



## FIFA's Hegemony in Double-Standard Sanctions for Israel and Russia Making in Sanctioning

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### Abstract

In response to Russia's military invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the International Fédération of Association Football (FIFA) imposed significant sanctions on the Russian Football Union. However, the organisation did not do the same with Israel's genocide in Palestine. This article analyses FIFA's decision through the lens of hegemony in international relations (IR), focusing on how FIFA is leaning towards a Western-centric/Euro-centric point of view and world order, rather than becoming a neutral international sports body. This paper is a qualitative research study that utilises the Cox concept of contemporary world order, focusing on material, ideational, and institutional tools to gain hegemony. As FIFA is used by Western powers to demonstrate their hegemonic influence on the world order, we argue that it is the reason behind their double-standard policy.

**Key Words:** FIFA, Palestine, Israel, Russia, Ukraine, Sanctions

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## INTRODUCTION

In February 2022, the Russia-Ukraine relationship escalated into military conflict. The event triggers widespread condemnation and prompts global institutions (Jamali et al., 2023) to reassess their engagement with the Russian state (Absalyamov & Schubert, 2025), including international sports federation (Bantekas, 2024). Among these responses, in March 2022 the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA), an association that has more members than the United Nations (UN), issued unprecedented sanctions, banning Russian national teams and clubs from international competition and withdraw St. Petersburg and Kazan as host of Champions League and UEFA Supercup final (Chadwick et al., 2024). FIFA officially express: "FIFA condemns the use of force by Russia in Ukraine and any type of violence to resolve conflicts. Violence is never a solution and FIFA calls on all parties to restore peace through constructive dialogue" (FIFA, 2022). Without any sanction, prior to a match in February 2022, Manchester City and Everton dressed their players in the colours of the Ukrainian flag and displayed banners at the Liverpool stadium in support of Ukraine (Olishevskaya, 2023). Even La Liga, the official Spanish league competition, and the Bundesliga, showed the Ukrainian flag at their broadcast (Krieger, 2025).

However, FIFA is applying a double standard in its response to the genocide in Palestine. There is no ban on Israel; on the contrary, some players who show their support for Free Palestine were banned by their clubs, such as Algerian footballer Youcef Atal by French Ligue 1 team Nice and Dutchman Anwar El Ghazi by Bundesliga club Mainz 05 in 2023.

FIFA has a regulation in Article 4: "Discrimination of any kind against a country, private person or group of persons because of race, ethnicity, national or social origin, gender, disability, religion, political opinion or property, birth or sexual orientation is strictly prohibited". Its regulation is merely a means by which FIFA covers up its discriminatory practices, as the double standard towards the two cases above is rooted in FIFA's status as a Western hegemony private international union, rather than a neutral one.

While international sanctions are often analysed in terms of state actions, FIFA's role in this context merits examination from an international relations (IR) perspective. The study on FIFA has been increasing since this non-state actor actively engages in political soft power, garnering prestige and drawing the world's attention to countries (Jerabek et al., 2017). Therefore, FIFA can be seen as a hegemonic power among non-state actors, particularly in the sports sector. This article examines how FIFA exercised its hegemony through the imposition of

sanctions and how this reflects broader patterns in sports governance and global order, drawing on Robert W. Cox's world order theory. The aim is to explore how FIFA functions as a transnational political actor and norm enforcer in the global arena.

Cox's work, sometimes classified as neo-Marxist or neo-Gramscian (Mittelman, 1998), is rooted in Gramsci's ideas, as Cox himself considered himself a Gramscian (Moolakkattu, 2009). He questions the origin and how institutions and social-power relations change and shape the world order (Cox, 1981). It can also see how a particular norm diffuses from leading states to lesser states (Acharya, 2018). By contrasting the leading and the lesser, Coxian uses power as a basic variable to see what norm can be coerced into the universe. From that point, consent from the lesser states, after being offered advantages by the leading states, will establish a world order based on hegemonic interests.

Cox's thought is characterised by historicism, which contrasts with positivism (Cox & Sinclair, 1996). For him, production is not only about material goods but also the production of norms and institutions. Elites will produce those things and lead historic blocs, a coalition of social forces bounded by consent and coercion that vary in time and space. Without a hegemonic social class, there is no historic bloc (Cox, 1983), as Moolakkattu (2009) wrote it as "elites lead historic blocs". To be considered elite, an entity's forces must consist of material capabilities, ideas, and institutions, which are collectively referred to as sets of social forces.

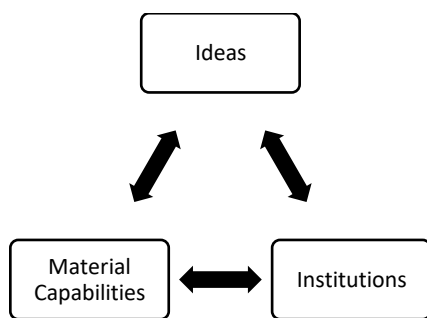


Figure 1. Three categories of forces that shape the world order

Material realm, focusing on the natural resources and productive capabilities that an entity possesses, including technology and wealth. The ideational aspect is historical and has two kinds, which are intersubjective meanings and collective images that can shape social facts (Sinclair, 2017). Intersubjective meanings refer to shared or common understanding and are widely accepted in social relations, norms, and expected behaviours. In contrast, collective images are alternative views

that differ from or are even opposite to dominant intersubjective means and could transform the hegemonic or status quo. Institutions are viewed as a "battleground" of power relations. Through the institution, elites stabilise, perpetuate, and strengthen their hegemony by exercising power over less powerful groups through the process of consensus-building, thereby stabilising a particular order. Hegemony, in Cox's notion, focuses more on consent rather than coercion, and institutions are used to minimise the use of force (Cox, 1981).

In this paper, we use FIFA as the analysis object. Therefore, material capabilities are viewed as a measure of wealth for a member and stakeholder of FIFA, which could influence a particular order, such as how a wealthy nation could be a host of the FIFA World Cup. The ideas are in a particular order that is inclined to benefit the West. Furthermore, for the institution, our main argument is that FIFA is a Western or European-centric institution; therefore, they have a double standard in dealing with Russia and Israel.

The West in here is taken from Said's Orientalism: "Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient" (Said, 1979). The Palestine-Israel conflict shaped his work. The West will define it as "Us" and the Orient as "them" which also refers to the former as superior and the latter as inferior. Said further wrote that the Orient is synonymous with Muslims, primitive, bizarre, conservative, and uncultured. Besides East or Orient as the opposite of the West, the Global South is another term for the opposition, which refers to regions outside Europe and North America that are politically and culturally marginalised from those two (Swart & Hussain, 2023). McNeill wrote that the West refer to nations populated by European stock and West-assimilated nations (McNeill, 1997), as Western values exported to Non-West (Mahbubani, 1992).

### ***Literature Review and statement of art***

Even though sport is often regarded as an activity without connection to politics (Jurič & Rogelj, 2024) and its global organisation based on political neutrality (Lindholm, 2022) it is a relevant subject for international relations (IR) (Bacheschi, 2023; Boniface, 1998; Franke & Koch, 2023) and socio-politics (Olishevskaya, 2023). There have been cases in the past in which international organisations have suspended countries from international sports associations because of political situation (e.g. South Africa during the Apartheid era and Yugoslavia during the 1990s). However, our case study is unique in the sense that a world political faction (Western), we believe, involved in a conflict uses the international sports arena to attack its adversary (Non-Western).

Once, Sepp Blatter, a former FIFA President, at FIFA's 63rd World Congress, held in Mauritius in May 2013, told The Professional Footballers' Association (PFA) that FIFA could not solve political issues, but neither should football succumb to such difficulties and that the unifying values of the game could play a role in improving understanding between the communities living in the region (Xenakis & Lekakis, 2018). Gianni Infantino, the current FIFA President at the 74th FIFA Congress in Bangkok, also said "Uniting this world is our responsibility, it is our answer to the aggression, our answer to the hate, our answer to the war. It is bringing people from all over the world together – this is what football does, from south to north from east to west.....The only thing that matters is the colour of the jersey that the players will wear for their club or national team" (FIFA, 2024a) However, political expression, relationship of political domination and expression, acquisition of power, status in international community, values and ideologies are represented in Football (Sugden & Tomlinson, 2020).

FIFA, for example, does not act in a political vacuum, and it may influence or be influenced by other global actors and organisations (Xenakis & Lekakis, 2018). In 1952, Jose Crahay from the Belgian Football Association stated that the Latin American Cabal threatened the European power structure of the FIFA Executive Committee. The statement was later proven by the spread of football into the Third World, which eroded the Eurocentric and neo-imperialistic style characteristic of FIFA (Sugden et al., 1998).

Amnesty International has previously criticised FIFA regarding human rights violations during the preparation of the World Cup in Qatar (Jerabek et al., 2017). Bar-On & Escobedo (2019), wrote that when selecting World Cup hosts, FIFA tends to be biased in favour of nations or regions with pro-colonial and neo-colonial characteristics, which feature modernist, masculinist, capitalist, elitist, and authoritarian ethos. They also argue that FIFA headquarters' place in neutral Switzerland is only a whitewash of the colonial crimes of the founding states.

As an institution of global governance, FIFA's leadership, members, and confederation have faced corruption issues (Pielke, 2013), at least since the 1980s (Homburg, 2008) and even after the 2016 reformation when Gianni Infantino became FIFA President, the culture remains (Gill et al., 2019). Besides corruption, FIFA's neutrality was also questioned when it expelled Russia due to Western demands (Ibrahim, 2025). Although FIFA has a mantra that football and politics do not mix, the 2018 FIFA World Cup in Russia showed the opposite, as a few leaders of Western countries disagreed to attend (Reiche, 2018). In this case, we believe that it is almost impossible to separate football from political conflict.

Conflicts today are very much battles of ideas, including in the arena of sports (Ber et al., 2017). Football, as one of the sports, could amplify marginalised communities' voices and correct wrongs (Abdelhafidh, 2025). The conflict between Palestine and Israel produces many new battlegrounds for their soft diplomacy, one of which is football. In that situation, football has become a foreign policy tool as it can be seen as part of political actors' soft power strategy.

In 2009, Israeli authorities detained and imprisoned without a trial three Palestinian players and/or professional club members. They also arrested 16 children playing football on a school ground. Palestinian Football Association (Palestinian FA) reports that over the next two years, it recorded similar incidents and problems (Xenakis & Lekakis, 2018). Through *hasbara* (propaganda), such as when Israel in 2013 hosted the UEFA Men's Under-21 Championship awarded by the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA), Israel "wash" their use of military power towards Palestine (Dart, 2016).

In contrast, the Palestinian Football Association (PFA) use football to challenge Israel's hegemony (Xenakis & Lekakis, 2018). On 24 March 2015, the Palestinian FA submitted a formal request in an attempt to suspend the Israeli Football Association (IFA) from FIFA. In the previous months, Palestinian players had been injured, arrested and even killed by Israeli forces (Pronier, 2014). The Palestinian FA request included the following accusations: (1) Israel was restricting the movement of players and equipment into and out of the Palestinian territories; (2) IFA was discriminating on racial bases; and (3) five Israeli clubs were playing on an occupied Palestinian territory. Notably, despite IFA's numerous attempts to disseminate their denial and counter-arguments, the Palestinian FA withdrew its request just minutes before the FIFA 2015 congress in Zurich. The latest, after 325 players coaches, administrators, referees and club board members in the Palestinian soccer community have died in the Palestine-Israel conflict since October 2023, Suleiman Al-Obeid, known as the "Palestinian Pele," was also killed by an Israeli strike targeting civilians waiting for humanitarian aid in the southern Gaza Strip in August 2025 (Reuters, 2025). FIFA keep silent.

FIFA's sanction against Russia is not without precedent (Mansoor, 2022) and allowing Israel to play is also unprecedented. FIFA's position is clear that they do not care who started the conflict/war/violence (Franke & Koch, 2023). However, the double standards are clearer. FIFA has suspended or sanctioned numerous non-Western countries. For example, Yugoslavia was banned from the 1992 European Championship and the 1994 World Cup due to UN sanctions, Kenya and Zimbabwe were banned in 2022, and Belize was banned in 2011 due to government



interference. Global rejection of racial segregation led to South Africa's ban on international football in 1961 during apartheid. Chile was also banned in the 1994 World Cup qualifying, as was Indonesia in the 2018 World Cup and 2019 Asian Cup qualifiers. In contrast, Nazi Germany participated in the 1938 World Cup, and militarised-Argentina in 1978 hosted the FIFA World Cup.

In 2023, Indonesia lost its right to host the U-20 World Cup after local protests against Israel's participation. Indonesia has the sovereign right to decide who can participate in events held within its territory, as outlined in the general principles of law and the 1933 Montevideo Convention (Putra et al., 2024). Indonesia looked at Israel's actions towards Palestine as a violation of Palestinian independence (Maksum et al., 2024). However, with a lack of explanation (Wijaya et al., 2025) FIFA framed the Indonesian protest as a violation of its principle of political neutrality.

Comparing these cases, FIFA's action on Russia is unique in speed and symbolism. Without any ban, Ukraine depicted a map of their territory on their jersey as a tool of soft power, which was protested by Russia in 2022 (Olishevskaya, 2023). Unlike the slower, consensus-driven decisions of the past, the 2022 sanctions were swift and responsive. This may mark a shift toward a more proactive, diplomatically engaged FIFA in an era of intensifying geopolitical volatility. FIFA's decision to suspend Russian teams from competitions following its military conflict escalation with Ukraine represents a significant case study in sport hegemony and world order. On 28 February 2022, "FIFA and UEFA decided together that all Russian teams, whether national representative teams or club teams, shall be suspended from participation in both FIFA and UEFA competitions until further notice". This decision expelled Russia from the 2022 World Cup qualification process and suspended Russian clubs from international competitions. In addition, from 7 March 2022 until 7 April 2022, FIFA allowed foreign players and coaches to suspend their employment contracts in Russia unilaterally, a rule later extended for two more seasons (Chadwick et al., 2024).

The decision came after initial reluctance; FIFA had initially announced that "Russian teams would be allowed to continue playing under the name of the Football Union of Russia, playing home games on neutral territory and behind closed doors, and with the Russian flag and anthem banned". However, this approach was dismissed as "totally unacceptable" by Poland's FA President Cezary Kulesza, who insisted Poland would not play their World Cup playoff with Russia "no matter what the name of the team is" (Aljazeera, 2022).

The literature reviewed here demonstrates the evolving understanding of relations between FIFA and world politics, highlighting the intersection of institutional structures, normative considerations, and geopolitical pressures. FIFA's contrasting response to Russia's military action against Ukraine and Israel's genocide in Palestine represents a significant case study that can advance understandings of how non-state actors, through their forces (ideational, material capabilities, and institutional) navigate complex international crises.

## METHOD

This research uses an interpretive qualitative methodology. It draws from primary sources, such as FIFA's official statutes, ethics codes, and public statements. Secondary data include scholarly literature, news articles, legal commentary, and public discourse from international actors such as UEFA, the IOC, and civil society organisations. From those resources, we examine FIFA's response to the two armed conflicts and how the organisation utilises its ideas, material capabilities, and institutional power to maintain its hegemony within the sport order.

After gathering some data, we analyse it through Cox's notion of how a hegemon, in this case a non-nation-state actor, participates in the world order. A thematic content analysis was employed to identify the three aspects of social forces (ideational, material capabilities, and institutional) that shape FIFA's hegemony and response towards two conflicts. While the focus remains analytical rather than normative, reflexivity is also acknowledged. For example, regarding ideas or ideational factors, we employ discourse analysis on FIFA official reports related to violence. Institutionally, we look at how particular orders through their ethic codes and rules are stabilised and perpetuated by FIFA to maintain Western hegemony.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### *Historic Bloc*

As Cox's thought has a historical dimension, we first look back at how FIFA was created and how it has Western roots. When FIFA was created in 1904, it was an organisation with pro-colonialist roots. Eight Western countries founded the organisation in Paris: France, Belgium, Denmark, Germany (which sent a telegram of support), Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the Netherlands. All the founding countries, except Switzerland where the headquarters is located, were colonial powers and predominantly comprised white Europeans. They used FIFA as one tool of international governance (Bar-On & Escobedo, 2019). With the power they had,



the European countries that established FIFA, which we can call the West, embedded in their control within the organisation to deter the "other" order in this global football organisation.

The President of FIFA were all white, men, and elite, which is synonymous with the West. In more detail, there were three Englishmen, two Frenchmen, a Belgian, and a Swiss. They had two non-Western presidents: João Havelange from Brazil, whose origins were from a wealthy family in Belgium (Tomlinson, 2000), and Issa Hayatou from Cameroon, who served only 141 days as acting president. FIFA authorities also faced a challenge from England and South American countries in the first decades of the twentieth century (Pouliopoulos & Georgiadis, 2021).

Western ideas and norms are clear in the FIFA World Cup. Asia, Africa, Eastern Europe, and the Middle East received their first hosting of the World Cup, respectively 98, 106, 112, and 118 years after FIFA's establishment. Uniquely, Uruguay and Argentina's World Cup hosting is a civilising tool from the British to promote their European origins, washed genocidal practice towards indigenous peoples, and to suppress any kind of opposition (Bar-On & Escobedo, 2019). The competition was essentially a European and South American affair (Darby, 2005). Unsurprisingly, FIFA needed to wait until the 74th to hold a FIFA Congress in a Southeast Asia country for the first time, which was in Bangkok, Thailand, from May 13-17, 2024.

Only after Havelange became the president, FIFA started to spread its hegemony into Africa and Asia (Gill et al., 2019), even though the decision to increase the World Cup from 16 to 24 slots was a direct response to demands for a fairer allocation of spots for African and Asian nations (Darby, 2005). This action was not intended to embrace the entire continent globally, but rather to impose FIFA's Western hegemony on non-Western countries. Havelange initiated FIFA's fund distribution program to support underdeveloped football countries in building their football infrastructure. However, as the fund enters the territories, its influence and hegemony follow. The West needs to control the rest.

Engaging Asian and African countries is crucial, as FIFA elites require the votes of these continents' nations to align with their interests. Notably, Asia (46) and Africa (54) have the most nations, following Europe (55). As the number of World Cup participants allocated from Asia and Africa, respectively, is only 8 and 9 on a 48-teams format, while it was 4 and 5 on a 32-teams format. In contrast, Europe has 13 direct slots, plus one slot in the 32-format, and now 16 direct slots on a 48-teams format for the FIFA World Cup 2026. It also happens in the case of CONCACAF (the Confederation of North, Central America and Caribbean Association Football),

which has 35 members of FIFA and only gets six slots in a 48-teams format and gets 3 or 4 in a 32-teams format.

As FIFA is historically made by and for the West, it is in line with Israel, which is also made by Western powers or Zionists (Karataş, 2020) in 1948. Without discussing it with the Arabs and Jews in Palestine and the surrounding region, the British established a Jewish state. The then U.S. President Harry S. Truman recognised Israel on the same day (U.S. Department of State, n.d.). France also supported the establishment (Vereté, 1970). In November 1947, the United Nations (UN) adopted the Partition Resolution or Resolution 181. Unsurprisingly, Israel is part of the West (Bardaji et al., 2015).

### ***Material Capabilities***

The main idea of this paper, that FIFA is a Western body, could be criticised by the fact that FIFA has awarded the FIFA World Cup to two non-Western countries, such as Russia and Qatar. However, FIFA is an association that operates economics (Hock & Gomtsian, 2018). The bid to host those two World Cup editions is all about the material dimension, the wealth that an actor has to force their hegemony or set the world in the particular order they want. In the FIFA case, winning as the host essentially means pouring money into FIFA's leaders. The voting to choose World Cup hosts was full of corruption, particularly bribery of voters to choose Russia in 2018 and Qatar in 2022 (Gill et al., 2019; Pielke, 2013). FIFA members of the Executive had the power to award World Cups and have been seen to be obvious targets for corruption (Dabscheck, 2014). The Guardian, Le Monde, CNN, BBC and The New York Times, along with Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, have criticised Qatar for its reluctance to end *kafala*, a sponsorship system that is a product of British colonial rule (Brannagan & Reiche, 2022).

On the other hand, Infantino defended Qatar and described the West as hypocrisy, racist, and colonizers (Olley, 2022). Choosing a World Cup host depends on more than which country will bring in the most money for FIFA (Gill et al., 2019). For example, FIFA gained 2.2 billion euros from the 2014 World Cup (Malone, 2015). It shows that FIFA is a playground of material power. Even FIFA dared to end sponsorship agreements with Russian companies (Jamali et al., 2023). Between 2011 and 2014, FIFA's total revenues amounted to US\$5.7 billion, of which 42% came from media rights (Storm & Solberg, 2018).

World Cup is FIFA's main product (Homburg, 2008; Tomlinson, 2000). FIFA runs market principle and will choose the most country that could generate them most profit as the FIFA World Cup host (Steinbrink et al., 2011). If FIFA World Cup Italy

1990 can be called as mega-event, then South Africa 2010 categorised as giga-event that cost more than 3.7 billion USD (Fett, 2020). From the beginning, FIFA had conducted its business activities on a for-profit basis and by the end of the twentieth century these profits had reached several hundred million dollars a year (Eisenberg, 2005).

The material aspect, in this matter is money, was used by FIFA to control its member globally. When Blatter became FIFA President in 1998, he started to use FIFA material dimension to control their members and confederations below them. Blatter made the Financial Assistance Programme (FAP) to spread US\$ 250,000 each year for each member association, Confederations Development Programmes in 2014 that gave US\$5,5 million annually to each confederation under, and many development program approximately US \$284 million on 668 projects, including 191 new football association headquarters and facilities in Africa and 158 in Asia (Gill et al., 2019). This material power produces double advantages, first for FIFA members to obey to FIFA hegemonic, and second is electoral dimension to choose the same FIFA president for the next presidential election.

Once, David Goldblatt said that FIFA sought to transfer some of the wealth of football in the rich world (Bishop & Cooper, 2018). We saw it like Western development programme who is establishes by UN, such SDGs, or World Bank, or IMF. The receiver countries must obey and follow the Western-style development that is guided by Western order.

### ***Ideational***

FIFA always claimed neutrality on political matters (Broda, 2022). However, the idea of FIFA was born in Europe (Sugden & Tomlinson, 2020) and that would bring an ideational factor inside the body of FIFA. In other words, Western ideas are inherent in FIFA. It same with the State of Israel, which was founded in 1948 by Western colonial powers, particularly the French, British, and the United States, or Zionists to utilise Jewish wealth (Karataş, 2020). UN Resolution 181 strengthened the establishment, which partitioned the Mandate of Palestine into two states: Palestine and Israel.

The impose Western ideas can also be seen in several cases. For instance, FIFA did not fine the Iranian Football Association when Iranian women showed a banner in the 2018 FIFA World Cup with the message: #NoBan4Women Support Iranian women to attend stadiums" (Reiche, 2018). The message was gender equality that was in line with Western ideas, not Iranian ideas. FIFA argued that "the banners are considered by FIFA to express a social appeal as opposed to a political slogan

and were therefore not prohibited under the relevant regulations" (Kanso, 2018). With Iran, which the West regards as opposition, particularly on the idea towards women's rights, FIFA did not take any political action on the grass.

In contrast, FIFA fined the Russian Football Federation for displaying a neo-Nazi banner by Russian fans and the Serbian coach for his comment about a referee being sent to the International Criminal Tribunal. FIFA also fined Granit Xhaka and Xherdan Shaqiri for their celebration during the match against Serbia that showed support to historical Albania-Kosovo, which has a political conflict with Serbia. Albania and Kosovo are Muslim-majority countries, even though opted to tend to the Western side in the recent political situation. Through those double-standard actions, FIFA shows its Western perspective.

FIFA's idea of violence is vague, but we can take it as that FIFA condemns the aggressor and regards the aggressor as wrong (Franke & Koch, 2023). However, another Western hypocrisy appeared at the Israel Football Association (IFA) with the use of violence. The IFA emphasised that the game of football needs to connect people rather than divide them, and that the sporting world had understood that boycotts are not the solution and had avoided them for decades when its government blocked the movement of Palestine athletes in 2015 (Ber et al., 2017). With genocide, FIFA's response towards Israel is they wrote they had received the Palestine FA's proposals against the IFA on 31 August 2024 and will be discussed in the next two months at the FIFA council meeting (FIFA, 2024b). At the council meeting, FIFA wrote they will investigate the discriminatory actions of Israel toward the Palestine FA (FIFA, 2024c). Previously, in October 2023, FIFA reported the genocide as "terrible events that have been unfolding in Israel and Palestine" (FIFA, 2023), which means not considering Israeli violence as genocide.

With Russia, FIFA approach is totally different because the country is not part of the "West". Russia's geography is indeed in the western hemisphere. However, Russia itself, particularly on ideational realm, is not a West and continually in competition with the West particularly in ideas or values such as freedom, democracy, and governance (Trenin, 2007). It makes Russia is "far away" from the Western system (Trenin, 2006). In geopolitics, Russia is also on the opposite side of the West in their idea of NATO (Rumer & Stent, 2009). Russian society is also torn between the Westerniser and the anti-Westerniser (Kaempfe, 2010).

FIFA, for example, removed a "wrong" map of Ukraine that they showed in the draw of the 2026 FIFA World Cup because of the exclusion of Crimea on the Ukraine map (Rossiter, 2024) and FIFA apologised (Guilbert, 2024). As we know, Ukraine and NATO (Western military alliance) are on the same side in the war with Russia.

On 3 April 2025, Infantino thinks that lifting the ban on Russia will give a sense that the war is over (Slater & Rampling, 2025), while the genocide in Palestine keeps going. On their official X account, FIFA wrote about the humanitarian crisis in Ukraine, without a single tweet about the crisis in Palestine.

The sanctions thus served as strategic alignment with the international order. FIFA mirrored the decisions of state-centric organisations and signaled its embeddedness in global governance frameworks. This case shows that international institutions—even those nominally apolitical—cannot escape the gravitational pull of geopolitical crises.

### ***Institution***

As a global regulator, every national associations, football competition, clubs, players, spectators cannot be organised without consent and approval of FIFA (Hock & Gomtsian, 2018). The basic structure of FIFA was composed of four bodies: a Congress with representatives from every member association, a president, an Executive Committee with members appointed by continental confederations and a general secretariat, which oversaw day-to-day business. In the Congress, FIFA represented football states according to the one country-one federation-one vote system, which was consistent with international bodies like the United Nations General Assembly in which sovereign states each have one vote.

As in other institutions, this structure gave small states – for example, Trinidad and Tobago – the same power in the FIFA Congress as major states like France. This was checked slightly in the Executive Committee, in which FIFA allocated seats to its member confederations for them to fill. But disproportionate representation remained an issue. For example, CONMEBOL and Concacaf each had three Executive Committee members, but CONMEBOL has 10 member associations and Concacaf has 41, meaning that despite CONMEBOL's members having larger football programmes, Concacaf had greater representation within the FIFA Congress, which translated into greater influence. This dynamic was key to the system that Havelange used to win loyalty by distributing funding to new member associations.

FIFA's authority to sanction member associations is grounded in its Statutes and the FIFA Code of Ethics. Article 3 commits FIFA to human rights principles, while Article 4 explicitly prohibits discrimination and political interference. These clauses empower the institution to take disciplinary action in response to serious breaches of global norms. The question is, again, whose norms apply? We believe it is a

Western norm. Whoever goes off the rails of Western hegemony, sanctions await. With no use of armed forces, FIFA's rules control the norms.

The decision to sanction Russia stemmed from internal consultations within the Disciplinary and Ethics Committees. Given FIFA's decentralised and bureaucratic nature, the legal basis of sanctions had to be carefully constructed to avoid legal contestation while signaling moral clarity. The invocation of these clauses illustrates FIFA's effort to maintain consistency with its regulatory identity.

This internal legal framing also serves strategic purposes. By emphasising rule-based governance, FIFA insulates itself from accusations of political partiality and enhances its credibility as a neutral arbiter—despite operating within a highly politicised environment.

Jules Rimet, who served as FIFA President between 1921 and 1954, considered all the *fédération* a united family. The Soviet Union's affiliation with FIFA in 1946 is an additional illustration of this principle. Throughout this action, Rimet was even nominated for the Nobel Prize in 1956 (Broda, 2022).

In contrast, for stabilising and perpetuating a particular order, Rimet's action cannot be seen as the pro-Non-Western order. It was only to impose the Western order on the football world. FIFA's cancellation of Indonesia as the host of the FIFA World Cup U-20 in 2023 is a clear indication. FIFA explained that, as an institution, it must ensure the safety of all stakeholders, and Indonesia's rejection of Israel might be regarded as a threat to safety (Radhiansyah et al., 2023). Moreover, in the middle of the ongoing genocide that the U.S. supports, Infantino meets Donald Trump (FIFA, 2025), a president from a country that supports Israel (Al Jazeera, 2025).



## CONCLUSION

FIFA's sanctions against Russia in 2022 and its permissiveness on the Israel genocide offer an interesting case study in international relations. It reveals FIFA's double standard in addressing the two separate violations. Through its ideas, material capabilities, and institutional framework, FIFA utilises its Western-ness to govern the global sport. By applying the ideas category, this article has illuminated how Western ideas were embedded from the beginning of FIFA's establishment. Through its material capabilities, FIFA disseminates its wealth to developing countries, accompanied by the influx of Western influence. As an institution, FIFA sets the agenda to depict itself as neutral, but as part of Western hegemony.

FIFA's decision to sanction Russia and free Israel on genocide highlights the increasing relevance of sports organisations as world order actors. The precedent sets a standard for institutional intervention in future crises, placing pressure on FIFA to maintain consistency and legitimacy. However, challenges remain. Accusations of selective enforcement, especially regarding other human rights violators, may undermine FIFA's moral authority. As mega-events continue to attract geopolitical controversy, FIFA must develop from reactive crisis management to proactive norm-setting. Scholars should continue investigating this double-standard action through the lens of post-colonialism. The Western order is shaped not by traditional colonialism, but by the use of non-state actors like FIFA in shaping international norms. It is also interesting to analyse the fact that Jules Rimet brought the Soviet Union into the FIFA family, and scholars need to analyse further whether FIFA has always been oriented towards the West or if this is a recent development.

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