

Military Sports – An Effective Tool in National Diplomacy

Introduction

1. Sports-diplomacy falls under the wide umbrella of public diplomacy. It involves representative and diplomatic activities undertaken by sports people on behalf of and in conjunction with their governments. The practice is facilitated by traditional diplomacy and uses sports people and sporting events to engage, inform and create a favorable image, to shape their perceptions in a way that is (more) conducive to the sending government's foreign policy goals. **While traditional diplomacy is the means to a state's foreign policy ends, sports-diplomacy is the means to the means of those ends.**

Why Military-Sports Diplomacy ?

2. Military sports can contribute in a big way to support the diplomatic goals of a nation. The major reasons how sports(specially military) can drive the diplomacy are given in succeeding paras.

3. **First, changes in the diplomatic environment have forced diplomacy to adapt and experiment.** Engaging with sports-diplomacy(including military) demonstrates a proactive government response to the post-Cold War irrelevance, obsolescence and deliquescence arguments.

4. **Second, sport and sporting institutions are increasing in scope, power and appeal.** Governments, always savvy to the whims of the public, are keen to coat tail on the growth in sport and the relevance of powerful non state events such as Olympic, FIFA or Military World Games.

5. **Third and related, publics the world over seem exhausted after the extraordinary amount of violence of the twentieth century. These publics are more likely to be engaged by soft power overtures from nations, such as cultural or sporting exchanges.** In the post-modern information age, sport, culture and diplomacy are no longer niche or backwater institutions but powerful foreign policy tools. Expressions of hard power through diplomacy based on traditional, high politics of arms treaties, border demarcation or alliances (while still important, obviously) does not hold the same amount of attention among the public as they used to.

6. **Fourth, sport is a major part of modern life and, driven by an Akira-style media, is worldwide in its audience. If the diplomatic posture, image and message is thoughtfully crafted and aligned to positive sporting values, the perceptions of foreign publics can be significantly altered.** Beijing's 2008 'coming out' party where they used the Olympic Games to foster an image of China as a rising, modern, economic powerhouse is a strong example. Despite the at times farcical build-up to the most expensive Games in history, China's image has gone from strength to strength since the 2008 Games. Using sport, it is likely that Brazil will proselytize a new image of a South American regional leader and powerhouse on the back of the 2014 World Cup and 2016 Olympics.

7. **A fifth reason that sports and diplomacy are moving closer concerns representation.** As an institution, diplomacy represents the business of peace, and the notion of international society amidst international anarchy. Through negotiation, compromise and conciliation based on clear and accurate communications it embodies noble values (at least on paper), and diplomacy's 'open, genial and civil' practitioners are men and women that personify 'calm, self-control, patience and good temper.' Likewise, sport represents noble qualities and values that appeal to governments and their diplomats.

8. **Diplomacy and sport, sixth, share other loose affiliations and these have been amplified with globalization. The soldier is no longer a soldier but also an aid worker, a construction worker, a diplomat, and the sports person.** Their roles are changing and more awareness of social responsibility is being publicly demanded of both professions. Under such conditions, sport and diplomacy naturally gravitate toward one another: both institutions are staffed by patriots representing their state as a privilege of international duty and whether it is the roundtable or the running track, both sports people and diplomats want to win for their state. Therefore, there is an obvious symbiosis.

9. **Seventh and finally, sports-diplomacy can be a 'soft' way of exploring or signalling a foreign policy shift between estranged states.**

Core Elements of Sports Diplomacy.

10. There are four core elements as given below with regard to sports as supporting diplomacy:-

- (a) Sport as a tool for development.
- (b) Sport as a tool for soft power.
- (c) Sport as an instrument to promote closer dialogue and integration in multicultural societies.
- (d) Sport as a tool to promote peaceful relations at the international level.

11. **Sport as a tool for soft power.** Joseph Nye describes **soft power as the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments.** As such a country should seek to use sports to promote their cultural heritage, history and show their national prowess and economic success. For instance, by hosting the 2008 Olympic in Beijing China gained international recognition for its great civilization and rapidly developing society. Sport is also a big business, and hosting the football World Cup, Olympic Games, or even lower-profile tournaments, is greatly beneficial for countries. Countries used to boycott the Olympics for political reasons, like the US in the 1980 Games in Moscow, in order to show their opposition of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Sport also proved to be an effective oppositional tool against the apartheid regime in South Africa. The United States have been very active in this field with the Department of State having established Sports Envoys programs. Likewise military-sports adds another dimension to the projection of soft power of the state both at

regional and global level.

12. **Sport as a tool to promote peaceful relations at the international level.** In the case of international competitions, Heads of State or Ministers have the opportunity to meet in a peaceful framework. However, states may also utilize sport to enhance their national prestige, demonstrate their rise on the international stage, and make use of soft power to extend their regional and global influence. All in all, one thing must be recognized: sport can bring people together by giving the chance for peaceful dialogue to exist in a peaceful context. Even if sport cannot resolve every single conflict in the world by itself, it can nevertheless provide people, politicians and representatives with a strong incentive to bring about a peaceful settlement or at least improve the situation.

Current military sports.

13. **Military World Games.** The **Military World Games** is a [multi-sport event](#) for [military sportspeople](#), organized by the [International Military Sports Council \(CISM\)](#). The Games have been held since 1995, although championships for separate sports had been held for some years. A winter edition of the games has been recently created, the [first edition](#) was organized by the [Italian region of Aosta Valley](#) from 20 to 25 of March 2010.

15. Military World Games comes next only to Olympic and FIFA World Cup in terms of grandeur and No of countries and athletes participation. These are held once in four years like Olympic. The 4th edition of games was held in Hyderabad (India) in 2007 when 4738 servicemen from 101 countries participated. In addition Military World and Cadets Championships/Cups are held annually for some of the sporting events. African Military Games were introduced in 2002 by CISM.

Indian Context.

14. Sportsmen from Indian Armed Forces (mostly Army) have been participating in Military World Games and won 21 medals so far (ranked 41 amongst countries participated worldwide). As these games are held once in four years the goodwill gained generally gets faded away with time.

15. Under the defence- exchange programme, India participates in sports activities with only few countries namely Singapore (marathon), Kazakhstan (Wrestling & Boxing) and US (shooting).

Recommendations.

16. **Sub-Regional/Regional/Continental Military Games.** Need of India playing a leading role in the immediate neighbourhood, a fillip to 'Act East Policy' and to realize the dream of being one of the leading nations at continental and global level, armed forces can play a vital role in supporting national diplomacy through sports. These games can be planned in phases like to start with Sub-Regional Military Games (called SAF or SAARC Military Games). These could be followed by Regional Military Games (calledSAF/SAARC &ASEAN Military Games) and then followed by Continental Games

(called Asian Military Games). The periodicity of sub-regional/regional and continental games could be alternate years. In addition to the ibid games annual sub-regional/regional/continental championships of individual sports can also be planned.

17. **Planning and Conduct of Military Games.** The Services Sports Control Board (SSCB) shall be the nodal agency for conduct of sub-regional/regional/continental military games. Necessary coordination with national (Indian Olympic Committee & Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports) and international (CISM) bodies shall be carried out. Indian armed forces have the necessary expertise and experience of conducting a bigger event World Military Games in 2007. These games can be conducted with reasonable budget as enough infrastructure both for sports and logistics is available at No of places in the country namely Delhi, Pune, Ranchi and Hydrabad.

18. **Joint Sports Training with Friendly Foreign Country.** One of the major takeaways of these games is the devp of jointmanship in terms of joint sports training with friendly foreign countries which enables the sports diplomacy and helps in attainment of national objectives.

Conclusion.

19. Because of its popularity across the globe, sports plays a significant role in international relations. Modern sports, which was limited to the local, regional or national level in the past, now spread to international level and have access to social and political area. Considering that the International Olympic Committee (IOC) has 202 members states, even more than the number the number of UN member states which totals 192, it is obvious that international sport is now an arena of international politics and diplomacy.

20. Military sports can also have great impact to international relations and politics. Conduct of military games at sub-region/region/continental level have the potential to promote peace and raising mutual understanding in international relations thereby supporting the national objectives.

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