of breaking into new import and export markets.

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid, p.77.

<sup>86</sup> Kobierecki, M. (2020), *Sports Diplomacy: Sports in the Diplomatic Activities of States and Non-State Actors*, Lexington Books, p.126.



## 5. CASE 5: QATAR, SMALL STATES WITH LARGE FOOTPRINTS – RISKS AND REWARDS

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Qatar is joining a number of small states attempting to use sport as part of its diplomatic repertoire.<sup>87</sup> The difference with many states of equivalent population size is that Qatar is a very wealthy nation and so possesses the financial means to do so.<sup>88</sup> In recent years, sport has added a new dimension to Qatar's public diplomacy which notably included the state's establishment of the television broadcaster Al-Jazeera which allowed for the projection of a modern image of Qatar to both domestic and overseas audiences. Similarly, through the Qatar Investment Authority, the state has a resonance throughout the world with investments in notable overseas institutions including Harrods, Canary Wharf, Heathrow Airport, Volkswagen and Barclays. Cultivating a positive image abroad can help build alliances with overseas powers in case Qatar faces economic, political or military hostility from neighbouring states and it can help boost investment and tourism opportunities.

Within its broader public diplomacy, sport plays an important role. Qatar has the financial means to use the hosting of major sporting events as a means of projecting an image of the Gulf-state distinct from its regional neighbours, some of which carrying negative perceptions amongst foreign audiences, including authoritarianism, terrorism and human rights abuses.<sup>89</sup> Grix et al. highlight how, between 2004 and 2022, Qatar will have staged 24 major tournaments, including the hosting of the 2022 FIFA World Cup.<sup>90</sup> The 2022 tournament was also meant to strengthen Qatar's environmental credentials with overseas audiences, particularly as a means of countering the view that Qatar acquired its wealth through damaging fossil fuel. The stadia are being cooled using low energy technology and the infrastructure can be dismantled and donated to developing countries following the conclusion of the tournament.

The strategy of using major events to project a modern image is not without risk.<sup>91</sup> The acquisition of the hosting rights for the 2022 FIFA World Cup contributed to hostility from regional neighbours, led to accusations of corruption and it attracted criticism of Qatar's human rights record, particularly in relation to the working conditions of the migrant workers who were building the World Cup infrastructure. The expectation that the staging of the World Cup would boost tourism has been damaged by reports of extreme heat, a lack of hotels, restrictions on alcohol consumption and hostility to the LGBTQ community. As discussed above, China also experienced this phenomenon of 'soft-disempowerment and reputational risk' following the staging of the Beijing games.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> From a tiny population in 1971, the date of independence from the UK, the population of Qatar now stands at approximately 2.8 million, the vast majority of whom are overseas nationals. Accessed at: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL?locations=QA>

<sup>88</sup> At its peak 2013, Qatar's GDP per capita stood at \$85,050 (\$50,805 in 2020). By means of comparison, in 2020, the EU stood at \$33,927. Accessed at: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.CD>

<sup>89</sup> Brannagan, P. M & Rookwood, J. (2016) Sports mega-events, soft power and soft disempowerment: international supporters. perspectives on Qatar.s acquisition of the 2022 FIFA World Cup finals, *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics*, 8:2, p.174.

<sup>90</sup> Grix J., Brannagan P.M., Lee D. (2019) Entering the Global Arena. *Mega Event Planning*, Palgrave Pivot, Singapore, p.100.

<sup>91</sup> For a discussion see Brannagan, P. M & Rookwood, J. (2016) Sports mega-events, soft power and soft disempowerment: international supporters. perspectives on Qatar.s acquisition of the 2022 FIFA World Cup finals, *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics*, 8:2.

<sup>92</sup> Brannagan, P. M & Giulianotti, R (2015) Soft power and soft disempowerment: Qatar, global sport and football's 2022 World Cup finals, *Leisure Studies*, 34:6, pp.703-719.

Securing the 2022 FIFA World Cup was a major sporting and diplomatic achievement for a country the size of Qatar, yet to sustain reputational gains, Qatar also realises that it also needs to be known for its sporting excellence. This represents a major challenge for a country with only approximately 300,000 nationals. Its Aspire Academy for Sports Excellence, managed by the Aspire Zone Foundation, is one means through talent is identified and developed and a means through which reliance on naturalisation schemes for overseas players to represent Qatar can be relied on less. Similar to China, Qatar also invested in domestic football with a number of high-profile European footballers being attracted to the national League.

Qatar also invests in overseas sport. Qatari money has been used to sponsor major sporting events in Europe, including prominent equestrian events such as the Prix de l'Arc de Triomphe, the Glorious Goodwood Festival and Royal Ascot.<sup>93</sup> Famously, in 2010, Barcelona ended its policy of not accepting paid sponsorships on shirts to enter an agreement with the Qatar Foundation, later replaced by Qatar Airways.<sup>94</sup> French football club Paris St German was acquired by Qatar Sport Investment (QSI), a joint venture between the Ministry of Finance and Qatar's National Olympic Committee.<sup>95</sup> The club acquired a number of leading players, notably David Beckham, Zlatan Ibrahimovic, Neymar and most recently, Lionel Messi. The acquisition of Messi in 2021 "will ensure that Qatar's projection of soft power continues, while the status, image and reputation of 'brand Qatar' are further burnished".<sup>96</sup> QSI also runs BeIN sports, a Qatari media group that has acquired the rights to multiple sporting events in countries across the world.

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<sup>93</sup> Grix J., Brannagan P.M., Lee D. (2019) *Entering the Global Arena. Mega Event Planning*, Palgrave Pivot, Singapore, p.102-103.

<sup>94</sup> The Guardian (2010), Barcelona agree €150m shirt sponsor deal Qatar Foundation, 10/12/10, accessed at: <https://www.theguardian.com/football/2010/dec/10/barcelona-shirt-sponsor-qatar-foundation>

<sup>95</sup> Kobierecki, M. (2020), *Sports Diplomacy: Sports in the Diplomatic Activities of States and Non-State Actors*, Lexington Books, p.147.

<sup>96</sup> Chadwick, S. (2021) Lionel Messi: why his arrival in Paris is a key part of Qatar's game plan, *The Conversation*, accessed at: <https://theconversation.com/lionel-messi-why-his-arrival-in-paris-is-a-key-part-of-qatars-game-plan-165982>

## **6. CONCLUSION**

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The above review highlights a number of themes as to why different types of states employ sport as part of their diplomatic tool kits. Sport diplomacy contributes to the projection of a positive image to external audiences. It can build better relations between states and enhance the internal and external legitimacy, brand and diplomacy of a state. This can result in security gains, the opening up of new markets and the expansion of tourism opportunities. Approaches to sport diplomacy vary but usually involve activities centred around the staging of major sporting events, investments into elite level sport and sport for development projects. Countries with formal strategies, such as the U.S. and Australia, place emphasis on people-to-people activities including the use of sport exchange programmes and sports envoys. Sport diplomacy strategies benefit from central government involvement, but it is evident that private actors, be they non-governmental organisations, university academics or private entrepreneurs are also involved in sport diplomacy activities. Those states that have measured the impact of sport diplomacy activities report positive outcomes, but it is also observable that building strategies around the staging of major sporting events carries a number of risks, both internal and external.

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