

# Here are 9 times sport was used as a political tool

South Korea's Winter Olympics head organiser has appealed to North Korea, a nation that boycotted the 1988 Seoul Games, to join in the 2018 Winter Olympics in Pyeongchang.



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The two Koreas have been in a technical state of war since the 1950–53 Korean War ended in an armistice, rather than a treaty.



The northern nation's nuclear programme remains a source of deep concern for its southern neighbour. Seoul sees the games as an opportunity to soften Pyongyang's attitude.

But South Korea isn't the first nation to use sports as a powerful tool to force a diplomatic hand or two. And some argue that sports should have nothing to do with politics.

Here are nine incidents in the past which show us that the two have always intersected:

### **1. Hitler used football to show the world a resurgent Nazi Germany**



In 1936, then-Chancellor of Germany Adolf Hitler saw the Summer Olympics in Berlin as an opportunity to promote his ideals of racial supremacy. He hoped that German athletes would dominate the games with victories.

But those hopes were dimmed after African American athlete Jesse Owens won four gold medals.

## 2. Ping-Pong diplomacy



A group of American table tennis players visited Communist China in 1971, at the height of the Cold War.

Their trip is often credited for reviving relations between the US and China; the two countries had not been in contact for 22 years.

Less than a year later, Richard Nixon travelled to Beijing as the first US president to visit China.

### **3. A soccer field in Honduras was also a theater of war**



In the 1960s, relations between Honduras and El Salvador were fragile due to border disputes and economic problems.

The national soccer teams of the two countries met in 1969 for the 1970 Mexico City World Cup.

But the two countries turned the soccer field into a theatre of war.

The three matches that they played helped to ignite tensions. After the games, an unknown number of people were killed during four days of war, still known as the “Soccer War.”

#### 4. The Cold War once played out on a chess board



The Soviet Union treated chess as a very important tool to demonstrate the intellectual superiority of its communist regime.

But not everything went according to plan.

In 1974, its chess champion Boris Spassky lost a game against American Bobby Fischer during the World Chess Championship.

Since this ended the Soviet domination of the World Championship, the US saw Fischer's win as a great victory.

## 5. Cricket diplomacy



Pakistan and India have been at odds with each other since 1947



The International Olympic Community barred South Africa from taking part in the 1964 Summer Olympics in Tokyo in a move that censured the apartheid regime.

It is widely believed that the international boycott played a crucial role in forcing South Africa to change its segregationist policies.

## 8. Once upon a time, the Olympics weren't all that popular



The United States in 1980 boycotted the Summer Olympics in Moscow in response to the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan in 1979.

Sixty-four other countries joined the boycott — the largest Olympic boycott ever.

In 1984, the Soviet Union declared that it would not participate in the games due to security concerns.

Thirteen other countries joined the Soviet Union's boycott, which was interpreted as a retaliatory gesture over the US boycott in 1980.

## **9. Baseball diplomacy — or Ground Hog Day?**



Former US President Barack Obama's picture with Cuban President Raul Castro at a baseball match in Havana gave hope for better relations between the two countries.

The countries' ties were soured after Cuba's revolution in 1959.

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