

## **Developing an Instrument to Investigate the Geopolitical Consequences of Attending National Teams in International Sport Events**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Governments often use sport as a tool to create unity among the people. The people are eager to follow the results of the national sports teams. They become happy with their success and sad with defeats. The purpose of this study was to develop an instrument to investigate the geopolitical consequences of attending national sport teams in international events. In terms of data collection method, the study was descriptive-correlational which was done as fieldwork. The statistical population was all Iranian and Iraqi students. The sample consisted of 527 Iranian and Iraqi students selected randomly. The instrument was a researcher-made Likert Five-Point scoring questionnaire. Seven sociologists and sports management experts participated to determine the factual and content validity of the instrument. Also, a confirmatory factor analysis method was used by means of Amos software. Validity analysis showed that the items of the questionnaire have a good factor load and the indexes of the model are well fitted. The results showed that the Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients and the 4-dimensional combination reliability are acceptable. After removing the questions with low factor load, the questionnaire items was classified into four factors: political prestige, soft power, dark dimension, coping with geopolitical isolation. The results showed that the psychometric properties of the questionnaire for investigating the geopolitical consequences of attending national teams in international sport events were acceptable.

Keywords: Politics, Geopolitics, Sport Events, Consequences, National team.

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### **1. INTRODUCTION**

All countries around the world seek to improve their position in the international system and sport is a very effective tool to achieve this. There is a mutual interaction between sport and various social, political and economic forces, and these effects must be thoroughly investigated (Melissa et al, 2012). Although there may still be individuals who believe in separation between sport and politics as two distinct issues, objective evidence suggests they are inseparable from each other. As the attention of the mass media on a case increases, that matter with all its meanings becomes more important. Suppose that something like Olympic Games in the corner of the world will gather athletes from 220 countries, it's obvious that heads of states and statesmen would like to use this media space in their favor. In fact, politics has been an inseparable, everlasting and historic part of sports. The relationship between sport and politics is one of the longest and most penetrating examples of interactions between society and sport. Sport is a good political asset and can contribute to international prestige. In fact, state intervention in sports has been observed throughout the history. A great deal of evidence around the world shows that the world of sports is intriguing with the world of politics.

The relationship between politics and sport is highlighted by attending national teams in international sport events, and countries try to use it as a source of soft power for gaining strength, wealth, and international prestige. Sport has become closely linked to politics and has become an issue of international affairs. This issue becomes more prominent with the presence of national teams in international events. Sport is a low-cost, efficient and effective tool that can break down stereotypes, increase mutual understanding and limit war to the field of play, rather than the actual scene of the campaign. Sport diplomacy exchanges can promote international perceptions and friendships and eliminate negative prejudices and assumptions. Sport diplomacy can be an appropriate way to send a message of foreign policy change between hostile countries, most notably Ping pong diplomacy in 1971, which opened up a new chapter in the relationship between the United States and China (Eden, 2013). Conversely, many examples such as boycotting sport events and not issuing passports to athletes can be found with the aim of isolating a country or modifying its political behaviors (Allison, 2005). In fact, sport boycotts are a kind of soft diplomacy that instead of a real dispute, use real global interest and mass media coverage to deliver a political message to a country. Geopolitical isolation means reducing or disconnecting a country with other countries in the region or the world in various aspects of political, social, economic, communicative, cultural, and so on. For example, in the 1970s and 1980s, to change South African policy on apartheid, its national teams were banned from participating in international events. Since the people of South Africa were keen on participating in sport competitions, this policy played a role in the gradual abandonment of apartheid. The boycott of 1980 and 1984 Olympic Games which were executed respectively by the US and the Soviet Union are classical examples of this non-violent political approach. In the Cold War, the United States strongly condemned communism, and the Soviet Union did the same to Western democracy. At present, sports boycotts still occur, but their number is lower. For example, before the 2008 Beijing Olympics, China was sentenced by the international community for some reasons such as trade with Sudan, occupation of Tibet and violation of human rights. Although no country resigned, but a number of political leaders such as German Chancellor Merkel and Prime Minister Brown the British and Italian President Berlusconi did not attend the opening ceremony.

## 2. Literature Review

Baghedano (2011) and Popović and Bjelica (2014) emphasized on the positive aspects of presence of the national team in sports and the positive impacts gained by exclusion from political, social, and economic isolation. Eden (2011) summarizes the goals of sport diplomacy as: improving and correcting the image of a nation; strengthening friendship, increasing peace and developing friendship among nations; Uniting minorities and most importantly; and Improving international relations.

The concept of geopolitics in sport means that sports, regardless of its influence on health, economy, entertainment and recreation, have effects on the relations of governments and political groups (Winstanley, 2010). With regard to relationship between politics and sport, this research seeks to develop an instrument to investigate the geopolitical consequences of attending national teams in international sport events. Making instrument can provide a path for future studies in this area. Therefore, according to theoretical foundations and studies on the political dimensions of international sport events, the research model described in Figure 1.

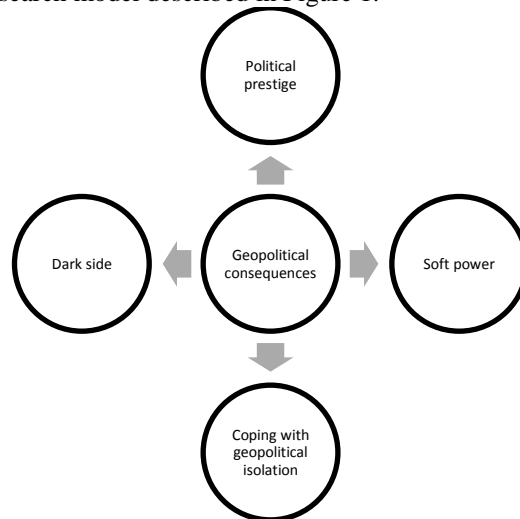


Figure1. Research model

Based on research literature, sport has a particular nature which can include both positive and negative effects. Likewise, sport geopolitics can act as a double-edged blade and include good and bad political functions. Considering the fact that politics and sports have always been influential on each other, the study of geopolitical consequences of attending sport teams in international events is a very important issue. This will enable us to strengthen the positive dimensions of attending national teams in the international level and to minimize its negative dimensions. Making an instrument in this field can provide a pathway for future studies and facilitate research in this field.

### 3. DATA & METHODOLOGY

The statistical population of the study included all Iranian and Iraqi students. 527 volunteers from universities in Iran and Iraq participated in this research. A researcher-made questionnaire was prepared based on literature, and with regard to the cultural and social backgrounds of the community. A 38-item questionnaire was designed and the answers to the questions were on the 5-level Likert scale (5 = very high to 1 = very low). This questionnaire was designed to evaluate three main objectives:

- The instrument used in this study has acceptable psychometric properties (validity and reliability);
- The attendance of national teams in the international sport events is influential on geopolitical dimensions (political prestige, soft power, dark dimension, coping with geopolitical isolation);
- There is a significant difference between the dimensions of the questionnaire from the perspective of the Iraqi and Iranian respondents.

On the way the construction of the instrument, the questionnaire approved by seven sports management specialists and the ambiguities eliminated. The formal validity of the questionnaires was approved. After collecting questionnaires, incomplete or missing questionnaire eliminated and finally, 527 questionnaires were analyzed. Data were analyzed by SPSS (exploratory factor analysis, Kolmogorov-Smirnov and U Man Whitney test) and Amos. The significance level in this research was considered as 0.05.

### 4. Results

As shown in Table 1, more people (about 50.5%) were between 21 and 25 years of age. 62.8% of students had undergraduate degrees and 60.2% of them were from Iran.

Table1. Individual profile of the sample

variable	frequency	Frequency percent
sex	Female	253 48
	Male	274 51/99
Degree	Bachelor	331 62/8
	Master	127 24/1
	PhD	69 13/1
Age	Below 20	93 17/6
	25- 21	266 50/5
	30 -26	105 19/9
	35 -31	52 9/9
	Over 36	11 2/1
Nationality	Persian	317 60/2
	Iraqi	210 39/8

After collecting the information, the data were analyzed using exploratory factor analysis and SPSS software used for categorizing the questions. Out of 38 designed questions, only 20 questions had a factor load of more than 0.4, and 18 questions were removed from the total number of questions due to low factor load. Therefore the study carried out based on 20 questions with appropriate factor load. The results of these studies are presented in Tables 2 and table 3.

Table 2. Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Index for the consequences of attending national teams in international sport events

Statistic	Amount
Kmo	0/916
x2	5882/843
Amount of Bartlett's significant level	0/001

As shown in the table 2, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Index is 0.916, which is greater than 0.70. Also, the significance level is less than 0.05, which indicates that the number of items predicted by each factor is sufficient and the correlations of variables are sufficient to provide a reasonable basis for factor analysis. Table 3 shows the factor load for each variable.

Table 3. Load Factors

Attending national sport teams can:	factor				load
	1	2	3	4	
2. Show the soft power of my country to the world	0/840				0/775
4. Be a symbol of development of my country	0/856				0/774
5. Increase prestige of my country	0/816				0/758
6. Increase geopolitical promotion	0/844				0/768
7. Show the world that my country is modern country	0/783				0/720
10. Introduce athletes and coaches as symbols of the soft power		0/511			0/500
14. Be a good substitute for conflict		0/748			0/636
15. Enhance the nationalist sense of my people		0/762			0/665
16. Enhance the political power of my country		0/771			0/709
17. Be an indicator for measuring the power of the country		0/729			0/658
18. Amplify the soft power of my country		0/683			0/605
23- Act as retaliation factor between countries			0/527		0/578
24. Demonstrate the legitimate aims of a country as illegitimate			0/776		0/716
25. Promote terrorist activities			0/819		0/743
27. Promote racism and discrimination			0/702		0/578
33. Strengthen international communication				0/669	0/518
35. Initiate or strengthen political relations between countries				0/777	0/673
36. Be a tool for transmitting political messages				0/581	0/553
37. Reduce or eliminate geopolitical isolation				0/850	0/765
38. Be a tool to reduce or eliminate geopolitical constraints				0/800	0/676
(Eigenvalues)	3/939	3/731	2/438	3/273	
Variance (percent)	19/693	18/653	12/190	16/187	

As can be seen, these results support functional validity and structural reliability. Factor load indicates the correlation between the observer variable (questionnaire item) and the variable (factors). For example, the factor load of the first question is 0/840. When all factor loads in one factor are greater than 0.4, there is a convergent-type construct validity. Given that all factor loads in the standard estimation are all greater than 0.4, the construct validity is convergent. Finally, after eliminating questions with a factor load of less than 0.3, the questions of each factor were categorized as follows:

First factor: Political prestige (5 items), Second factor: Soft power (6 items), Third factor: Dark dimension (4 questions), Fourth factor coping with geopolitical isolation (5 questions). The consequences of attending national sport teams were ranked in 20 points and 4 factors. The high convergent validity and reliability ( $\alpha = 913/0$ ) above  $-0.70/0$ , which are presented in Table 4, represent the proper psychometric properties of the questionnaire. The questions are also given in the table below:

Table 4. Average, standard deviation and coefficients of reliability of components of geopolitical consequences attending national teams in international sport events

Index	Number of variables	Average	Standard deviation	Cronbach's alpha coefficients	Abbreviation
Political prestige	5	4/398	0/745	0/917	Prestige
Soft power	6	4/141	0/790	0/869	soft
Dark dimension	4	4/200	0/764	0/796	dark
coping with geopolitical isolation	5	3/673	0/940	0/841	coping
Consequences of Attending National Sport Teams	20	4/103	0/623	0/913	Consequences

As can be seen, the high convergent validity and reliability higher than 0.70 show the proper psychometric properties of the questionnaire. Considering that the main basis of the path analysis models is the correlation matrix between variables, the correlation matrix of 4 components is presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Correlation matrix between research variables

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	
Consequences of Attending National Sport Teams	1					
Political prestige	.2	0/710**	1			
Soft power	.3	0/831**	0/487**	1		
Dark dimension	.4	0/768**	0/421**	0/575**	1	
coping with geopolitical isolation	.5	0/763**	0/334**	0/508**	0/405**	1

All correlations are at 99% confidence level\*\*

Correlation coefficients between variables show that the relationships between all the variables in the research are significant. Also, the presence of the national team in the international arena has the highest correlation with soft power ( $r = 0.831$ ) and the least correlation between the outcome of the team's attendance and coping with geopolitical isolation ( $r = 0.334$ ).

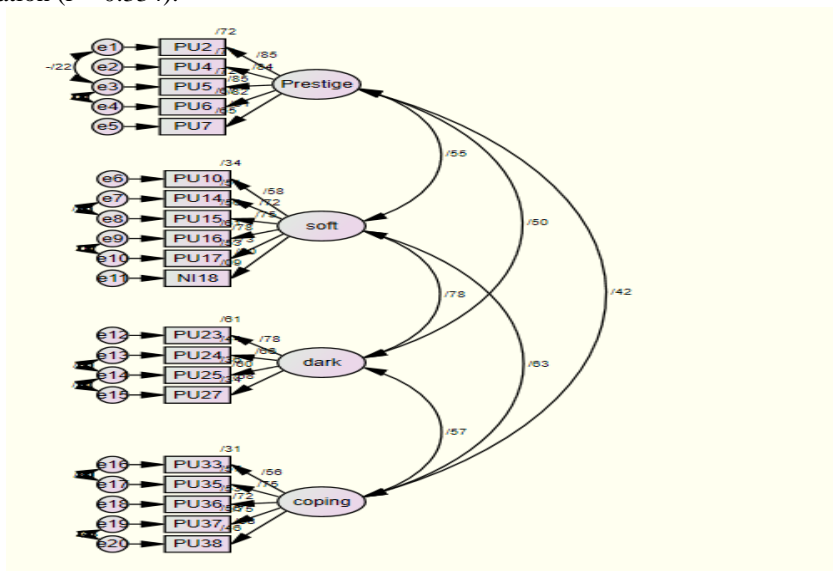


Figure 2. Model of the geopolitical consequences of attending national teams in international events in standard manner

Table 6. Results of implementation of the model for measuring geopolitical consequences of attending national teams in international sport events

Hypothesis	Effect size	Standard error	Critical ratio	Significance level
Political prestige←Q2	0/85			Significant
Political prestige ←Q4	0/84	0/046	23/325	Significant
Political prestige←Q5	0/85	0/052	21/317	Significant
Political prestige ←Q6	0/82	0/048	22/187	Significant
Political prestige ←Q7	0/81	0/049	21/809	Significant
Soft power←Q10	0/58			Significant
Soft power ←Q14	0/72	0/130	12/062	Significant
Soft power ←Q15	0/75	0/145	12/416	Significant
Soft power ←Q16	0/78	0/133	12/651	Significant
Soft power ←Q17	0/73	0/138	12/114	Significant
Soft power ←Q18	0/30	0/148	6/181	Significant
Dark dimension ←Q23	0/78			Significant
Dark dimension ←Q24	0/66	0/074	13/272	Significant
Dark dimension ←Q25	0/60	0/069	11/926	Significant
Dark dimension ←Q27	0/58	0/065	11/870	Significant
coping with ←Q33 geopolitical isolation	0/56			Significant
coping with geopolitical ←Q35 isolation	0/75	0/083	13/577	Significant
coping with geopolitical ←Q36 isolation	0/72	0/097	11/068	Significant
coping with geopolitical ←Q37 isolation	0/75	0/117	11/137	Significant
coping with geopolitical ←Q38 isolation	0/68	0/122	10/487	Significant

Considering the significant values of the table 6 (they are not in the range of -1.96 to 1.96), it can be said that all questions affect the determined dimensions. It should be noted that the impact of questions on the dimensions of geopolitical consequences of attending national teams in international sport events is direct. It means that, with the increase in the desirability of each question, the dimension of the question becomes greater.

Table 7. General fitting indices

	X2/df	RMSEA	GFI	AGFI	CFI	PNFI
Acceptable amount	<3	<0/08	>0/9	>0/9	>0/9	>0/5
calculated values of model before modification	2/045	0/076	0/887	0/855	0/908	0/721
calculated values of model after modification	2/003	0/062	0/917	0/911	0/943	0/753

As shown in the table 7, due to the appropriateness of fitting indices second-order factor analysis was used.

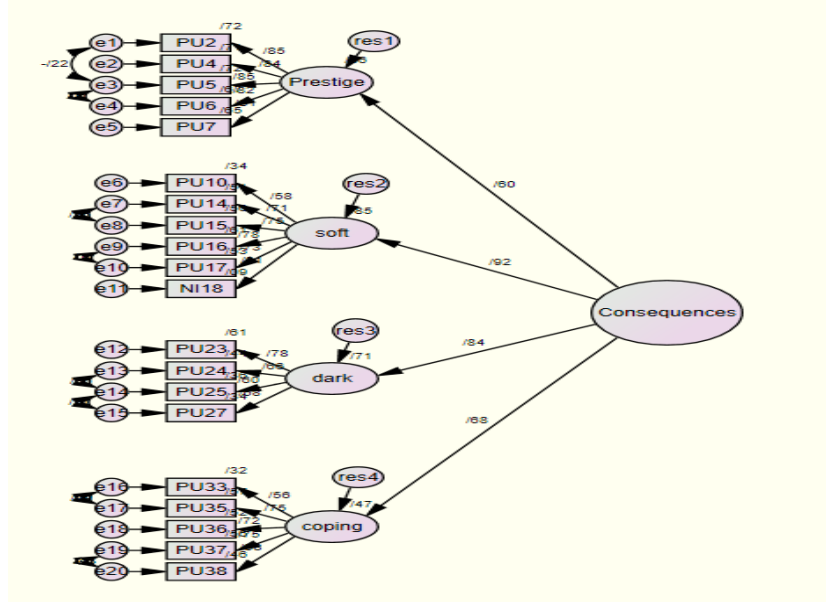


Figure 3. The second-order structural model of geopolitical consequences attending national teams in international sport events in standard mode

Table 8. Results of the implementation of the structural model of attending national teams in international sport events

Hypothesis	Effect size	Standard error	Critical ratio	Result
Political ← geopolitical consequences prestige	0/60			significant
Soft power ← geopolitical consequences	0/92	0/116	9/278	significant
Dark ← geopolitical consequences dimension	0/84	0/138	10/615	significant
coping with ← geopolitical consequences geopolitical isolation	0/68	0/145	8/267	significant

Considering the significant values of the table 8 (they are not in the range of -1.96 to 1.96), it can be said that Geopolitical Consequences affect all dimensions. It should be noted that the effect of the consequences on geopolitical dimensions is direct. It means that with the increase in the desirability of consequences, the reflection becomes greater in all dimensions.

Also, the outcome has the most effect on the soft power dimension and with regard to the effect level ( $\beta = 0.92$ ). The other variables are interpreted in the same way, and only the extent of the effect changes.

Table 9. General fitting indices

	X2/df	RMSEA	GFI	AGFI	CFI	PNFI
Acceptable amount	<3	<0/08	>0/9	>0/9	>0/9	>0/5
Calculated amounts	2/966	0/061	0/920	0/913	0/943	0/763

The U man-Whitney test was used to examine the differences between the dimensions of the questionnaire. The use of this test was due to the fact that the results of Kolmogorov-Smirnov test showed that the level of significance was less than 0.05 (as reported in Table 10).

Table 10. The results of Kolmogorov-Smirnov test

	Average	Standard error	Z	Significance level
Political prestige	4/39	0/749	4/800	0/0001
Soft power	4/14	0/790	3/181	0/0001
Dark dimension	4/20	0/763	3/392	0/001
Coping with geopolitical isolation	3/67	0/939	1/813	0/003

The results of the Mann Whitney test are presented in Table 11:

Table 11. Results of U-Mann-Whitney test about comparing dimensions of sports geopolitical questionnaire for Iranian (N = 317) and Iraqi (N = 210) students

	Group	Average rating	Total rating	Difference of ratings	Z	Significance level
Political prestige	Iranian	225/53	71494/50	3861	-7/337	0/001
	Iraq	322/02	67633/50			
Soft power	Iranian	223/33	70797/00	2466	-7/589	0/001
	Iraq	325/39	68331/00			
Dark dimension	Iranian	237/93	75424/50	11721	-4/882	0/001
	Iraq	303/35	63703/50			
Coping with geopolitical isolation	Iranian	676/59	87678/50	36229	-2/338	0/019
	Iraq	245/00	51449/50			

As shown in Table 11, the significance level in all dimensions less than 0.05 and there is a significant difference between the dimensions of the questionnaire

## 5. Conclusion

When the national teams compete in international sport events, it is like a nation that has entered the field and wants to broadcast it (Gibsons, 2011). The effects of attending national sport team's on the international level was a question that was examined in this study. Also, an instrument was designed. The research showed that attending national teams in international sport events has different reflections and geopolitical implications among Iranian and Iraqi students. These outcomes were divided into four areas:

### 1) Political prestige:

One of the functions of geopolitics in the field of international sports is the acquisition of prestige for the countries. Political prestige is a term used in various international relations. Prestige is a non-transparent term with a variety of meanings, and all individuals, groups, and governments seek for it with various economic, social and political reasons. Prestige is different from reputation. Prestige comes from a positive reputation and refers to the highest degree of respect. The prestige of a country depends on its basic characteristics, such as political structure (whether democratic or not), economy (poor or rich), culture (number of great writers, poets, artists, etc.), level of technology and potential military capability. These assets are gradually formed over the course of history and cannot be freely and quickly obtained. The important point is that the prestige of a country should not be reduced by simplicity to its military capability, but that prestige should also be reflected in its other material and immaterial assets (such as moral values). Some governments have a high status in the international system, and others are not even registered. The status of countries in the international system is achieved with various evaluations. It may be the lowest that one country wants to be for another country (Kacos, 2011).

Governments are continually trying to improve their prestige and to gain a better position than others. Sport is a good political asset and can contribute to international prestige. Sport's success will not only help strengthen the national identity at the domestic level, but also contribute to the international status of the country and to the message that the government wants to send to the world. Believing in the ability of international sports strengthens national identity, as a result, governments use sport as an instrument in their foreign policy. For many small or poor countries, sport-driven credentials lead to the identification of these countries to the world.

### 2) Soft power



In our globalized world, sport is considered as an important tool for soft power, which has an impact on both international relations and political prestige. Freeman (2012) introduces sport as a soft power and a source of pride, expressing that sport plays a role in the formation of pride in two ways: first, by creating identity and national cohesion in the country and second, by creating national prestige and displaying it to the world. The attractiveness of sport has made it an ideal platform for delivering a nation's values to the world, and sports (especially Olympic sports) have become an important source of soft power. In fact, soft power can be deeper and wider through sport. Sport can help cultural diplomacy to attract more audiences than traditional forms of diplomacy. Consequently, sport as a form of soft power can be a valuable complement to hard power.

### 3) Coping with geopolitical isolation

The results of this study showed that attending national teams in international sport events can exclude the country from political isolation (Allison, 2005). Geopolitical isolation means reducing or disconnecting a country with other countries in the region or the world in various aspects of political, social, economic, communicative, cultural, and so on. For example, in the 1970s and 1980s, national sport teams of South Africa were banned from participating in international events to change its policy on apartheid. Since the people of South Africa were keen on participating in national sport events, this kind of policies led to the gradual abandonment of apartheid.

Countries that are under the social, political, cultural and economic pressure can use the impressive impact of international sport as a means to improve foreign policy. For many newly independent countries or small nations, Success in sport events leads to the identification of these countries to the world. The results of the study about the dimensions of the questionnaire showed a significant difference between Iranian and Iraqi students in all variables, and the greatest difference existed in coping with geopolitical isolation. Perhaps the reason for this difference can be attributed to the recent wars that took place in Iraq. In recent years, Iraq has been involved in civil wars with terrorist groups, while the internal stability of Iran has been more than Iraq.

### 4) Dark dimension

Though a large number of countries use sport to strengthen their diplomatic message, but the negative effects should not be ignored. Some authors believe that sport imitates war. The front page of sport newspapers are full of words about conquest, battle, war, devastation, victory, capture and honor, and effortlessly portrays some of the values that the sport itself has formed for. In some cases, sport has increased friction in international affairs. Just as a government can use sport events to strengthen a diplomatic message, others can also benefit from it for malicious purposes. At the 1972 Olympic Games in Munich, where some Israeli athletes and coaches were killed by Palestinian guerrillas, the spokesman of the group issued a statement one week after the incident: "A bomb in the White House, a mine in the Vatican, the death of Mao Tse-Tung, an earthquake in Paris could not have echoed through the consciousness of every man in the world like the operation of Munich. The Olympiad arouses the people's interest and attention more than anything else in the world. The choice of the Olympics, from a purely propagandistic viewpoint, was 100 percent successful. It was like painting the name of Palestine on a mountain that can be seen from the four corners of the earth" (Reeve, 2000). These words confirm a negative aspect of sport diplomacy: sports can also issue non-diplomatic messages as they can promote positive values.

On the other hand, since sport has inherently a positive character, politicians use it to hide their own failures. If governments and politicians occupy the realm of sport and see it as a means to achieve their illegitimate goals, they will distract sport from its true nature. The presence and success of national teams cannot always be positive, and this shows the dark edge of sports geopolitics. Finally, we must admit that there are few examples of constructive relations between sport and politics (such as the 1971 Ping pong event, cricket diplomacy, etc.). Existing examples do not show a permanent and sustainable pattern. The point here is that sports diplomacy works sporadically and exactly "case-by-case," sometimes having negative effects, and sometimes positive, because the type of issues involved is variable. It is true that sports communication can help to melt ice of relationship between countries, but cannot lead to better relationships. Attending national teams in international sport events can provide the opportunity for nations and countries to improve the present situation in some way beyond war and global supremacy. Nevertheless, it is necessary to examine how geopolitical effects of sport works, and how to achieve a specific pattern for its influence.

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