

FOOTBALL AND HOW IT IS USED TO CALM THE STORMS

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This writing is being developed at as the World Cup in its 22ed in the Guff state of Qatar, and the writer, like the billions of people will be glued to his TV set to watch probably all the 64 matches of the grand event which will take place between November 20th and December 18th of this year.

Football (or soccer as it is called in North America) has taken a steady and remarkable progress in its popularity over the years and, certainly, has taken different dimensions much more than only a game between two competing teams. These include social, political, national, and even religious dimensions as it will be shown, and some countries in fact went into an armed conflict because of a football match.

This writer believes that governments across the world, and especially those in with political or social unrest, are waiting anxiously for the tournament to begin so things calm down, and they certainly will, as football has a major tranquility effect. This has been proven over and over again across the world.

This article will show how football was used by various governments across the globe to defuse tensions, tarnish opponents image, and in many instances to brighten their image. In that regard, and it will be illustrated, massive sums of monies have been poured in to build stadiums, football academies, host large tournaments, etc.

Qatar world cup journey

In a highly controversial move, Qatar was selected on the 10th of December, 2010 by the International Federation of Association Football (FIFA) to host the 22ed edition of the world cup. The country would become the first in the Middle East to host the world's biggest sporting event, beating stiff competition from the United States and Australia.

Qatar is a tiny country in the Persian gulf with a total population of only 2,703,396 people, 15% only are Qatari citizens and the rest are foreigners. In addition, Qatar has no history of any football achievements on the international stage, and has no history of hosting large events other than the Gulf football championship which occurs every three years with the participation of only 6 gulf nations (UAE, Qatar, Oman, Iraq, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia. Yemen was added later.) Qatar also hosted this tournament 4 times, and won it three times. Qatar also hosted the 2019 FIFA Club World Cup, the 2020 FIFA Club World Cup and the 2021 FIFA Arab Cup . But none of those tournaments come even close to the size and magnitude of the world cup.

Over the past several years, and in preparation for the world cup and to boost its international image, Qatar became a mecca for all ex football superstars who spent their prime careers in Europe and are looking for a hefty pay before retirement. It is also very common to see only a handful of spectators in the stadiums.

Under such backgrounds, and since then, a flurry of corruption allegations and claims of Qatar “buying the World Cup” have surfaced while the country’s treatment of migrant workers has also been in the spotlight.

On May 5, 2011, the then FIFA vice-president Jack Warner, suspended over a corruption investigation, leaks an email from FIFA’s general secretary claiming Qatar “bought” the rights to host the World Cup. And on May 10, 2011, a British parliamentary inquiry into why England failed to secure the 2018 World Cup was told by MP Damian Collins there was evidence from the Sunday Times newspaper that Issa Hayatou of Cameroon and Jacques Anouma of the Ivory Coast were paid by Qatar. This was shortly followed by an accusation by whistleblower Phaedra al-Majid, who was part of Qatar’s World Cup’s bid, claims Qatar paid \$1.5m to African Football Confederation president Hayatou, Anouma and Nigeria’s suspended Amos Adamu. All three denied the allegations.

Al-Majid later said that she had fabricated her claims. In November 2014, she stated that she was coerced into withdrawing her allegations over security concerns and lack of legal representation.

On July 17, 2012, FIFA President Sepp Blatter announced that former US attorney Michael Garcia and German judge Hans-Joachim Eckert had joined the organization to investigate allegations of wrongdoing.

The treatment of foreign workers in Qatar who are building the massive stadiums was also the subject of much scrutiny. For instance, on September 25, 2013, British newspaper The Guardian publishes an investigation finding that thousands of Nepalese workers in Qatar face exploitation and abuses that amount “to modern-day slavery”.

Here’ a rundown of Qatar’s legal issues and complains as piled by Al Jezzsera on October 20, 2022;

On November 18, 2013, a report by Amnesty International found Qatar’s construction sector rife with abuse, with workers employed on multimillion-dollar projects suffering serious exploitation.

On March 17, 2014, British newspaper The Telegraph published an investigation revealing former FIFA executive Warner and his family were paid nearly \$2m from a firm linked to Qatar’s campaign to obtain rights to host the World Cup.

On September 5, 2014, FIFA received three reports from ethics investigator Garcia and his team after their year-long probe. Eckert refused to publish that report.

On September 24, 2014, Garcia called on FIFA to make his report public.



FIFA President Sepp Blatter reacts while banknotes thrown by British comedian Simon Brodtkin float around him during a press conference in 2015 [Ennio Leanza]

On November 13, 2014, Eckert released a 42-page summary, clearing Russia and Qatar of any wrongdoing and allowing both countries to stage the tournaments. Garcia declared the report “materially incomplete and erroneous”.

On November 20, 2014, FIFA said it will further review the awarding of hosting rights for the 2018 and 2022 World Cups by studying a US prosecutor’s 430-page report into allegations of widespread corruption.

On May 27, 2015, The Office of the Attorney General of Switzerland opened criminal proceedings against persons unknown on suspicion of criminal mismanagement and money laundering in connection with the allocation of the 2018 and 2022 World Cups.

Swiss authorities also arrest seven leading FIFA officials in Zurich on racketeering and bribery charges brought by the US.

On September 29, 2015, FIFA banned Warner for life from football activities after he was found guilty of violating the organization's code of ethics several times.

On April 1, 2016, Amnesty International reported that workers in Qatar renovating a stadium for the 2022 World Cup suffered rights abuses two years after the tournament's organizers drafted worker welfare standards,

On April 22, 2016, FIFA's new president Gianni Infantino announced plans to set up an independent committee to monitor conditions for laborers working at Qatar's World Cup 2022 stadiums.

On June 27, 2017, FIFA released the full report on an investigation it conducted into allegations of corruption over the awarding of the 2018 and 2022 World Cups. The dossier provided a picture of a flawless voting process and no hard evidence that the committees used bribes to secure the rights.

On October 26, 2017, Qatar's government approved a draft bill to support a fund for its two-million-strong foreign workforce.

In October 2017, Qatar entered into an agreement with the International Labour Organization (ILO), aimed at extensively reforming migrant workers' conditions, including by reforming the kafala (sponsorship) system.

On February 10, 2019, The Guardian revealed that Sir Lynton Crosby, a UK-based Australian political strategist, was offered to work on a campaign to get the 2022 World Cup awarded to another country in return for \$6.4m.

On June 18, 2019, French police detain for questioning former UEFA chief Michel Platini in relation to the awarding of the 2022 World Cup. He was released a day later.

On September 19, 2019, a new Amnesty International report revealed that "hundreds of migrant workers" have been forced to give up on "justice" and return home "penniless" since March 2018.

In October 2019, Qatar moved to announce the abolishment of the kafala system, enabling workers to change employers. In response, a UN study a few days later praised measures taken by the tournament organizing committee but it also stressed that improved safeguards and working hours are needed.

On January 16, 2020, Qatar announced that most migrant workers previously prevented from leaving the country without their employer's permission will no longer need an exit permit.

The accusation of bribery, however, persisted from all directions. For instance, On April 6, 2020, the US Department of Justice says that representatives working for Russia and Qatar had bribed FIFA officials to secure the hosting rights for the global football tournament.

On August 24, 2020, A Human Rights Watch report found that employers across Qatar frequently violated workers' right to wages and that efforts to improve the work environment have largely failed. Further investigation by Al Jazeera migrant workers stated that they are struggling to survive due to salary delays, non-payment of dues and NOC (no-objection certificate) restrictions.

On August 30, 2020, Qatar abolished its controversial kafala system, allowing migrant workers to freely switch employers. The country also announced it will introduce a monthly minimum wage for all workers of 1,000 riyals (\$275).

On December 8, 2020, Qatar announced that it would comply with FIFA rules of promoting tolerance and rainbow flags will be allowed in stadiums at the 2022 World Cup.

On March 2021, An Al Jazeera investigation reveals that while a number of workers were successful in switching jobs after Qatar abolished the kafala system, the majority of those interviewed experienced delays in the process as well as threats, harassment and exploitation by their sponsors, with some of the workers ending up in prison and eventually deported.

On November 16, 2021, a 48-page report by Amnesty, Reality Check 2021, said that practices such as withholding salaries and charging workers to change jobs were still rife, despite labor reforms.

On December 16, 2021, the court of appeal in Qatar upheld a guilty verdict handed out to a former 2022 FIFA World Cup official for bribery and misuse of funds but reduced his prison sentence from five years to three years.

Abdullah Ibhais, a former media manager at the Supreme Committee was arrested in 2019 and sentenced to five years in April 2021.

On May 17, 2022, Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, along with eight other human rights organizations, sent a letter to Infantino calling for FIFA and Qatar to compensate families of workers who died in the build-up to the World Cup.

On June 8, 2022, Former FIFA president Blatter and former UEFA chief Platini are both cleared of corruption charges by a Swiss court. (1)

At the end, and as Forbes Magazine commented “When Qatar kicks off the first match of the 2022 World Cup against Ecuador on Sunday night — mid-morning for American audiences — the world will finally witness the end result of one of the largest capital campaigns in human history.

Qatar’s minister of finance said in 2017 the country was spending \$500 million per week on infrastructure projects including roads, hotels, stadiums and airport upgrades to prepare the small Middle Eastern nation to host the world’s largest sporting event. It will be, by far, the most expensive World Cup in history. Qatar is estimated to have spent as much as \$220 billion in the dozen years since being chosen as a World Cup host in late 2010, more than 15 times what Russia spent for the 2018 event (2.) It is estimated the seven stadiums built for the world cup cost between 6 to 10 billion dollars.



Ahmad Bin Ali stadium, one of seven stadiums built for the 2022 world cup. Getty Image

Dictators in Argentina and using football

South Americans' passion and love for football is an essential part of their lives and culture. It is natural to assume that politics will be used to further the cause of politicians. The case of Argentina and its sad and long history of dictatorships is a typical example of this phenomenon.

On March 29, 1976, Jorge Rafael Videla came to power in a *coup d'état* that deposed Isabel Perón. He was accused and later prosecuted for large-scale human rights abuses and crimes against humanity that took place under his rule, including kidnappings or forced disappearance, widespread torture and extrajudicial murder of activists and political opponents as well as their families at secret concentration camps. An estimated 13,000 (3) to 30,000 (4) political dissidents vanished during this period.



Jorge Rafael Videla, takes the oath of the presidency, 1976

This period of political unrest and the savage treatment of the opposition was dubbed as the “dirty war” and the Argentine regime did its best to deflect attention to its practices, and there is nothing better than football, a hugely popular sport, to do the job. As it was later proven, Videla used the [1978 FIFA World Cup](#) for political purposes. He cited the enthusiasm of the Argentine fans for their victorious football team as evidence of his personal and the junta's popularity (5.)

It was no secret that the American administration at that time was a good friend of the military Junta in Argentina, a vital south American country. There was also a concern of dealing with a cuban-inspired leftist movement in that country (where the legendary revolutionary figure Arnisto Che Guevar was born.) Newly declassified documents from the Department of State reveal that in 1976 “Doctor K” supported the “war” against “subversion” and urged the dictatorship to finish its job “quickly” so as to avoid future problems with the US Congress (6.)



Henry Kissinger guest of General Jorge Rafael Videla during world cup of 1978 in Argentina

Less than a year before the World Cup, in September 1977, Interior Minister General Albano Harguindeguy, stated that 5,618 people had recently disappeared. The infamous Higher School of Mechanics of the Navy (known by its acronym [ESMA](#)) held concentration camp prisoners of the [Dirty War](#) and those held captive reportedly could hear the roars of the crowd during matches held at River Plate's Monumental Stadium, located only a mile away (7.)

The controversy of Johan Cruyff and the 1978 world cup

Because of the political turmoil, some countries, most notably the [Netherlands](#), considered publicly whether they should participate in the event. Despite this, all teams eventually took part without restrictions. However, most notably, Dutch star [Johan Cruyff](#), who won the [Golden Ball](#) in the previous [1974 FIFA World Cup](#), refused to take part in the 1978 World Cup, even though he earlier participated in the [1978 FIFA World Cup qualification](#). Allegations that Cruyff refused to participate because of political convictions were denied by him 30 years later—he and his family had been the victims of a kidnapping attempt a few months before the tournament. Several criminals entered his house in Barcelona at night and tied him and his family up at gunpoint (8.) Since then, there have been persistent questions of whether Cruyff was a victim of a random kidnapping attempt to extort money or a larger task of preventing him from participating in the world cup and, hence, enhancing Argentina's chances of winning it. No

matter what the reasons behind it, Cruyff was adamant not to go even when the Queen of the Netherlands intervened to persuade him to change his mind, Argentina went on to win the cup by beating none other than the Dutch by a score of 3 to 1.



Cruyff scoring against Argentina, Germany 1974

The world cup of 1978 and Videla's dictatorial regime, violence against opponents, and how it was used, was summarized Will Hersey's article "Remembering Argentina 1978: The Dirtiest World Cup of All Time": The other teams in Argentina and Hungary's group were the much-fancied France and Italy, establishing the tournament's toughest qualifying section. After the victory against Hungary, one junta official remarked to [Leopoldo Luque](#) that "this could turn out to be the group of death as far as you are concerned." It was delivered with a smile. "Uppermost in my mind was that earlier that day, the brother of a close friend of mine had disappeared", recalled Luque. "His body was later found by villagers on the banks of the River Plate with concrete attached to his legs. At that time, opponents of the regime were sometimes thrown out of airplanes into the sea" (9.)



General Videla handing the world cup to the Arentinian captain, Pacerella, 1978

Diego Maradona, the Falkland war, and the “Hand of God”

Although there was a transfer of power in March 1981 from General Jorge Rafael Videla to General Leopoldo Galtieri (acting president), the problems engulfing the country remained the same. The Galtieri government, after a long and bitter dispute with Britain, invaded the Falkland Islands which were claimed by both countries. The junta hoped to mobilize the long-standing patriotic feelings of Argentines towards the islands, diverting public attention from the chronic economic problems and the ongoing human rights violations of its Dirty War (10) and bolstering the junta's dwindling legitimacy.

The Falkland islands war ended in a total defeat of the Argentine army which surrendered on June 14th, 1982, which is only one day after the beginning of the 1982 FIFA World Cup which was played in Spain between 13 June and 11 July 1982.

Leading to the tournament, there was some consideration given as to whether England, Northern Ireland, and Scotland should withdraw from the tournament because of the war. It was decided at the end, however, by Cabinet Secretary Robert Armstrong to allow the British national teams to participate so that Argentina could not use their absence for propaganda purposes, reversing the intended effect of applying political pressure onto Argentina (11.)

It was suggested that the ongoing war had a great negative effect on the Argentina team, the defending champions, which were eliminated in the second round (finishing third and last in their group.)



Argentina national football team, 1982

The defeat in the Falklands war paved the way for the return of democracy in Argentina, but the tension and the bitterness of the defeat remained. So in the world cup tournament of 1986 which was held in Mexico, the quarter-final between Argentina and England at the Azteca stadium took a different meaning. That match featured two very different goals in the second half by Diego Maradona, captain of the Argentine team and probably the greatest player ever to plant the game. The first goal was scored illegally, as he punched the ball into the goal past England goalkeeper Peter Shilton. The referee did not see the handball and the goal was given as valid. After the game, Maradona claimed the goal was scored "A bit with the head of Maradona and another bit with the hand of God"; it became known as the "Hand of God" goal. For his second goal, voted "Goal of the Century" in 2002 on the FIFA website, Maradona dribbled half the length of the field past five English players before scoring. With 20 minutes to go, the introduction of John Barnes as a substitute changed the tide of play in England's favor, as he pinged cross after cross into the Argentine penalty area: with 9 minutes to go, Lineker got on the end of one and scored, then almost repeated the dose six minutes later but was just unable to reach the ball thanks to a timely block by Olarticoechea: 2–1 to Argentina was the final score. In Argentina, the game was seen as revenge for the Falklands War (12), a sentiment shared by most argentinians.



Diego Maradona lifts the world cup in Mexico, 1986

Iran, USA, and football

This year will be the six time Iran has made it to the finals. It will also be the second time Iran falls in the same stage group with the USA. This meeting comes at a very crucial time, especially for Iran which is undergoing a political upheaval as a result of the death of a young Iranian woman, Mehsa Amini. It is not possible then, the authorities in Iran are awaiting the world cup to begin and for the Iranian national team to make it as far as possible into the competition, and hence remain glued to their TV's.

Iran's first qualification for the world cup was in 1978 in Argentina which took place at the heights of the Islamic revolution against the Shah's regime. At that time Iran was in political turmoil, the deteriorating political situation in the country leading to riots destabilized life in the country. Peaceful marches turned into violent protests after the security forces used brute force and live ammunition against the protesters. That led to chain reaction and even more protests across the country. Iran was on the brink of a revolution. The atmosphere was tense everywhere in the country (13.) The world cup, however, did its magic and things calmed down, at least partially during that month. The political problems reflected itself on the national team as it lost two of its matches and tied in one, giving up 8 goals and scored only 2.

In the 1998 world cup in France, and as it was stated earlier, Iran and the USA fell in the same group. And as the political tension which exists currently between the two nations, it was just as tense at that time. The match, which is described as the "mother of all games" and the "most politically charged game in World Cup history", ended with a 2–1 victory for Iran, the team's first ever victory in the history of the FIFA World Cup (14.) It was reported that there was dancing in the streets in Iran after this victory, and the Iranian leader Ali Khamenei called it a "victory against the enemy."



USA & Iran teams before their famous clash in the 1998 world cup in France

The two teams will be meeting on November 29, 2022 at Al Thumama, Doha, Qatar, and as it was stated above, it comes at a tense and crucial time especially for the Iranian government as it battles protests which publicly accuses the USA and the west of instigating.

The football war

Football and its tremendous popularity and the passion it generates becomes part of the people's social fabric and national consciousness. It, therefore, becomes national honor and pride which must be defended by all means. And in 1969, a war, named "the football war" (or the 100 hours war) broke out between El Salvador and Honduras in 1969. In that event, existing tensions between the two countries coincided with rioting during a 1970 FIFA World Cup qualifier (15.) The war began on 14 July 1969 when the Salvadoran military launched an attack against Honduras.

Series of matches between the two nations to qualify for the 1970 world cup in Mexico, resulted in riots and clashes between the fans of the two nations. On 27 June 1969 the play-off match and deciding match took place in Estadio Azteca in Mexico City (16.) As it entered the 11th minute of extra time, El Salvador's Mauricio "Pipo" Rodríguez scored the winning goal, resulting in a 3-2 victory for El Salvador. Whilst the team did go on to play in the 1970 FIFA World Cup, they ultimately failed to advance past the group stage, where they lost every match.

The same day El Salvador dissolved all diplomatic ties with Honduras, stating that in the ten days since the game in El Salvador 11,700 Salvadorans had been forced to flee Honduras. It said that as Honduras had "done nothing to prevent murder, oppression, rape, plundering and the mass expulsion of Salvadorans", there was little point in maintaining relations (17.) It further claimed that "the government of Honduras has not taken any effective measures to punish these crimes which constitute genocide, nor has it given assurances of indemnification or reparations for the damages caused to Salvadorans" (18.) The hostilities lasted exactly for 100 hours when The Organization of American States (OAS) negotiated a cease-fire on the night of 18 July. Thankfully, it remains the only known war between two nations attributed to football.

The religious football

Just as it was shown that football takes nationalist as much as a personal dimension, it is really strange that the game takes "religious" dimensions. A marked example is the rivalry between the two Glasgow-based and most famous Scottish football teams, Rangers and Celtic. The competition between the two clubs had roots in more than just a simple sporting rivalry. It has as much to do with Northern Ireland as Scotland and this can be seen in the flags, cultural symbols, and emblems of both clubs (19.) It was infused with a series of complex disputes, sometimes centered on religion (Protestant and Catholic), Northern Ireland-related politics (Loyalist and Republican), national identity (British or Irish Scots), and social ideology (conservatism and socialism) (20.)

Conclusions

The focus of this article is the belief by the writer that the current world cup taking place in the tiny gulf state of Qatar will have a great calming effect on countries which are undergoing social and political strife. The governments of these countries are just as anxious to wait for those games to go on for the exact reasons. That much effect this widely popular game has which no other game or mean has such an effect.

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