

Albion College

Growth of Political Relations or Sportswashing?

The Nuances of Sports as Soft Diplomacy

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**ABSTRACT:**

The use of sports as soft diplomacy is an effective tool for political persuasion, but there has also been the rise in sportswashing. When authoritarian regimes, regimes where the governments centralize power through repression, exclusion, and disallow challenges to their leaders, host international sporting events, they utilize the international media coverage to increase their prestige and finances. They manipulate public perceptions in a way that develops a positive international image despite their political misdeeds, such as human rights violations or government corruption. The issue of sportswashing has also contributed to the rise in human rights abuses, political tensions, and cultural clashes. Through closer analysis of sports diplomacy used in U.S.-China and U.S.-Saudi Arabian relations from the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to today, society can learn how to alter the perceptions of sports diplomacy as a negative political tactic. Through a focus on case studies of the 1970s Ping Pong Diplomacy events, the international presence of the National Basketball Association throughout the early 2000s, the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics, and the present implications of the Saudi Arabia backed LIV golf league, there becomes evident negative implications, such as increases in human right abuses and political corruption, but also positives, such as sports bringing different cultures together and strengthening relations between countries. By understanding the connection between sports and diplomacy, society can use sports and major sporting events to encourage greater respect for human rights, build cultural understanding, and grow positive political relations.

**I. SPORTS DIPLOMACY INTRODUCTION**

The relationship between the United States and China has fluctuated through the 19<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup>, and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries when underlying hostilities plagued the possibility of strengthening political relations. Cold War tensions and the U.S.'s opposition to communism continued to complicate political relations between the U.S and China during much of the mid to late 1900s when the U.S. and China refused to hold political conversations with each other. However, the U.S. and China would work to overcome the hostilities that plagued their relationship through the use of sports. Ping pong and basketball came to embody more than leisure entertainment and helped ease U.S.-China political and cultural tensions.

## II. PING PONG DIPLOMACY

While my specific research focuses on the Chinese Ping Pong Team's visit to Michigan in 1972, the developing relations between the U.S. and Chinese teams began to develop in 1971 at the 31<sup>st</sup> World Championships in Nagoya in Japan.<sup>1</sup> The interactions between the U.S. and Chinese athletes as ping pong players displayed athletic empathy that opened the door for increasing interactions on a people to people level between the Chinese and Americans which would eventually lead to opening interactions between the U.S. and China at a high diplomatic level. Although sports can be used as a way to express a country's strength and dominance, and at times, can play a divisive role in nation to nation interactions due to highly competitive attitudes intensifying rivalries, ping pong diplomacy was beneficial to fostering positive U.S.-China Relations, both politically and culturally. The 1972 ping pong exchange in Michigan intertwined political and athletic competition in order to elevate sports to a level of diplomacy. Ping pong diplomacy created an atmosphere that opened up communications between the U.S. and China, which allows us to analyze the impacts that a small, white, plastic ball had on fostering long-term international relations such as sparking diplomatic conversations, accepting cultural differences, and developing athletic empathy within U.S.-China relations.

China's team was ranked 1<sup>st</sup> in the world, while the U.S. teams were ranked much lower with the women's team ranked 21<sup>st</sup> and the men even lower at 28<sup>th</sup>.<sup>2</sup> Given these statistics the U.S. team would barely have a chance at winning any of the matches in Michigan against the Chinese. So why would the U.S. want to bring over the Chinese team to play against the American team if the American team would just be crushed in front of American audiences? The Chinese knew that they were superior to the American team and would intentionally lose some

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<sup>1</sup> Mayumi Itoh, *The Origin of Ping-Pong Diplomacy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 112-120.

<sup>2</sup> Ping Pong Souvenirs, *Table Tennis 72* pamphlet, 1972, box 4, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI.

points and select matches to the American players. For example, in an exhibition match between Chinese player Yang Chun and American player Olga Soltasz, “The Chinese coach, aware that delicate matters beyond table tennis supremacy were at stake, signaled to her charge to let up and Chun responded by lobbing a few into the net to make the match respectable.”<sup>3</sup> Jan Berris, who helped with the National Committee on U.S.-China Relations host the 1972 events in the U.S., recounted in an interview celebrating the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of matches stated that, as the matches went on in the U.S., a meticulous pattern of letting American players who lived near the matches win although the Chinese ping pong players could have won every match easily.<sup>4</sup> This act by the Chinese players displayed courtesy and respect for the American players and provided the American audiences a sense of pride in their team without the Chinese completely giving up the overall victory in the matches. The Chinese decision to not completely destroy the American players in these exhibition matches displays that the players were looking to establish ties of friendship, not only exclusively between the Chinese players and the American players, but between Chinese and Americans as a whole.

Even though the Chinese team faced issues with anti-Chinese and anti-Communist groups protesting against their arrival to the U.S. due to the high diplomatic political tensions with China in the mid- to late-20<sup>th</sup> century, other Americans, such as students and Chinese Americans, responded positively to the use of ping pong as a soft power tactic to build international relations. Supporters of these efforts warmly received the Chinese team as Americans became fascinated with getting to know the Chinese as people. When the Chinese team arrived at the Union on the University of Michigan’s campus, the Chinese team was

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<sup>3</sup> Dan Borus, “Professionalism... .People’s Ping-Pong,” *Michigan Daily*, April 16, 1972, 7.

<sup>4</sup> Jan Berris, Judy Hoarfrost, and Doug Spelman, “People-to-People Exchange: Celebrating the 50th Anniversary of Ping Pong Diplomacy,” YouTube video, 1:12:08, May 6, 2021, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EjAV0D5FwW8&ab\\_channel=NationalCommitteeonU.S.-ChinaRelations](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EjAV0D5FwW8&ab_channel=NationalCommitteeonU.S.-ChinaRelations).

warmly and enthusiastically greeted by around 500 students alluding to the massive support for the Chinese delegation from college aged students.<sup>5</sup> The university students were excited to have people to people interactions with the Chinese team as they cast aside the anti-Communist and anti-Chinese sentiments that plagued many Americans. Most students demonstrated their support of the Chinese team in America by displaying welcome signs, wearing Chinese calligraphy clothing, or giving the Chinese flowers, but one U-M student went further by selflessly giving up his frisbee to one of the Chinese players who seemed interested in the sport, but had never heard of frisbee before.<sup>6</sup> These actions demonstrate the thawing of tensions between anti-Communist and anti-Chinese attitudes as most American students enthusiastically welcomed the Chinese and were eager to bridge cultural gaps in order to learn more about the Chinese people. The soft power tactic of using sports allowed for the changing of domestic views at a people to people level, which opened the door for U.S.-China relations to take place at a high diplomatic level.

### III. NATIONAL BASKETBALL ASSOCIATION (NBA) AND CHINA

Similarly to ping pong diplomacy, China and the U.S. have used the National Basketball Association (NBA) to build cultural, political, and even commercial ties internationally. As Barrie Houlihan and Mick Green from Loughborough University, Leicestershire, U.K. along with Tien-Chin Tan from National Taiwan Normal University, Taipei, highlight in their research, “the recent development of basketball, more than any other sport, provides a unique opportunity to explore the interplay of globalization and contemporary Chinese identity—between a quintessentially American cultural export energetically promoted by the National Basketball Association (NBA) and a resurgent Chinese nationalism” where China has turned to the success

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<sup>5</sup> Roy Reynolds, “500 Greet Chinese,” *Ann Arbor News*, April 15, 1972.

<sup>6</sup> Ruth Eckstein, “Ping Pong Diplomacy: A View from behind the Scenes,” *Journal of American-East Asian Relations* 2, no. 3 (1993): 334. <https://doi.org/10.1163/187656193x00202>.

of individual players in the NBA since their national team struggles to do well.<sup>7</sup> Chinese basketball players in the NBA have been utilized in similar ways to the Chinese ping pong team where these players have been strategically promoted by the Chinese government to enhance their political and cultural connection with the U.S. through people to people interactions.

Yao Ming has contributed to China's goal of using basketball for soft power diplomacy. With the rise of Yao Ming as a celebrity in the NBA, Haozhou Pu from the University of Dayton states in his research how, "As a cultural icon of a country's growth and global status, Yao Ming is far more than a basketball legend; he is a historical symbol representative of the new tendency of global capitalism and the development of Sino-American relations."<sup>8</sup> Yao proved to be influential for the Chinese Americans. Pu also mentions in his research how "Yao Ming's presence in the NBA was particularly influential for the 14 million Asian Americans living in the United States" because his physicality and successful performance in the NBA challenged "the 'model minority'—hard working and educated, while physically inferior and insulated from sports talents" stereotype that Chinese Americans faced in the U.S.<sup>9</sup> Through his success with basketball, Yao broke barriers between how Chinese Americans were perceived in the U.S. by displaying his athleticism and, ultimately, China's ability to produce superior athletes in a way to help elevate Chinese Americans from being perceived as inferior in the U.S. Yao's popularity went beyond Chinese Americans' affinity towards him. He was a "global cultural icon" and had an "extensive social influence on American society" as he was prominently featured in American entertainment and television shows.<sup>10</sup> The media representation of Yao altered perceptions that

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<sup>7</sup> Barrie Houlihan, Tien-Chin Tan, and Mick Green, "Policy Transfer and Learning From the West: Elite Basketball Development in the People's Republic of China," *Journal of Sports and Social Issues* 34, no. 11 (2010): 5.

<sup>8</sup> Haozhou Pu, "Mediating the giants: Yao Ming, NBA and the cultural politics of Sino-American relations," *Asia Pacific Journal of Sport and Social Science* (June 2016): 6. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/21640599.2016.1191703>.

<sup>9</sup> Pu, "Mediating the giants," 9.

<sup>10</sup> Pu, "Mediating the giants," 14.

Americans held about the Chinese, which helped to break down barriers of hostilities to contribute to building stronger political and cultural relations for the U.S. and China.

#### **IV. SPORTS DIPLOMACY CONCLUSION**

As evident, maintaining positive relations between the U.S. and China has been a constant struggle through the years; however, the U.S. and China have been able to strengthen their relations through the use of ping pong and basketball. The U.S.-China ping pong matches helped bridge American perceptions about Chinese Communism and opposing national identities in a Cold War context, by elevating sports to the level of diplomacy. Additionally, Yao Ming's role as a cultural icon in the NBA helped provide China with a way to use basketball to bridge cultural gaps with the U.S. by strengthening relations as political issues would arise, as well as contributing to the rise in nationalism and an increase in global power for China. The people to people encounters through sports helped grow international relations such as sparking diplomatic conversations, accepting cultural differences, and developing athletic empathy between China and America and contributed to forming better cooperation between the two countries.

#### **V. SPORTSWASHING INTRODUCTION**

Unlike the positive political attributes gained from the use of sports for diplomacy in the 20th and early 21st century, a growing political problem in society today is the issue of sportswashing, where governments use sports and sporting events to attempt to improve their reputation and hide wrongdoings, such as political corruption and human rights abuses. Jules Boykoff, a professor in the Department of Politics and Government at Pacific University in Oregon, defines sportswashing as “a phenomenon whereby political leaders use sports to appear

important or legitimate on the world stage while stoking nationalism and deflecting attention from chronic social problems and human-rights woes on the home front” and that “Sportswashers use mega-events to try to foment national prestige and to convey economic or political advancement.”<sup>11</sup> Sportswashing is essentially a form of soft power in which governments can influence political perceptions to increase their prestige and legitimacy through non-political means without the use of force. While sports diplomacy has helped intertwined politics and sports in positive ways, such as sparking diplomatic conversations, accepting cultural differences, and developing athletic empathy, the use of sports by regimes for sportswashing has negative effects, such as allowing for, as well as, increasing political corruption and human rights abuses, as seen during the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics and through the development of the Saudi-backed LIV golf league. However, through analyzing the perils of sportswashing, society can begin to see instances where the negative narrative surrounding issues of sportswashing could be transformed into a narrative that reflects how sports can positively strengthen political and cultural relations between countries.

## **VI. 2022 BEIJING WINTER OLYMPICS**

The controversies over sportswashing were prominent when China hosted the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics. China attempted to utilize hosting the Games to increase their image globally in a non-aggressive manner while simultaneously diluting attention away from their human rights violations and political corruption within their country. Their goal was to use sports as a way to distract the public perception from their human rights abuses and political issues by

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<sup>11</sup> Jules Boykoff, “Toward a Theory of Sportswashing: Mega-Events, Soft Power, and Political Conflict,” *Sociology of Sport Journal* 39, no. 4 (2022): 342, <https://doi.org/10.1123/ssj.2022-0095>.



promoting images of their extravagant sporting facilities built for the Olympics and their athlete's performances to enhance China's prestige and legitimacy internationally.

Due to the high level political tensions between the U.S. and China in the early 2020s, the U.S. media typically depicted China hosting the 2022 Winter Olympic Games in a negative light. Through Boykoff's research outlined in "Framing the Games: US Media Coverage of the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympics," he discovered that for mainstream U.S. media sources "the most common frame was the Human Rights Frame (47%)" when reporting on the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics, which focused on Peng Shuai's sexual assault allegations, diplomatic boycotts, and Chinese censorship of the press and athletes during the Games.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, politics and sports were evidently intertwined, but not in a positive way.

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) not only demonstrated not only that they were complicit with China's political and human rights abuses by allowing China to host the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics, but they also endangered the athletes who were competing in the Games. An article from the Human Rights Watch mentioned how "before the Games began, Chinese authorities warned athletes against 'any behavior or speeches' that violated 'Chinese laws and regulations.'"<sup>13</sup> Human Rights also acknowledged how "there is no evidence that [the IOC] challenged Chinese authorities' threats to athletes before the 2022 Games."<sup>14</sup> While the IOC claimed that they wanted to keep politics separate from sports, the IOC choice to allow a government with questionable human rights and political abuses to host the Games demonstrates their failure to adequately protect and alleviate anxieties for the athletes competing in the Beijing Games.

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<sup>12</sup> Jules Boykoff, "Framing the Games: US Media Coverage of the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympics," *Communication & Sport* 12, no. 1 (Fall 2022): 25, DOI: 10.1177/21674795221122938.

<sup>13</sup> "China: Censorship Mars Beijing Olympics."

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

With the Games being held in China, certain athletes who participated in the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics found themselves caught in the crossfires of political tensions and questions of national sovereignty. One of the controversies pertaining to athletes during the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics involved Dinigeer Yilamujiang, “a 20-year-old Uyghur cross country skier,” who received the honor of lighting the cauldron during the Opening Ceremony of the Games.<sup>15</sup> The issue with this decision is the fact that in the years leading up to and continuing during the Games, China was committing human rights abuses “against Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslim communities.”<sup>16</sup> Strategically, China chose a Uyghur as a way to give the perception that they valued their minority populations, even though their political actions depict another narrative.

Another athlete prominent in media for both the U.S. and China was Eileen Gu, who was born in the U.S., but chose to compete for China in the games.<sup>17</sup> Her role in the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympic Games went beyond competition as her decision to compete for China highlighted issues around decisions of allegiance and identity for many Chinese Americans. Americans on social media exemplified how heightened political tensions between the U.S. and China bleed into their perceptions of Chinese American athletes. They called “Gu a ‘traitor’ and ‘ungrateful,’ painting her as somehow not quite an American because she had chosen to compete for China, and suggesting that her identity must fall into a binary — Chinese or American, but not both.”<sup>18</sup> Although the news surrounding China has focused on sportswashing, especially given the rising aspects of political corruption in China and the recent current events of China’s

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<sup>15</sup> Amy Gunia, “Why Winter Olympic Athletes Like Eileen Gu Are Getting Caught Up in U.S.-China Tensions,” *TIME*, February 11, 2022, <https://time.com/6145687/winter-olympics-athletes-us-china-gu-politics/>.

<sup>16</sup> Sophie Richardson, “The UN Shouldn’t Let the Olympics’ Celebration of Uyghur Repression Go Unchallenged,” *Human Rights Watch*, February 17, 2022, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/02/17/un-shouldnt-let-olympics-celebration-uyghur-repression-go-unchallenged>.

<sup>17</sup> Ashley Wong, “Why Chinese Americans Are Talking About Eileen Gu,” *New York Times*, February 18, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/18/nyregion/eileen-gu-chinese-american.html#:~:text=Gu%20has%20repeatedly%20stated%20that,still%20largely%20a%20nascent%20sport>.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

human rights violations against their Uyghur minority populations, Gu chose to align herself with China rather than the U.S., which demonstrated her loyalty to her Chinese heritage, and was symbolic for Chinese Americans who want to be accepted as both American and Chinese.

Despite the controversies around Gu and the concerns about sports being used for sportswashing, Gu has demonstrated that sports can be used to bridge the gap between different cultures. She has stated that “sport is a shared experience that transcends gender, age, race, background and culture; it could bring about cultural exchange, communication and uplift one another, generating a cycle of positivity.”<sup>19</sup> Gu’s statements allude to the idea that sports can be positive in the sense that sports can be about diplomacy and a useful soft power tactic for countries to overcome issues of political and cultural tensions instead of governments utilizing sports as a way to cover up their human rights abuses and aspects of political corruption.

## VII. LIV GOLF

Saudi Arabia has been prominent in the news for their sportswashing attempts through the development of LIV Golf, a new professional golf tour, and embodying the concerns from political scientists of the way golf is being used to enhance their reputation in light of human rights and government corruption concerns. One of the major concerns about LIV Golf is that it is “funded by finances from the Saudi Arabian sovereign wealth, the Public Investment Fund (PIF),” which is “is chaired by Prince Mohammed Bin Salman, the son of the King of Saudi Arabia.”<sup>20</sup> The close ties of LIV Golf to the Saudi Arabian government highlights the fact that Saudi Arabia is politicizing golf and is a tool for enhancing their political agenda. LIV Golf has

<sup>19</sup> Chang Jun, “Olympic champion Eileen Gu has more to do on world stage,” *China Daily*, June 8, 2022, <https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202206/08/WS62a00fb8a310fd2b29e61636.html>.

<sup>20</sup> Leon Davis, Daniel Plumley, and Rob Wilson, “For the love of ‘sportswashing’: LIV Golf and Saudi Arabia’s push for legitimacy in elite sport,” *Managing Sport and Leisure* (2023): 1 and 8. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23750472.2022.2162953>.

been a key soft power tactic utilized by Saudi Arabia's government to attract the attention of the PGA, the media, and the public and using the attention to highlight the positives of LIV Golf, such as increasing competition and options for professional golfers while also displaying the modernization, growth, and positive qualities of Saudi Arabia.<sup>21</sup> Despite all the positives Saudi Arabia is trying to convey, underneath the surface, Saudi Arabia is using these discussions to gain attraction for their country, while hiding the negative aspects of their political corruption, such as the way in which Mohammed bin Salman Al Saud, Crown Prince and Prime Minister of Saudi Arabia, gained political power, and human rights abuses, such as punishing those who criticize the government and oppressing women among other violations.

However, LIV Golf as sportswashing is not only about Saudi Arabia's attempt to distract and cover-up human rights issues, but LIV Golf is also strategic by using sports rather than military strength to enhance their political power through the diversification of their economy as the world shifts away from the use of oil, which their economy relies on currently. Joel Beall, Senior writer for *Golf Digest*, and Dan Rapaport, staff writer for *Golf Digest*, demonstrates how sportswashing with LIV Golf is also essential for attempting to legitimize the power and prestige of the regime economically as evident by Bin Salman's Vision 2030, which is "a blueprint to diminish Saudi Arabia's reliance on oil by diversifying the economy and modernising its public services" to create "a 'vibrant society...' via professional sport."<sup>22</sup> On the surface, Saudi Arabia is looking to continue their modernization and development to remain competitive on a global scale. While Saudi Arabia claims the motivations for developing LIV Golf were to diversify their economy, Saudi Arabia continues to use their efforts in diversification to build prestige and legitimacy, but remain unresponsive to corruption and human rights problems.

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 5 and 9.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 9.

Even though Saudi Arabia is trying to develop a positive image through LIV Golf, U.S. media perceptions on LIV Golf typically have reported on the situation in a negative light and heavily criticized Saudi Arabia and the PGA for entering into a deal with LIV Golf. Chad Pergram from *Fox News* in his article “Livid at LIV Golf” clearly focuses on placing a negative light on Saudi Arabia through the word choices of “brutal” and “repressive” to describe Saudi Arabia.<sup>23</sup> Similar to *Fox News*, in the *MSNBC* article, “The PGA Tour rolls out a blood-red carpet for Saudi Crown Prince and LIV Golf,” Dave Zirin highlights rhetoric stating that LIV Golf “was a scandalous, even odious, operation” and mentioning that Saudi Arabia has a “horrific human rights record.”<sup>24</sup> A majority of U.S. media perspectives have highlighted the negative implications of LIV Golf as Saudi Arabia’s plan of using golf to cover their human rights and political issues, which has contributed to rising public resentment against LIV Golf, Saudi Arabia, and even the PGA for their decision to merge with LIV Golf.

Furthermore, the U.S. news media has been prominent in highlighting the controversy around the merger and the way the PGA treated their players. In the *New York Times* article, “A Stunning Merger Angers Athletes,” David Leonhardt recounts the controversy of the PGA before the merger scrutinizing players from joining LIV Golf and trying to prevent their players from leaving the PGA for the large sums of money offered by LIV Golf through Saudi Arabia even though later Jay Monahan, the PGA Commissioner, would announce that the PGA “would merge with LIV and accept a large investment from a fund run by Saudi Arabia’s government [with] Yasir Al-Rumayyan, who runs the fund, [becoming] the chairman of the combined tour, while Monahan will become the chief executive” without including PGA Tour players in on the talks

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<sup>23</sup> Chad Pergram, “Livid at LIV Golf,” *Fox News*, July 12, 2023, <https://www.foxnews.com/politics/livid-liv-golf>.

<sup>24</sup> Dave Zirin, “The PGA Tour rolls out a blood-red carpet for Saudi Crown Prince and LIV Golf,” *MSNBC*, June 6, 2023, <https://www.msnbc.com/opinion/msnbc-opinion/pga-tour-liv-golf-saudi-arabia-rcna88016>.

about the merger.<sup>25</sup> Similar to the IOC, the PGA failed to consider the implications of their decisions for their athletes and neglected the possibility of their organization's role to use sports as a means to challenge the actions of regimes with human rights issues and political corruption. The controversy after the merger was evident by how "Rory McIlroy, the esteemed golfer who was among the most outspoken opponents of his sport's swelling ties to Saudi Arabia, [had] resigned from the PGA Tour's board" a few months after the merger was announced.<sup>26</sup> While McIlroy did not comment on his resignation, Blinder and Hirsch referenced in their article that McIlroy had previously stated that "'It's hard for me to not sit up here and feel somewhat like a sacrificial lamb and feeling like I've put myself out there and this is what happens'" where the PGA "had blindsided and stung him," especially since he was one of the forerunners for criticizing LIV Golf on behalf of the PGA.<sup>27</sup> While McIlroy understands the enticement of the financial gain through the merger, the whole process in which the PGA made the deal in secret and the politics behind Saudi Arabia's development of LIV Golf created tensions between McIlroy and the PGA. The PGA disregarded their moral values in opposing Saudi Arabia's sportswashing efforts to distract from their human rights violations and political corruption.

## VIII. CONCLUSION

With the rise in human rights abuses, political tensions, and cultural clashes, regimes, especially authoritarian regimes, have increasingly abused sporting events to distract from these issues. Authoritarian regimes, regimes where the governments centralize power through

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<sup>25</sup> David Leonhardt, "A Stunning Merger Angers Athletes," *The New York Times*, June 7, 2023, <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/06/07/briefing/liv-golf-pga.html>.

<sup>26</sup> Alan Blinder and Lauren Hirsch, "Rory McIlroy Resigns From the PGA Tour Board," *The New York Times*, November 14, 2023, [https://www.nytimes.com/2023/11/14/business/rory-mcilroy-resigns-pga-tour-board.html?campaign\\_id=9&emc=edit\\_nn\\_20231115&instance\\_id=107779&nl=the-morning&regi\\_id=142442735&segment\\_id=150103&te=1&user\\_id=4e7923180828c1062f4b25d3cc2bec7c](https://www.nytimes.com/2023/11/14/business/rory-mcilroy-resigns-pga-tour-board.html?campaign_id=9&emc=edit_nn_20231115&instance_id=107779&nl=the-morning&regi_id=142442735&segment_id=150103&te=1&user_id=4e7923180828c1062f4b25d3cc2bec7c).

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

repression, exclusion, and disallow challenges to their leaders, have been utilizing international media coverage to increase their prestige, finance, and power while simultaneously manipulating public perceptions in a way to develop a positive international image despite their political misdeeds, such as human rights violations or government corruption. By focusing on the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics and the new Saudi Arabian-backed golf league, LIV Golf, there have been evident negative implications, such as increases in human right abuses and political corruption, but also glimpses of positives, such as sports bringing different cultures together and strengthening relations between countries, which ties into the aspects of sports diplomacy evident through the examples of ping pong diplomacy and the China with the NBA. By understanding the connection between sports and diplomacy, specifically the areas where the idealizing factor of sports has caused political tensions and where countries have abused the soft diplomacy power of sports, society can change the narrative to utilize international sporting events as a soft diplomacy tool to encourage greater respect for human rights, build cultural understanding, and grow positive political relations, which can increase the legitimacy of government actions and restore faith in societies democratic systems.

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