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Si Vis Pacem Para Ludum
Ping Pong Diplomacy: When Sport
Breaks Walls


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Abstract

This thesis focuses on the impact that Ping Pong Diplomacy had in the 20th century and nowadays as well. It will be analyzed how the Table Tennis World Tournament changed the diplomatic relations between China and United States at the social, economic and political level. Ping Pong diplomacy has embraced an extreme importance in politics and it is a model to follow for today's diplomatic initiatives. In fact, it shows how Sport and Diplomacy can work together, in symbiosis, to solve or to avoid a conflict. The main message of Sport is, indeed, to unify people, regardless their nationalities, race, language or religion. Any athlete doing any kind of sport, works together with his/her fellows to achieve a goal. In other words, they work play together with a common destiny. They are united even if they have different nationalities, to achieve a common objective. This wonderful message can be also applied in international and domestic politics. Diplomacy needs Sport and vice versa. Tournaments, matches and games can be the perfect circumstance to start a diplomatic summit between two or more countries. It is known that today Diplomacy is multilateral, public and transparent. There no longer exist secret diplomatic summits or meetings. In a such globalized world, everything is visible. Thus, although Ping Pong Diplomacy was a result of secret summits between Kissinger, Nixon, Chou Enlai and Mao, it still embraces the perfect symbiosis between Sport and Politics. Ping Pong Diplomacy, hence, is the perfect example of this symbiosis. I wanted to write about this particular way of doing diplomacy, to explain the concept that Sport in general has an enormous power. If it is linked to politics, diplomacy acquires more power in avoiding conflicts. No one, in fact, should never forget the main purposes of diplomacy.

Sport completes politics and it serves as a vehicle or as a tool to create and strengthen diplomatic negotiations between two or more states.

Dedication

To all of those who believe, like me,
that without rain there cannot be a rainbow.

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Introduction

Ping Pong diplomacy has a vast amount of academic literature. Sport has always played a crucial role in global diplomacy, helping States to create or to recover diplomatic relations. Political experts and academic scholars have focused their attention on the importance that the 31st World Tennis Table Championship had in China in the 1970s. In particular, scholars have focused their attention on the competition between the American and the Chinese teams, the significance of the American visit by the Chinese team and the visit by American athletes to China. In addition, the tremendous impact of these visits will be analyzed analytically and critically. Then, the public opinion in China and in the United States about these reciprocal visits have been also subjects of academic studies. Finally, there will be an examination of the role that sport has embraced in order to unify as much as possible different nations.

Sport has always been a regulated process of communication and it has been used through the course of history as a diplomatic tool, useful to diminish ethnic and national diversities. Every day, the media and the press is concerned about the significance of sport in diplomatic relations. The study of such current topic has brought many scholars to investigate on the role of the 31st Table Tennis Championship in China on April 6, 1971.

There are many sources on the Internet: web sites, interviews, academic works and journals which contribute to a wider understanding of the topic. As a matter of fact, “American Experience”, a web site, give exhaustive articles about the ping pong tournament in China.

The U.S. Ping-Pong team, in fact, was in Japan to take part to the tournament. Suddenly it received an invitation from the Chinese for a paid visit in the country. Hence, on April 10, the Ping Pong diplomacy started. The US team was made of nine players, four officials, and two wives. It must be underlined the significance of such event. In fact, this was the first American group allowed into China since the Communists gained power in 1949. Another important aspect of this meeting, was the participation of ten journalists, five Americans and other five Chinese. This has stopped the block to information which had been implemented since 1949. Thus, the American public could daily follow the events happening in China from April 11 to the 17th, by reading the newspaper or by simply watching television.

Chinese premier Chou En-lai welcomed the Americans brilliantly in the Great Hall of the People on April 14. He made a clear and exhaustive speech hoping that the ping pong tournament would have benefited the diplomatic relations between the two countries. The Premier said:"You have opened a new chapter in the relations of the American and Chinese people. I am confident that this beginning again of our friendship will certainly meet with majority support of our two peoples. The importance of that meeting could also be found in the removal by the US government of a twenty year embargo on trade with China. The American government adopted this measure that same day. Also, the magazine Time reported that the ping pong tournament was "a metaphor for the relations between Washington and Beijing. This favored the visit of US President Nixon the following year. The first American president to visit China.

Online Journals like Smithsonian provide useful information and analysis about the ping pong event took place in Beijing. The writer David A. DeVoss is an expert of the topic

and he also wrote a book called “Ping Pong Diplomacy” published in April 2002. For the Smithsonian magazine, DeVoss writes that the table tennis tournament set an adequate stage for Nixon’s breakthrough with the People’s Republic of China. He writes that the early 1970s were crucial times in history. In fact, the Cold War did not seem to end and then, in Vietnam, the war was still going on. On April 12th of 1972 in Detroit, Michigan, People's Republic of China's world champion table tennis team arrived for a series of matches and tours.

Ping-Pong diplomacy started 12 months earlier when the American team which was in Nagoya, Japan, for the World Table Tennis Championship, received a surprise invitation from their Chinese colleagues to visit the People's Republic. DeVoss, however, wonders the reason why these American athletes had been invited. He writes that the Chinese wanted to open a door to the US to make a change. In fact, they believed that they could be allied and not enemies anymore. Thus, the United States took the brilliant opportunity. In addition, President Richard M. Nixon said: "We simply cannot afford to leave China outside the family of nations." Hence, President Nixon, caught the momentum and on February 1972 went to China. This trip would become one of the most important events in U.S. postwar history. Chinese Premier Chou En-lai described that moment with these words: "Never before in history has a sport been used so effectively as a tool of international diplomacy," For Nixon, it was "the week that changed the world." It is important to remind the importance that this tournament has brought for the two States. The table tennis world tournament embodies all the good moral and civic values which have allowed a reconciliation between these States. Sport has embraced an enormous impact on both domestic and foreign politics of the two countries.

On a social and economic level, the ping pong tournament has provided a new beginning. Apart from America and China, which were primarily involved in the tournament, the match also provided a clear example of how sport can replace war and its consequences. Therefore, the China-America tournament became metaphor of peace and transnational communication. In addition DeVoss explains that in February 2002, President George W. Bush, recalled the ping pong tournament, telling Chinese President Jiang Zemin: "Thirty years ago this week, President Richard Nixon showed the world that two vastly different governments could meet on the grounds of common interest and in a spirit of mutual respect.",

Furthermore, it is interesting how Nicholas griffin writes about the 31st Table tennis Tournament. In his work titled "The Secret History Behind the Game that Changed the World," Griffin explains that the year of 1971 provided the greatest diplomatic restoration between two countries. In fact, after twenty-two years of antagonism, China and the United States restored their diplomatic relations, which were achieved by ping pong players and not by politicians. Here comes the greatness of sport diplomacy. In fact, this is the best example of how sport can unify and restore diplomatic relations between certain countries whenever politics fails, or is not enough. The western press viewed that moment as an absurd thing and began to call it "Ping Pong Diplomacy."

However, for the Chinese, ping pong was a fundamental and strategic part of foreign policy. A way to strengthen and consolidate its soft power.

Though, Griffin gives a critical and cynic analysis of how Ping Pong Diplomacy was manipulated by the Chinese government. In fact, this table tennis tournament was used to cover up the death of 36 million people during the Great Famine;

how players and athletes were condemned, tortured, and murdered during the Cultural Revolution; and, finally, how the survivors gathered together in 1971 to meet their American counterparts. In addition, in the work called “Ping Pong Diplomacy Between China and United States”, Ibrahim Mamdouh Al-Sayed Fouda provides useful explanations about the aftermath of the visit to China by the US President Nixon. Nixon’s visit was called “Journey for Peace” and it favored a new beginning of peace. Washington already wanted to defeat its rivals, where as China needed to change its position of isolation. President Nixon’s visit ended with the document report "Shanghai Communiqué". It was February 27, 1972. The section, provided a place where the two presidents could exchange their opinions and political views. Both parties agreed that “countries, regardless of their social systems, should conduct their relations on the principle of respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all states.”

This visit was essential not only for the normalization between the two countries but also for the relaxation of tension within Asia. Although the friendly visit which represented a real breakthrough, major issues still divided China and United States. For example, each government insisted upon a separate declaration concerning Taiwan question. In fact, China had a right and a duty to “liberate” Taiwan by any means it chose without outside interference. In order to stabilize the American-Chinese relations, the United States had break its ties with Taiwan and remove its forces from the island. The position stated by the United States appeared as something of a mirror image. It said that “Taiwan is Part of China” with the United States saying that they would withdraw the military once the tensions had diminished. With no assurance that China would not invade, the United States could not break the 1954 mutual defense treaty with Taiwan.

One more significant aspect of the 31st Table Tennis Championship, is that in May 1973 the two States agreed to establish embassies in their respective capitals. These unofficial embassies served as an important forum for ongoing political talks. Furthermore, other changes were adopted by the two governments. Initially, trade between the two nations was established. This trade agreement consisted of Chinese purchases of American cereal grains and China had some handicrafts to export to the United States. Although China's purchases from the U.S. rose to \$900 million in 1974, the total soon declined. In fact, when it became clear that the United States would not quickly establish full diplomatic relations with Beijing, the Chinese shifted their purchase of grain to other exporting nations. As a consequence, the creation of diplomatic offices proved to be inefficient. As a consequence, both countries seemed uncertain of their future course.

Also, as Ibrahim Mamdouh Al-Sayed Fouda points out in his work, the new relationship between China and United States, had an indirect effect upon ending the war in Vietnam.

Ping Pong Diplomacy could be considered as the greatest example of how sport can create diplomatic relations between certain States. Whenever politics fails, in fact, sport has the power of unifying different nations. It is possible to use the Latin proverb "Si vis pacem para bellum" ("Seeking peace through war") and adopt it for this circumstance as "Si vis pacem para ludum" ("Seeking peace through the game"). This is, indeed, the goal of the Olympic Games. Regardless different ethnicities, religions or nationalities, these convey a message of unification and equality. This is why sport can be considered as an effective diplomatic tool of negotiation and communication. Therefore, the 31st Table Tennis Championship is, de facto, one of the best models of sport diplomacy of the 20th

century. Nowadays, it still covers a remarkable place in history for the achievement of peace. Ping Pong diplomacy, finally, has also embodied a model to follow for other countries seeking a peace achievement.

Sport has always been a regulated process of communication and it has been used through the course of history as a diplomatic tool, useful to diminish ethnic and national diversities. Every day, the media and the press are concerned about the significance of sport in diplomatic relations. The study of a such current topic has brought many scholars to study the role of the 31st Table Tennis Championship in China on April 6, 1971. Sport has always been a subject viewed as external to the political field. However, the international community has recognized in the course of history the importance of Sport Diplomacy. In a globalized world, indeed, where public diplomacy is the essence of inter-State relations, sport can be the right tool to help diplomacy. It is possible to state that diplomacy and sport work in symbiosis with each other. As a matter of fact, sport has the power of uniting cultures regardless different nationalities, ethnicities, race or language. This message can be brought in the field of politics. In fact, sometimes politics is rounded by conflicts of interests, the seeking of power or personal interests. This, can limit the aim of public multilateral diplomacy. Sport, thus, is used as soft power as Nye says, that makes easier to involve other States. Also, by using sport as soft power, it is possible to reach agreements in easier ways, avoiding, thus, conflicts, which is the main goal of multilateral diplomacy. Here, it is written “using” sport. The verb “to use” is specifically written to underline the fact that sport is a mean to achieve something. It is a diplomatic vehicle which has the ability of helping diplomatic negotiations between two or more representatives of States. A place of meeting where diplomats can exchange ideas while enjoying the game in a joyful

environment. Ping Pong Diplomacy could be considered as the greatest example of how sport can create diplomatic relations between certain States. Whenever politics fails, in fact, sport has the power of unifying different nations. In the course of history, there are many examples of the success that sport had in bilateral or multilateral diplomacy and there is empirical evidence of this.

In April 1971, an American table tennis (Ping Pong) team received an unexpected invitation to visit the People's Republic of China and was welcomed with enthusiasm in Beijing. Because the invitation was a diplomatic move, the term "Ping Pong diplomacy" was applied after the meeting between China and United States took place, which favored the historic visit by Nixon to China in 1972. Ping Pong diplomacy fulfilled the desire of both governments to improve relations between each other. President Nixon and Premier Chou Enlai agreed to work for a normalization of Sino-American relations but this is still something unsolved.

CHAPTER 1

Diplomacy and Sport: A Team Game

“The conduct of relations between sovereign states with standing in world politics by official agents and by peaceful means.” (Murray, Stuart, Consolidating the Gains made in Diplomacy Studies, p21-39, 2008). This is the definition of traditional diplomacy. It is a process of communication used by states to avoid conflicts. It is the opposite of war. In the global arena diplomats gain the authority to fully represent their state of origins. They have three major roles: roles of representativeness, role of negotiation, role of providing information. Diplomacy has changed over the years. In fact, before the WWI there was the bilateral diplomacy, which was only between two states. After the two great wars diplomacy started to be multilateral. This means that, not only was there the participation of more than two states, but it concerned the involvement of other global actors. As a matter of fact, many NGOs like St. Egidio for example, behave as mediators between other states in order to solve or avoid conflict. These mediators are completely neutral, so they do not have any particular interest in getting allied with one side instead of the other one. Traditional diplomacy, however, had been criticized for being obsolete, inappropriate and old. Also, diplomats were criticized as well. The former ambassador of Canada, Modelski, says that diplomacy now “technologically redundant, self-cantered, inbred and fossilized” as well as “impervious it is to its general environment.”(Principles of World Politics, pp. 187-190) Furthermore Ross, a British diplomat, writes that there is “nothing special about

diplomacy.” (Independent Diplomat, pp. 207). Diplomacy, in fact, is affected by “a lack of accountability and responsiveness” which leads to a “crisis of diplomatic legitimacy” with a “veil of privilege and secrecy.” (pp. 210). Ross, however, realizes the power of modern diplomacy. Furthermore, Jackson sees diplomacy as a “self serving barrier to progress” and “standing in the way of an urgently needed international revolution.” (Diplomacy and Statecraft, pp.14). He argues that that the diplomatic system “must not be merely fitted into the state system. It must displace the politically pragmatic and morally compromised arrangements of conventional diplomacy” (pp 15.). Today, however, something is changing. Diplomatic institutions, in fact, are reforming and innovating. Diplomacy has learned that people are the fundamental players in such world. Now, ambassadors could be compared to CEOs. Now there is a better condition for diplomatic training such those for young diplomats. Then, there is another factor which needs important considerations: globalization. In fact, the world now is global. There are important innovations in technology, transportation and information. Therefore, globalization allows new ways of conducting diplomacy. As a consequence, now, diplomacy can also be called as “public diplomacy”. In the sense, that there is more transparency in diplomatic relations. Everyone knows when an ambassador or a head of a certain state has met with another diplomatic figure of another state. Everyone knows, through the innovations in technology and information, about what they have talked about and if they have come to a common agreement. Today, every country and every diplomatic institution invests in public diplomacy. Its popularity relates to its adaptability. Gareth Evans, wrote about public diplomacy as “an exercise in persuasion and influence that extends beyond traditional diplomacy by leveraging a much larger cast of players both inside and outside

government.”(Australia’s Foreign Relations in the world of 1990s, pp. 66). Thus, the goal of such type of diplomacy has no limit and the players have grown significantly. For example, the state of Canada views artists, teachers, students, researchers, experts and young people as public diplomats. Thus, there has been a change also in the players.

CHAPTER 2

Sport As The Big Unifier

Public diplomacy has favored the creation of another important tool of diplomacy, which is now, more than before, very valuable: sport diplomacy. Years, by years, diplomats have come to contact with many sport institutions and people from that world. This, as an emerging tool, has led to the introduction of a new term in public diplomacy. Hence, the diplomacy of sport has embraced the characteristics of public diplomacy. There is the presence of diplomatic initiatives and activities with sport people and sport institutions linked to the government. So it can be said that there is a connection between two fields that apparently do not have anything in common: sport and politics. This performance is guided by traditional diplomacy and uses sports people and sporting events to engage, inform and create a good image in foreign services and organizations, to shape their perceptions in a way that could be more helpful to the foreign policy goals of one state. It is possible to say that there has been a sportization of diplomacy. There are mainly six reasons which have brought to this new way of doing diplomacy. First, due to the changes that diplomacy has had over the years, there has been the necessity of adapting to those innovations. Sport could be viewed as an indirect tool for foreign policy. So the image of a state's foreign policy can publically change to become innovative, effective, public and fun. Second, the power of sport institution and sport in general are increasing tremendously. This growth in sport can be seen taking as a model FIFA, the non state actor and the most

important sport institution as far as football is concerned. Nobody is opposed to sports: it has a global, universal quality. As Robert Redeker says: “Who is against sport? No one, or almost no one. The Inuits are as interested in the World Cup as the Argentineans, Congolese and Europeans.” (Sport as an Opiate of International Relations, pp. 495-496). In the public it has always been what scholars called public myopia whenever sport is concern in political relations. Governmental institutions now are working alongside with sport institutions to have a better outcome of the unsolved issues. Third, the entire world is tired of the political mistakes, especially in twentieth century, and the stereotypes that those mistakes have generated back then. Sport now can be seen as soft power for states which can connect different ethnicities, languages, cultures and put them together into a common arena, with the same rules, where time and space is limited. In this era, sport, society and diplomacy are no more in the corner, but they are effective apparatuses. Articulations of hard power through diplomacy in view of conventional, high governmental issues of arms bargains, outskirts division or organizations together, does not hold the same measure of consideration among the general population as they used to. Fourth, sport plays a crucial role in everyday life and is worldwide spread. If diplomacy carries out a positive message of good values in sport, the view of the public can be fundamentally changed. In 2008, there were the Olympic Games in China, in Beijing. These games served to cultivate a picture of China as a fully developed State. Even though those have been the most expensive games in history, from that point on, China grew even more. The same thing happened to Brazil, with the 2014 World Cup and the 2016 Olympics. Therefore, sport, as soft power, is a fundamental way to get visibility and to acquire important status in the global arena, in particular for those states which do not have such global hard power. A

fifth reason is that sport and diplomacy are coming under the same representation. Diplomacy speaks the language of peace, while the anarchic system of the global arena. Through negotiation, compromise and conciliation diplomacy provides a message of noble values. On the other side, there is sport which also carries out noble messages which appeal to the diplomatic institutions. The former American ambassador to Denmark, H.E. Jim Cain, said at the second Hague Conference on Diplomacy in 2009 that: "Sports can be a powerful medium to reach out and build relationships across cultural and ethnic divides, with a positive message of shared values: values such as mutual respect, tolerance, compassion, discipline, equality of opportunity and the rule of law. In many ways, sports can be a more effective foreign policy resource than the carrot or the stick." In addition, the U.S. Department of State said that ambassador Cain's rallying call "to aggressively use sports as a diplomatic tool" making the example of SportsUnited, an extremely important sport initiative. In particular, SportsUnited is an international sport initiative whose goal is to help to start a dialogue at the grassroots level with non-elite boys and girls aged 7-17. This initiative helps the young people to understand how success in athletics can be translated into the development of life skills and achievement in the classroom. Also, foreign participants are given an opportunity to establish links with American athletes getting in touch with the American culture. Americans learn about foreign cultures and the challenges that other young people from different countries face. Furthermore, after the terrorist attack to the Twin Towers in September 11 2001, the U.S. Government has benefited of sport as a tool to involve young Muslims people in Africa, the Middle East and South Asia, to sport and his ethic values of unity. Walters examines why a state is attracted to sport. He says, in fact, that: "Only certain cultures or segments of society show

strong interest in speaking English, travelling to the United States, attending a classical music event, or participating in a discussion on human rights. On the other hand, virtually all cultures and all citizens have an interest in and appreciation for sport. This makes it one of the best methods for exchange - especially for diplomats operating in an age when the opinions of foreign publics are so crucial for success.” (Sport Diplomacy is The New Come Back Kid, 2007). Also, some Departments of State, like the American one, use popular sport public figure in their offices, in order to promote sport in diplomacy. This is the case, for example, of the American skater Michelle Kwan and the baseball player Cal Ripken Jr.

In addition, sport diplomacy promotes international understanding and friendship and eliminate prejudices (Keech, March and Huliham, Barrie, Sport and the End of Apartheid, 1999, pp. 109). Sixth point. Sport diplomacy shares other affiliations through globalization. Just as the soldier is no longer a soldier but also an aid worker, a construction worker, a diplomat, etc., the same can be said of both the diplomat and the sportsman. (Murray, Stuart). Having taken into consideration this point, sport and diplomacy rotate around each other. In fact, these two fields are characterized by some figure who represents his own state in the global arena and both figures, the diplomat and the athlete have the desire to win. Therefore, it is evident that they work in symbiosis. Furthermore, the seventh and last point is that sport diplomacy can be used as a soft or light way in foreign relations with other states, as mentioned before. The first example in modern history of this, is certainly the so called “Ping Pong Diplomacy” between United States and China in 1971. In fact, China invited the American ping pong team to play in the 31st Table Tennis World Tournament against Chinese athletes. Through this move, China gave the idea of establishing a relationship with the enemy, the United States. This action became famous

in history as “the ping heard around the world”. It is important to note, that since the establishment of Communism in 1949, China had never invited American or Western groups. So, after several months, the American President Richard Nixon visited China and became the first American president who went there. The Ping Pong Diplomacy will be discussed and studied in a detailed way in chapter three, in order to show how sport can change diplomatic relations between two states, where politics fail. There are many peculiar cases. The Cricket Diplomacy, for example, between Pakistan and India. In 2011, the Prime Minister of Pakistan was invited by the Indian Minister to watch the Cricket World Cup semifinals. The tournament had been seen as “an attempt to use sport to create a feel-good atmosphere between the two countries at a time when the atmosphere of suspicion and hostility towards Pakistan in India is very strong.” (Rupert, James, Cricket Diplomacy May Smooth Tensions Between India and Pakistan, 2011). Thus, the tournament gave birth to bilateral diplomatic relations. These two examples clearly define how powerful and, very often unfortunately, sport diplomacy is. Furthermore, sport institutions go behind their simple role of organizing worldwide sport events. In fact, as FIFA President Joseph M. Blatter argued: “FIFA is no longer merely an institution that runs our sport. It has now taken on a social, cultural, political and sporting dimension in the struggle to educate children and defeat poverty. At the same time it has also become a powerful economic phenomenon. Football can move mountains.” (2009). In addition, in 2009, Blatter met Barack Obama where they highlighted the importance of a such sport institutions. The US President Barack Obama underlined “FIFA’s determination to break down social barriers, promote tolerance and encourage harmony between people around the world by spreading a message of hope by means of football.” (2009). Moreover, sport

is becoming more and more important, as the years pass by. It is not something strange, now, to watch the former soccer player David Beckham giving a speech to raise awareness of Children's right. More and more governments are using sport to amplify their diplomatic message.

However, there are negative sides of the debate. In fact, sport and diplomacy do not always mix. By providing the following five observations it will be easier to understand the problem. The first observation concerns the mix between the two fields. It is better to clarify that sport and diplomacy can be put together. In fact, the most part of the states have a minister of sport. However, the argument is that sport is often controlled by politics (Jackson, Steven, *Sport and Foreign Policy in a Globalized World*, 2008, pp.354). Furthermore, sport provides an arena for governments to certain types of superiority, from their athletic power to the ideology of a particular state system. Governments are well aware of the audience, reach and power of the opiate of the masses and have long been drawn toward sport and sporting festivals. Allison notes that all governments "have endorse international sporting competition as a testing ground for the nation or for a political "system." Regarding to this, governments use sport as a tool, as diplomatic vehicle to send a political message or to "defeat" enemies, for example. Then, a state can insist on the mix of sport and diplomacy for political interests, in the case, for example, of the 2008 Olympic Games in China. Furthermore, a second observation is that sport in diplomatic affair should not mix with politics. After all, other than a ping-pong match, a rugby boycott and some cricket, the involvement between sport and diplomacy have a small amount of examples. They do not suggest a sustainable pattern. The reason is that sport is sacrosanct. It should not mix with politics.(Murray, Stuart). Sport is something which has been put free by

globalization and controlled by powerful and prestigious international institutions like the UEFA or the IOC. It has a “spiritual power” (Redeker, p.499) and it is above governments (Alison, p.5). In addition, sport is something magical, an ideal not to be contaminated by the corrupt and disruptive elements of society. When governments and their diplomats infringe this realm (viewing sport as a foreign policy tool, a vehicle to put an) it means that sport is viewed as something below them. Alison says that “a trivial diversion from any serious human purpose, pursued by ‘muddied oafs on flannelled fools’”(p.5). “For the sporting public, politics remain ignorant of the true nature of sport.”(p.6). Thus, there are arguments which viewed sport as something sacred and sport as a diplomatic tool. However, sport cannot be considered neither above nor below governments. Sport is beyond them and there it should be left, pure, untouched and untapped. For example, the World Cup could be taken as a model. In fact, “the victors, like officiating priests, lift triumphantly to the heavens on the day of victory. No spiritual or intellectual message is conveyed, no hope for humanity, no promise for the human condition comes from this ceremony, where only the law of the strongest are celebrated.” (Redeker, p.495). Then, the third theoretical observation concerns the sports diplomats themselves. The public wonders who they are, what they do, how they work, where they are. “Sport diplomats act more like celebrity diplomats, using their star power to draw the world’s attention to international, global issues such as poverty, debt eradication, and pandemic diseases without a state agenda.”(Cooper, Andrew, *Celebrity Diplomacy*, 2007). Those practices cannot be considered as sport because they are not competitive, nor something diplomatic because there is the absence of a state. However, this is called “hybrid diplomacy”. Diplomacy and sport is a great combination. Sports diplomats who make their appearance to worldwide

occasions are not really diplomats, nor ambassadors, but heads of state and other powerful figures that more often are strangers to the topic. While the pre-negotiation and publicity stage of an episode of sport diplomacy involves official diplomats and diplomatic interactions, the big moment does not. Instead, powerful figures appear only to let the game begin. For the critics of sport diplomacy, a head of state's interest in sport is nothing more than a act, a politician move to show common interests to the public and to get more votes. Furthermore, the fourth observation is that these moves can be seen as the practice of statecraft and not diplomacy. "Among diplomatic practitioners and theorists, there is agreement that meetings between heads of states are bad for diplomacy. De Commynes, writing in the 15th century, notably remarked that 'two great princes who wish to establish good personal relations should never meet each other face to face but ought to communicate through wise Ambassadors.'" (Barridge, G.R, *Diplomacy Theory and Practice*, p. 170). More recently, Watt comments that "heads of government, with their massive egos, their ignorance of the essential details and their ingrained belief in the value of back-slapping ambiguity, simply mess everything up." (Watt, p. 170). Therefore, sports diplomacy provokes the same criticism that summit diplomacy has. For example, that carefully orchestrated meetings between heads of state constitute nothing more than dramatic theatre with a sporting backdrop. (Constantinou, Costas M, *On the Wave to Diplomacy*, 1996, p. 95). Furthermore, diplomatic meetings conducted with the media and with the public can be considered as an abomination to diplomacy, which requires privacy to build trust and build relationships. In fact, the public is critical. "All rational discussion is abandoned in favor of interminable propaganda speeches addressed not to one's political opponent but to the national electorate at home and the public abroad."(Berridge, p.6). In

addition, sport diplomacy has “the power of television and sprinkle the surface with exotic locations of great symbolic significance, and sport diplomacy is an irresistible dish for statesmen.” (p. 63). However, there are other issues. In fact, any diplomatic meeting generated by a sport event is criticized to be short and negotiations are limited because the heads of state underlines their objectives before the meeting has taken place. It happens that some presidents of some states pretends to like sport. This is not something positive for sport diplomacy. Then, there are other issues beyond the theories that sport and diplomacy do not mix. These theoretical observations and irregularities also stand to affect the development and practice of sport diplomacy. In fact, the two terms are theoretically paradoxical. In order to fully understand such paradox these two terms must be precisely defined. Diplomacy takes place in a competitive and grey system and its goal is to avoid conflicts. Sport, instead, is a more vague term to clearly define. Etymologically speaking, the origins of the English word “sport” comes from the French word “desport”, so “leisure”. Then, according to Kyle: “sport” is a non-ancient and vague term at best. “Athletics” usually suggests competition, training, prizes and the goal of victory. “Physical education” implies instruction and the exercise of the body. “Recreation” or “leisure” applies to non-work, relaxation and rejuvenation with pleasure or fun as a goal. “sport” is used as a general rubric for all these areas as well as hunting, dance and even board games.” (Jackson and Haigh, p. 355). Hence, Sport is a complex phenomenon, difficult to generalize. Sport can be non-professional and professional, senior and junior, international, national or regional and so on. However, when sport and diplomacy do not coexist, the difference can be viewed “simultaneously and without contradiction as unifying, universalizing, progressive and liberating, or as divisive, fragmenting, constraining and destructive.” (Kyle, Doug,

Directions of Ancient Sport History: Journal of Sports History, 1983). The main essence of sport, particularly in ancient Greece, concerned competition based on winning, at any costs. In addition, sport seen as competition could contradict diplomacy and its pursuit of peace. Then, there are more general differences between sports and traditional diplomacy. As Dr. Stuart Murray puts it: “Traditional diplomacy occurs in a highly structured environment where the outcome is often decided before the process takes place. Sport, on the other hand, is unpredictable and fluid. Diplomacy is practical game of cunning and manoeuvre that occurs between the professionals, officially accredited representatives of a state, whereas sporting exchanges involve a wide range of government and increasingly powerful nongovernmental actors. A final difference between traditional diplomacy and sporting exchanges is that the former takes place behind closed doors, far away from public and media scrutiny, while acts of sport and diplomacy take place amidst the public and are open to scrutiny” (p.18). Chamot along with Defrance gave some other explanations: “the two cultures – sporting and diplomatic – are poles apart in the former, agents express themselves through their body, in the latter, they work with words: while the former show themselves, the latter act with discretion: the rise of adrenalin among sportsmen differs from the quiet gestures of diplomats, the clamor of the stadium is the opposite of the peaceful atmosphere of embassies.”(The Voice of Sport, 2008, p. 395). While sport diplomacy promotes the “it’s not the winning, it’s the taking part that counts,” sport is actually built on “winning isn’t everything, it’s the only thing that counts” (The Voive of Sport). In fact, fans in sport do not watch matches, but battles. Regarding to this, in 1945 Orwell commented: “war minus the shooting,” In the present, as in the past, sport is associated with suffering and war , which is by definition the antithesis of diplomacy.

(Segal, 1987). Sport has references to tribalism, war and battle. Furthermore, for Fischer: “sport imitates war, a sampling of the daily sports page reveals conquest, battle, war, destruction, victory, the taking of manhood, honor and prestige.” (Fischer, Norman, *Competitive Sport’s Imitation to War*, p. 16). In addition, Redeker writes that “virtues, values and humanitarian gestures, have no place in sports; they ‘blatantly contradict sportive logic. (p. 497-498). Thus, through sport as competition, supporters get emotional with their national team. Then, the national anthems, show a type of patriotism and symbolism that brings a vivid nationalism. Regarding to this, sport again contradicts diplomacy, which serves to minimize distinctions. International sporting exchanges are emotive and charged occasions where the suggestion of using sport as a means of bringing estranged nations closer together can seem farfetched (Murray, p.20). Furthermore, Delay says that “completion merely intensifies enmity; sport severs itself from the civility required by rules and diplomacy, becoming a prelude to incivility and, in the worst case, violence. This inherent violence contradicts the essence of diplomacy-as-peace whether it be riots or, in the worse case, war and terrorism.” One example of this are the so called Football Wars between Honduras and El Salvador in 1969. Tensions between the two states were high and there was a flow of immigrants from El Salvador into Honduras. As economic problems continued, many Hondurans blamed the immigrants. Honduras, then, expelled immigrants from El Salvador. After the games violence erupted from both sides. Although the conflict between Honduras and El Salvador overcame sport and the nationalist spirit of the clashing fans gave the war its name.

Furthermore, the competitive essence of sport, mean that unsavory actors can use sport to spread fear to the audience. For example, between 1972 and 2005, it has been

reported “171 sport-related terrorist attacks have been logged.” (Jackson and Haigh, p. 351). As Toohey says: “Just as sport serves for the dissemination of positive sporting values, there is a ‘strong underlying connection between using sport to spread non diplomatic messages’”. (Toohey, Kristine, *Terrorism, Sport and Public Policy in the Risk Society*, 2008, p.429). Kuper, when he wrote about terrorists in soccer, for example, noted that: “the main allure of soccer to terrorists is the game’s global reach. Terrorism is a form of public relations. The aim is to spread as the greatest fear with the least effort. To do that, terrorist seek out the most public places and events. That means sport.” For example, in the Munich Games, the fact that they went ahead, despite such tragic beginnings, means that sport goes even beyond that. Hence, according to these theoretical prospects, terrorism, war and violence are happen in sport. Sport diplomacy, therefore, as scholars write, has a problem with duplicity. When the FIFA President Blatter says that football can move mountains because it represents peace, good sportsmanship and citizenship, the public may wonder if he is crazy. Hence, Walter says that, when a Department of State official says that “sports-diplomacy is not really about competition at all. It is about respect for diversity, leadership, teamwork and dialogue, it can sound as idealistic” (Walters.) This difference between sport reality and sporting idealism is bad for sport diplomacy, because it affects the accountability of the main and true essence of sport. Redeker writes that: “countries think they are using sports for their own purposes, for the furthering of some political strategy, when in reality people pick up just the opposite message their states think they are sending. Words and messages that have some meaning in political reality are nothing more than “empty sounds after passing through the gates of sport.” (p.18). In addition, sport involves people’s emotion. As Liverpool F.C icon Bill Shankly said of football, “it’s not a matter of

life and death it's much more than that.”. Sport can spread positive and ethic values, yet it is associated with competition and victory at the expense of the opponent. The diplomatic understanding of sport seems quite different from the conventional order. Therefore, saying that there is a danger of sport diplomacy is a fluffy argument.

Furthermore, “while the appearance of terms like sport diplomacy, cyber diplomacy and trade diplomacy suggest a welcome ‘renaissance’ in the theory and practice of diplomacy, there is a worry that its form is diluted through hybridization”. (Rana, K, *Bilateral Diplomacy*, 2002, p. 8). Having taking into consideration Rana’s words, such terms can confuse the both the essence and role of sport diplomacy when the traditional diplomatic institution can poorly afford an identity crisis. In addition, sport diplomacy is not the right tool for every issue. It is necessary to view carefully case by case. It is important to explore the issue because if the mix does not work in theory, then it does not work in practice and it has no future.

Thus, sport diplomacy can have a great future and does have a future. Sport does not care about borders, cultural rivalries and it breaks the ice over historical fights. Through sport, there is a possibility to really change the world. An opportunity to make those hateful political and cultural relations into a friendly and still competitive atmosphere, with a defined space and time. Everyone battling with the same rules for a common destiny. With further understanding, beliefs, trust and respect, sport diplomacy can really move mountains. Sport is a vehicle used in diplomacy to begin or to consolidate political relations between two or more states. And, as far as states are concerned, also cultures, communities and social groups can be allied.

CHAPTER 3

Ping Pong Diplomacy: An Unexpected Triumph

In order to fully understand the development of a such epic moment that re-wrote history, it is important to understand the political and cultural relationship between the Soviet Union and China. In the middle of the 1950s, the Ideological harmony between China and Russia began to fade away until the full vanishing of this harmony in the 1960s. The Socialism of Mao Zedong was different than the one in Soviet Union. They had different views on how to reach socialism. In 1968, tensions began to increase with the doctrine of Brezhnev, which proclaimed the right to Moscow of bringing any backsliding Communist State to heel by military force. The American National Security adviser, Henry Kissinger, stated : “No Communist leader was then challenging Moscow’s doctrinal preeminence more rigorously than Mao. If the Brezhnev Doctrine [...] had any obvious application, it was to Mao’s China” (Kissinger, Henry). Hence, China was interested in defending its borders from the Soviets. In the meantime, the United States was trying to disturb Moscow in order to make Russian leaders more interested in building relations with the United States. These diplomatic elements could create the perfect Sino-American pact.

Furthermore, the opening of the Sino-American relations was favored by the stem of the US involvement in the Vietnam war. Kissinger and president Nixon thought about a visit in China as something that would create a distraction from Vietnam in the United

States. The US was committed in this horrible war despite the worldwide dissent and in Washington there was a big desire of a big foreign policy. Moreover, president Nixon wanted and hoped Hanoi to come to a peace treaty, once the communication with China would become stronger. Finally, the United States decided that could not ignore anymore the importance of China's international presence, because China just joined the United Nations Security Council. In an address to the nation, Nixon declared, "There can be no stable peace and enduring peace without the participation of the People's Republic of China and its 750 million people" (Nixon). Hence, the talks between China and the US were the result of a series of events .

On September 17 of 1968 the United States proposed to China a kind of resumption of the declining diplomatic talks. China accepted. Slowly, these two States started to make footsteps between each other, but with caution. In 1970, Kissinger told to ambassador Walters, who was in Paris, to tell the Chinese that the US was willing to open secret talks. Furthermore, in an interview to Nixon by the magazine Time, the president said that he would like to visit China one day. In a peculiar interview, Mao said that he would be happy to talk to President Nixon, as a president or as a tourist. Meanwhile, he recognizes Sino-US advances in politics, a diplomacy masterpiece resolved on an unlikely stage. Nobody expected that the US-China relations could be created during the World Table Tennis Championship in Nagoya, Japan, in 1971. As a matter of fact, Chinese athletes were told not to get into any kind of conversation with American athletes. Sometimes, though, fate can be very helpful in these kind of situations. One afternoon, in fact, after a match, the American athlete Glenn Cowan missed his bus where his mates were and decided to ask for a ride to the Chinese. At that point, Chinese athlete Zhang Zedong began a conversation

with Cowan and after that, they exchanged souvenirs between each other. When Mao read about the episode, he did not get mad, but, instead, he complimented the Chinese ping pong player, saying that Zhang Zedong not only is a good athlete but also a good diplomat. Hence, two days later, Mao caught the positive moment and decided to invite the American team to do a tour in China on April 10, 1971. When President Nixon heard about this, he had a positive reaction. In fact, he said that he was surprised but at the same time happy. He could never expect that this initiative from China could be the fruition of a simple ping pong tournament. The American athletes were surprised by the warm hospitality they received. On the first day, the American team was received by Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai. He also was very happy about this. He said, in fact: “You have opened a new chapter in the relations of the American and Chinese people.” Then, on the same day, Beijing’s stadium welcomed 18,000 people who gathered together to watch the ping pong matches between the two teams. The American athletes suffered the superiority of the Chinese and lost. However, this did not really matter because the outcome of that match re-wrote history and consolidated the relations between the two countries. Furthermore, in June, 1971, Premier Zhou Enlai invited US ambassadors to China to discuss the Taiwan question and the Sino-Soviet dispute. Regarding the letter received by Nixon, Kissinger said that this letter was the most important one received by the Whitehouse since the end of the Second World War. The American National Security Council caught the opportunity, and President Nixon appointed Kissinger to make the first visit to the Beijing. This was July 9, 1971. Kissinger had a very clear goal to achieve: to arrange a future meeting between Nixon and Mao. In the autobiography written by President Nixon, it is written that, once the presidential trip was arranged, they would use a secret word “Eureka” (which in Greek means “Finally”),

because of the need of secrecy. Two days later, on July 11, Kissinger sent to Nixon a letter in which he wrote: "Eureka". The first trip to China done by an American President, at this point, was just a question of time. President Nixon's visit lasted 7 days, from February 21 to February 28, with the company of Kissinger, of course. The meeting between Mao and Nixon was an epic moment. Nixon wrote that they shook hands for about a minute. Then, during the meeting there was a diplomatic exchange of ideas on topics like the Sino-US relations and international affairs. These talks took place in diplomatic dinners and tours. This was a perfect occasion to exchange different views on a variety of topics and issues which had not been touched for approximately 20 years. The final document obtained from the talks between Nixon and Mao was called the Shanghai Communiqué. This is a diplomatic report which outlined the mutual goals of both countries and their views on different issues. In particular, the Communiqué expressed a crucial peculiarity: both countries expressed the desire of exchanges in fields like science, culture, technology, journalism and sport. Also, they came to an agreement which consisted in facilitating the development of mutual trade between the two countries. In addition, in the Shanghai Communiqué, they condemned hegemony in the Asia-Pacific area by any country. In other words, they agreed to unite and put mutual effort if USSR or any other country would decide to take over Asia. Finally, the Shanghai diplomatic document stated the positions of United States and China regarding the political status of Taiwan. The Chinese's view about it did not change, in fact, they repeated that Taiwan was a province of China. Plus, the Chinese addressed their desire of the withdrawal of the US military installations in Taiwan. On the contrary, the United States position was ambiguous. In the Communiqué, in fact, it is written that the United States recognized the presence of one united China, but it did not

clarify the governing body it recognized. In diplomacy, this is called “constructive ambiguity” (Kissinger, Henry). This diplomatic move served to the US to support the Nationalist Independence of Taiwan, but maintaining diplomatic relations with China for further negotiations. As a matter of fact, this ambiguity was the only way to assure further negotiations with China and to maintain good diplomatic relations. After the conclusion of the diplomatic summit, President Nixon announced the following words which have become famous: “In the years ahead, we will build a bridge across 16,000 miles and 22 years of hostility which have divided us in the past. We have been here a week. This was the week that changed the world. However, the aftermath of the meeting between Mao and Nixon was something important. In fact, Taiwan saw the United States sellout and was devastated. Although the Shanghai Communiqué did not directly stated that United States would support China on governing Taiwan, the idea of Beijing controlling China (and Taiwan) created a dissent toward the Communiqué among the Nationalists. Similarly, China was not happy about United States’ support for Taiwan. Thus, the Taiwan question was an obstacle that both China and the US failed to overcome in 1972 talks. This question is still unsolved to this day. However, this failure was necessary for other topics like immigration, economics and international relations, for the Communiqué of 1972. Furthermore, another disappointment from the United States, is the fact that the Table Tennis Tournament failed to encourage China in negotiations with Vietnam to achieve peaceful agreements. Furthermore, two weeks before the February 21 meeting date, Kissinger and President Nixon tried to meet the North Vietnamese ambassador on Chinese soil during the Nixon’s visit in China. However, the Chinese refused the American request. Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai clearly stated that China would continue to support Vietnam

as long as the United States continue to fight. President Nixon reminded that the later United States withdrew from Vietnam, the more problematic and disappointing the withdrawal would be for the US. The Chinese Premier knew the toughness of the North Vietnamese. Hence, President Nixon recognized the meetings with Mao and Zho Enlai did not bring any positive outcome regarding the Vietnamese political issue. Despite these two disappointing outcomes, ping-pong diplomacy was successful in making the Soviet Union adopt a better state of mind. In fact, through the opening of Sino-American relations, tensions between Moscow and Beijing started to fade away with the American suggestion for a détente. Moreover, two months after Nixon's visit in China, there was a visit by the American president to Moscow, in May 1972. This visit brought the first nuclear weapons limitations agreement, the SALT I treaty, between China and the United States. Furthermore, the most important consequence of the opening of China, and the result which makes the ping-pong diplomacy a success in the long term, was the birth of China's huge economy. In fact, in 1973, there was the opening of liaison offices which proved to be essential in restoring trade, in facilitating diplomatic negotiations and increasing the processes of communication. After the Table tennis World Tournament, approximately 10 years later, China started to establish shades of a capitalist economy. In fact, China's economy resulted to a 10% growth each year that passed by. From those years until this day, the amount of connections and ties between China's and United States' economy is amazing. As a matter of fact, in 2010, China happened to be the largest foreign exporter country in the world and 20% of the products were shipped to the United States. Also, the Chinese are the biggest foreign owners of American treasuries. Furthermore, Kissinger, compared China before and after the Table tennis World Tournament. He said that: "The latter-day bustling

cities, numbing traffic jams, and an emergent consumer society were inconceivable in the days when China was a world unto itself of stagnating industry, drab agricultural communes, and a vast population garbed in standard uniform.”

Ping pong diplomacy, then, was named in this way because the ping pong tournament served as a place and opportunity to have diplomatic negotiations between two rival countries. In a figurative perspective though, ping pong, as a sport, focused on precise and delicate skills. Its name, in fact, implies mutual initiatives. Hence, it can be seen as a metaphor for the diplomatic relationship between Beijing and Washington. In addition, through the table tennis tournament, President Nixon (and Kissinger) put an end to 20 years isolation between the two States and cut what seemed to be unbreakable knots of international affair in the 20th century.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the 31st Table Tennis Championship is, de facto, one of the best models of sport diplomacy of the 20th century. Nowadays, it still covers a remarkable place in history for the achievement of peace. Ping Pong diplomacy, has also embodied a model to follow for other countries seeking a peace achievement. In the course of history, there are many examples of the success that sport had in bilateral or multilateral diplomacy and there is empirical evidence of this. In addition, ping pong diplomacy has embodied a model to follow in the current century as well. This is because the secret diplomatic summit happened in 1971 between Mao and Nixon, has shown the world how a simple table tennis tournament could give birth to diplomatic negotiations between two States. Ping Pong diplomacy, is, therefore, the best example of how sport can play a crucial role in diplomacy. Diplomacy and Sport can work in symbiosis and they do work in symbiosis. Politics need sport as a vehicle to unite people. This is because the athletes in any kind of sport, work together to reach a common goal. They have, in other words, the same destiny and it does not matter if they are black, white, Muslims or Christians, what matters is the achievement of a common objective. Also, a remarkable place the sport has embraced in history, was in Christmas of 1914. In fact, during a Christmas break, in the land of anyone, both English and German soldiers decided to put the weapons on the ground and play a soccer game. The thing that strikes the most, is that English and Germans played in mixed teams. This shows how a simple ball can unite people even in times of war. Also, this shows that human beings are good but they are pushed to war by stupid and irresponsible governments, so much that as soon as those soldiers were free, they chose peace and fraternity. Soldier Leon

Harris, who was part of the 13th legion of the London Regiment, wrote a letter to his parents saying that it was the best Christmas he had ever had. He explains that they were in the trench and when nobody was shooting, the Germans started screaming “Merry Christmas” to the English soldiers, putting on the trench candles and little Christmas plants. Then, both English and German officials agreed in a truce until midnight of that day. But the truce lasted until midnight of the 26th. Thus, Harris wrote that both factions got out of the trench and started to exchange souvenirs, gifts and cigarettes to each other. Many of them could speak English. He wrote that it was a wonderful moment. They gathered together and started to make bonfires on that land of anyone, singing together. Harris concludes writing that they fell asleep and the next day, they woke up covered by the white snow. This is just one of the many situations where sport has united enemies, making them become friends for just that night. One of many situations where sport has made friends become brothers.

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