

Making sense of international sport organisations in the global arena. The case of FIFA and Israel-Palestine

FRANCESCO BELCASTRO

Abstract

This chapter analyses FIFA's involvement in the Israeli-Palestinian issue, with particular reference to the International Football Federation's stance on Israel's assault on Gaza. It argues that international sports organisations like FIFA, far from being 'neutral', are themselves full-fledged actors in the international arena. Institutional aims, in particular promoting and protecting football and strengthening FIFA's control over it, shaped the organisation's approach to the issue. However, other factors, especially the 'political' stance of FIFA presidents Blatter and Infantino, are also crucial in explaining FIFA's role. Both presidents prevented the FIFA congress from voting on Israel's suspension from international football, in spite of the state's clear violations of FIFA's own rules. Infantino's interventions, amid what was clearly emerging as a genocide against the Palestinian population in Gaza, are entirely consistent with his broader position on regional politics and crucial in shaping FIFA's role on controversial issues.

Abstract (Italiano)

Questo capitolo analizza il coinvolgimento della FIFA nella questione israelo-palestinese, con particolare riferimento alla posizione della Federazione Internazionale del Calcio sull'assalto israeliano a Gaza. Si sostiene che le organizzazioni sportive internazionali come la FIFA, lungi dall'essere "neutrali", siano esse stesse attori a pieno titolo nell'arena internazionale. Gli obiettivi istituzionali – in particolare la promozione e la tutela del calcio e il rafforzamento del controllo della FIFA su di esso – hanno orientato l'approccio dell'organizzazione alla questione. Tuttavia, altri fattori, soprattutto l'orientamento "politico" dei presidenti della FIFA, Blatter e Infantino, risultano altrettanto determinanti per spiegare il ruolo della FIFA. Entrambi i presidenti hanno impedito al Congresso FIFA di votare sulla sospensione di Israele dal calcio internazionale, nonostante le evidenti violazioni da parte dello Stato delle stesse regole della FIFA. Le iniziative intraprese da Infantino, in un contesto in cui stava chiaramente emergendo

un genocidio contro la popolazione palestinese di Gaza, sono pienamente coerenti con la sua più ampia posizione sulla politica regionale e determinanti nel plasmare il ruolo della FIFA sulle questioni controverse.

Keywords: *FIFA, International Sport Organizations, Israel, Palestine*

Introduction: International Sports Organisations, the International System and FIFA

This chapter looks at FIFA, the International Football Federation, and analyses its role as an actor within the global international system. The study focuses on the case of FIFA's involvement in the Israeli-Palestinian issue, with particular reference to the Israeli assault on Gaza. The paper argues that international sports organisations (hereafter also ISOs) like FIFA, far from being "neutral", are themselves full-fledged actors in the international arena. Their stance on sensitive political issues is not driven solely by the so-called "institutional logic" (Broda, 2022), according to whom ISOs' behaviour is defined by their rules and aims, typically promoting and protecting the sport they manage and defending their control over it. International sports organisations (and their leaderships in particular) also have their own political aims and biases that can diverge significantly from the "defence" of the sport." The case of FIFA's involvement in the Palestinian-Israeli issue shows how positions on controversial matters are shaped by factors such as leadership preferences and goals. The institution's drive towards "stability" and aim to establish itself as the sole authority on the game initially led it to prioritise the relationship with the already established and Zionist-led Palestinian federation (later Israeli Football Association) against the Palestinian aspirations. Since the achievement of full FIFA membership by the Palestinian FA in 1998, however, FIFA's policy on the issue has been shaped by other factors and particularly by the political agenda and views of its leaders, Sepp Blatter and subsequently Gianni Infantino.

This chapter is composed of five sections. Section two places FIFA within the broader context of international institutions and the literature on international sports organisations, before looking

at FIFA's decision-making process. Section three focuses on the organisations' historical engagement with the Israeli-Palestinian issue and analyses how different aims shaped FIFA's position. Section four looks at FIFA's involvement in the Israeli war on Gaza. Section five contains some final remarks.

1. FIFA: Unique or Typical International Sport Organisation?

Few topics have received as much attention in international relations as international organisations. This has produced countless classifications of typologies of institutions, and different views on how they work. In the last two decades, the institutions that regulate different sports, ISOs, their functioning and their role have been subject to more attentive analysis (Allison and Tomlinson, 2017). For the purpose of this chapter, theoretical debates over what approach better represents the working of ISOs will not be addressed systematically but only referred to in the context of FIFA's role within the international system. It is however useful to note how this study draws from the broad approach to the study of institutions defined as historical institutionalism. Historical institutionalism is defined here as:

an approach to studying politics and social change, distinguished from social sciences approaches by its attention to real world empirical questions, its historical orientation and its attention to the way institution's structure and shape behaviour and outcome (Steinmo, 2010: 118).

Historical institutionalism¹ sits between rational choice theory, which sees actors as seeking to maximise benefits and minimise costs, and sociological institutionalism that emphasises the role of rules in shaping behaviour (Steinmo, 2010). A framework based on historical institutionalism will therefore allow the author to analyse both the impact of FIFA's rules and structures, and the agency of key actors within the organization itself.

¹ It is worth noting how, while historical institutionalism is in some cases seen as close to path dependence theory, it is rather a broader approach to the study of change that can rely on "path-dependence-like" mechanisms.

As this study focuses on FIFA's role as a global actor, it is worth emphasising how the International Football Federation is both unique in terms of its global position and representative of ISOs' role as global actors. FIFA is unique because of its size and influence, being (together with the International Olympic Committee) significantly larger and more influential than any other ISO. The International Football Federation is not unique in its complex relationship with political neutrality. FIFA has often posed as the defender of the sport's interest and therefore neutrality, yet it has very much been an actor in the global arena. In the last decades in particular, the organisation has been consistent in its inconsistency, with its leadership alternating between assertive interventions on the political arena (Reuters, 2015) and statements on the importance of sport neutrality (Infantino, 2023). Perhaps unsurprisingly, FIFA has been the subject of as much attention as any other ISO. Several analyses have focused on FIFA's economics and its integration into the global capitalist market. Drawing on Archer (1992), Sudgen and Tomlison outlined how the International Football Federation had "transformed itself from an INGO (International Non-Governmental Organisation) into a BINGO (a Business International Non-Governmental Organisation)" (2005). While the focus of this chapter is on FIFA's role as a "political" actor, it is important to know how the organisation's integration into the world economy and its drive towards economic profit are also central to understanding the ISO's position on the global stage.

This study argues that the role of ISOs in the international system stems from the interaction between institutional aims (chiefly the defence of the sport and the organisations' role within it) and what will here be defined as "political" aims², based on leader preferences and interaction among different organs of the ISOs. The contrast between these two sets of aims is at the core of what we defined as the "paradox of neutrality" of ISOs, the frequent claim to political neutrality of institutions that cannot be neutral.

² While institutional and political aims are presented as entirely separated and contrasting for the purpose of this analysis, it is worth noting how in some cases the two can and will overlap.

In the case of FIFA, its chief institutional aim stems from the Statute's first articles, and it is to regulate and control the game of football (FIFA, 2003). Essentially, FIFA seeks to obtain two main goals: to expand the game, and to strengthen its control over it, particularly through the role of its national federations. The latter are the crucial mechanisms through which this control is achieved: "Articles 1, 3 and 6 notably granted each national federation a monopoly on football in its territory" (Broda, 2022: 78). FIFA's "mission" has remained the same since its foundation in 1904, despite the organisation's expansion both geographically as the numbers of members increased, as well as in scope to include the women's game and futsal. This institutional logic is however not the only factor driving FIFA's actions on the global stage. The organisation has its own political dynamics that go beyond the simple institutional logic. The interaction between its different organs, and particularly the president and the Congress, represents this complexity well. The Congress, the organisation's "parliament" where all federations have a vote, is FIFA's "supreme and legislative body" and represents the instances and views of the different national organisations. It is however the FIFA council, headed by FIFA presidents that "defines FIFA's mission, strategic direction, policies and values, in particular with regard to the organisation and development of football at worldwide level and all related matters" (FIFA legal handbook, n.d.).

FIFA presidents in particular have been at the centre of the organisation's development, but also represent the fulcrum around which FIFA's external relations develop. FIFA presidents build their election and maintain their power through the support of groups of federations, as shown by Joao Havelange's role in the organisation's global expansion (Vonnard and Sbeti, 2018). FIFA leaders bring their preferences and bias to the ISOs' external relations, "steering the wheel" when the organisation appears to be going in a direction contrary to its own preferences. Increasingly, and in spite of their own appeals to the sport's neutrality, FIFA presidents played a crucial role in shaping what we could define as FIFA's "foreign policy". These changes see FIFA as a more assertive actor on the international stage, interacting with state leaders and assuming clear political stances on different issues. The region of the world where this

approach has manifested itself more clearly has arguably been the Middle East.

The last two FIFA presidents, Sepp Blatter and Gianni Infantino, have both shown a clear interest in Middle East politics and (the latter in particular) a clear position in regards to Israel and Palestine. This interest could also be partially related to the increase in influence and relevance of non-Western players, and particularly of Gulf states, in global sports. Blatter, FIFA president between 1998 and 2015, grew increasingly ambitious in the latter part of his presidency. The FIFA president sought to use football as a tool to resolve some of the world's most intricate conflicts, and hoped that this would get FIFA (and himself) a Nobel Prize (BeIN Sports, 2017). His "football for peace" initiative focused particularly on the Palestinian-Israeli issue (Reuters, 2015). Crucially, Blatter's proposal to hold a match between Palestine and Israel came after the FIFA president had stepped to thwart the PFA's first attempts to suspend Israel from FIFA (Homewood and Lewis, 2015). Gianni Infantino was elected in 2016 to replace the disgraced ex-supremo. From the onset of its mandate, Infantino prioritised his "extra-sporting role as an international actor operating in a globalized world" (Beck, 2022). Infantino portrayed his role as using the power of football to resolve conflicts and bring upon positive change, in contrast with FIFA's previous toxic past³ (Beck, 2022). His position on Middle East politics and the Palestinian-Israeli issue was clearer than that of his predecessor. Infantino attempted to throw FIFA's noticeable weight behind the Abraham Accords, the highly controversial US led agreements aimed at normalizing relations between Israel and Arab states in the region. These agreements were not only strongly denounced by Palestinians, but also an attempt to consolidate US/Israeli hegemony over the region at the expense of other regional powers. Infantino even floated the idea of a joint Israel-UAE World Cup bid (The New Arab, 2021). A brief account of FIFA's historical involvement in the Palestinian-Israeli issue will show how long-term

³ Infantino himself was not an outsider to FIFA's previous past, having worked for UEFA from 2000, reaching the role of General Secretary in 2009, however the scandals that had hit FIFA towards the end of the Blatter presidency led the new president to paint himself as a discontinuity leader.

institutional aims and the role of the two presidents shaped the organisation's stance on the matter, resulting in a clear (although controversial) position.

2. FIFA and the Palestinian Israeli Issue

FIFA's involvement in the Palestinian-Israeli issue shows both institutional and political aims at play. In the early years, the driving factor in FIFA's approach to the issue of football in Historical Palestine was the institutional need to impose itself as the sole controller of the beautiful game in the land⁴. In this regard, the fact that the Zionist movement managed to establish the first federation to be officially affiliated with FIFA gave it a significant advantage. Later on, when the Palestinian and Israeli federations were on equal footing from an institutional point of view, the preferences and views of FIFA leadership played a role in shaping the organisation's approach to the issue.

FIFA's involvement with football in historical Palestine dates back to the period of the British mandate. Even in those early days, some of the features of FIFA's approach to controversial and disputed political issues were evident. The first Palestinian Football Association was admitted as a permanent FIFA member in 1929 (Broda, 2022). Crucially, while the federation invited Arabs and British (as well as Jewish) clubs to participate in order to meet FIFA's requirement to represent all teams in a state, it was controlled by the Maccabi organisation⁵ and particularly by the man driving the establishment of many Zionist sport institutions, Yosef Yekutieli (Broda, 2022: 81). This allowed the Zionist movement to achieve a certain degree of "institutional" control over football in historical Palestine, despite the establishment of the Arab Palestine Sports Federation in 1931 (Khalidi, 2012). In effect, once a national federation was accepted

⁴ This is not to suggest that in the earlier years of FIFA involvement its leadership did not have a stance or views on the issue, but rather that, as control of the game on the land was not consolidated, this was FIFA's focus.

⁵ The Maccabi World Union is an organisation whose aim is to promote sport among the Jewish population in different parts of the world. Since its foundation, Maccabi has been strongly associated with Zionism.

by FIFA, it became effectively the sole controller of the game in that territory, excluding therefore any potential “challenger”.

This control was reinforced with the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948 (and conversely with the non-establishment of a Palestinian state). This “lack of statehood” effectively resulted in the exclusion of Palestinians from world football “as Palestinians”, their participation mirroring their geopolitical predicament. Therefore, after 1948, when Eastern Jerusalem and the West Bank were controlled by the Kingdom of Transjordan, Palestinian and Jordanian football were considered one from an institutional point of view. The logic at play is confirmed by the Palestinian’s federation’s admission to FIFA in 1998. Palestine was admitted to FIFA during the Oslo process, whose stated goal was to establish an institutional structure that would have gradually developed into a future Palestinian state⁶. Here, the institutional logic of control over the game through national federations emerges clearly: as Palestine was to become a state, FIFA had to extend its control over the game by admitting the Palestinian football federation within its folder. After decades of denial, it was exactly the quasi-statehood that the Palestinians had obtained in the eyes of the international community that saw them admitted to FIFA.

The admission of the PFA started a new chapter in FIFA’s approach to the Palestinian-Israeli issue. The international football federation was now involved in the relations between two fully fledged federations. Once the Palestinian federation was established, it was able to press the issue of Israeli violations of FIFA’s rules against itself and Palestinian football more in general.

The grievances varied but can be reduced to three: (1) the restrictions on the movement of Palestinian players, (2) the alleged racism against them – these two being linked – and (3) the

⁶ Several scholars have noted how the ultimate goal pursued by key actors involved in the process might not have been the establishment of a Palestinian state, but rather the creation of a framework that would allow Israel to expand its control over the land and particularly expand its settlements policy in the West Bank. Regardless of what the real aims of the actors were, what matter from FIFA’s point of view was that steps were taken towards the creation of a state, hence the “institutional” attempt to extend control over the game in Palestine.

participation of five Israeli teams from the occupied territories in competitions organised by the IFA (Broda, 2022: 89).

Particularly relevant to understanding FIFA's behaviour is the third point, the presence of teams based in Israeli settlements. While all three sets of accusations are at least plausible, the presence of Israeli teams in occupied territory⁷ represents a straightforward violation of FIFA's own rules and particularly of rule 76.3 of the FIFA statutes (FIFA, 2003).

While the PFA initially attempted to get FIFA to put pressure on its Israeli counterparts, by the early 2010s it was evident that the leadership was not willing or able to exercise pressure on the Israeli FA. Under the leadership of Jibril Rajoub, its president and high-ranking Fatah official, the PFA decided to pursue a more assertive strategy aimed at suspending the IFA from FIFA altogether. The PFA therefore brought the matter to the 2015 FIFA world congress, where only the intervention of FIFA president Sepp Blatter avoided a vote that could have resulted in the suspension of the Israeli Football Association (Homewood and Lewis, 2015). In what would later become a common FIFA response, the then FIFA supremo managed to postpone a decision by appointing a committee entrusted with investigating the claim by Palestinian authorities, led by South African anti-apartheid activist Tokyo Sexwale. The appointment of the Sexwale committee allowed FIFA leadership to take the matter off the hands of the congress and under the control of the FIFA council (Warshaw, 2017). The outcome of this process explains well the developing position of FIFA leadership on the matter: with a short statement the FIFA Council declared that "Given that the final status of the West Bank territories is the concern of the competent international public law authorities... [FIFA] ... must remain neutral in regards to political matters" (FIFA.com, 2017). The Council (now led by new president Infantino) decided not to take any measures due to its assessment of the political situation on the ground, against the organisations' own rules (Belcastro, 2023). While nodding at institutional considerations by referring to "the situation of football in the relevant territories" (FIFA.com, 2017),

⁷ Israeli settlements are widely considered illegal and part of Palestinian territory.

FIFA's behaviour clearly shows the role of the leadership's political preferences in shaping the organisation's position.

3. The War on Gaza and FIFA

While FIFA leadership managed to (at least temporarily) postpone the suspension of Israel, it was clear to external observers that the issue would not disappear from public debates. Football had, in fact, become an area of focus for the broad international network supporting the Palestinian cause. As Dart (2017) outlines, the Boycott Disinvestment and Sanctions movement was central in centring the arguments of supporters of the Palestinian cause on Israel's violation of international law. BDS Campaigns such as Red Card Israeli Apartheid (Red Card Israeli Apartheid, n.d.) focused on the violations of Palestinians' human rights and of FIFA's own rules. In the last few years, the BDS movement has achieved significant success in the area of sport boycott, notably contributing (or directly leading to, according to some views) to German sportswear giant PUMA dropping its partnership with the Israeli Football Association (Al Jazeera, 2023). The most recent Israeli war on Gaza, started after Hamas' 7th of October attacks, brought the issue of Israel's suspension from international sport back to the forefront of public debates. It also meant that FIFA had to deal once again with increased pressure to address the issue of Israel's participation in world football.

As the evidence of Israel's genocide against Palestinians in Gaza mounted, many international sport institutions (including the IOC, with the Olympics taking place in Paris over the Summer) experienced significant pressure towards excluding Israel from international competitions. Campaigners asking for the suspension of Israel from sports and football in particular grew more vocal, focusing on the impact of Israel's assault on Gazan sport but also connecting the issue with the historical context of Israel's violation of international law and its impact on Palestinian "right to play" (DIEM25, n.d.). Given the popularity of football and the Israeli team's participation in UEFA competitions, FIFA was unsurprisingly the focus of many debates. The initial reaction by the organisation was muted. While FIFA president Infantino offered his condolences to both

football associations in the first days of the war (Reuters, 2023), no official FIFA statements were made till the eve of the FIFA national congress in Bangkok, due to take place in May 2024. The congress was the opportunity for FIFA to re-examine its stance on the issue. The Palestinian FA, backed by other federations and particularly the Jordanian FA, called for the congress to vote on the exclusion of Israel from world football. In what was by then a predictable pattern, FIFA president Infantino stepped in and decided that the matter would be deferred to the FIFA council. An extraordinary meeting was called for the following July, where a decision would be made on the basis of independent legal advice sought by the organisation (BBC Sport, 2024). Perhaps predictably, the July date was missed, with FIFA citing unconfirmed “requests for more time by both federations” (Inside FIFA, 2024b), as it was the following date of the 31st of August (Al Jazeera, 2024). Given the clear pattern of postponements developed since May 2024, FIFA watchers were not surprised when on the 3rd of October 2024 FIFA decided to delay taking a decision even further by delegating the investigation to two of its committees:

The FIFA Disciplinary Committee will be mandated to initiate an investigation into the alleged offence of discrimination raised by the Palestine Football Association.

The FIFA Governance, Audit and Compliance Committee will be entrusted with the mission to investigate – and subsequently advise the FIFA Council on – the participation in Israeli competitions of Israeli football teams allegedly based in the territory of Palestine (Inside FIFA, 2024a).

This latest move by FIFA council confirmed that Infantino and FIFA leadership aimed at preventing FIFA from having to make any decision, hoping that the pressure on the ISO would relent eventually. Furthermore, a recent precedent existed in the ISOs’ reaction to Russia’s assault on Ukraine in 2022⁸. It took FIFA (and UEFA,

⁸ Interestingly, FIFA president Infantino (and to a certain extent his predecessor Sepp Blatter) had showed a certain cosiness with Russia president Vladimir Putin in the past, with Infantino even awarded Russia’s prestigious Order of Friendship by the Russia leader in 2019 (Associated Press, 2019).

the European Football Federation) a grand total of four days from the invasion of Ukraine to decide to suspend Russian teams from all competitions (FIFA Media Release, 2022). Notwithstanding the differences between the two cases, FIFA's willingness to swiftly decide in this case contrasts clearly with its position on the case against the Israeli Football Association.

Here, it is useful to note that FIFA was not the only ISO that had to negotiate the issue of Israel's participation in international sport. In particular, the Olympic Games that took place in Paris in the Summer of 2024 saw the participation of both Israeli and Palestinian athletes. The IOC adopted the (in)famous line of "keeping sport out of politics" (Walker, 2024). The Olympic committee, on the other hand, adopted the compromise solution of allowing a limited number of Russian and Belarusian athletes to participate under a neutral "independent flag" if they met a set of (rather restrictive) criteria (International Olympic Committee, 2023). While this position did not spare the IOC from criticism, this had appeared to be more muted and less sour than the ones received by FIFA. While, to the best of the author's knowledge, no research has been done on this issue, different factors could explain this discrepancy. The IOC's significantly different structure from FIFA, without a congress that represents "national views," accounts for the limited internal discussion, while the perception of the Olympic committee as having historically been more "politically neutral" than FIFA on the Palestinian-Israeli issue could have also played a role.

Both FIFA's reaction to the Gaza war and the discrepancy with the swift action taken by the ISO after the Russian invasion of Ukraine show the complex interaction between institutional factors and leaders' preferences. FIFA's leadership chose to postpone the decision on Israel's suspension from the organisation and (crucially) take control of the process away from the FIFA congress and into the hands of the Council and therefore the FIFA leadership itself. Given the evidence against the Israeli FA on both longer term violations of FIFA rules and the impact of the current assault on Gaza on the population of Gaza and its football infrastructures, players and coaches, the crux of the issue for FIFA's leadership appears to be that, would the organisation make a decision on the matter, it would be hard not to rule against the IFA. This choice does not

reflect “institutional” logic but rather FIFA’s president and his cohort aim to avoid the organisation making any decision against the Israeli Football Association. Here, the standard explanation of ‘keeping football out of politics’ appears to be particularly weak coming from an organisation (and a leadership in particular) that had clearly thrown its weight behind some political actors in the past. FIFA’s leadership attempts to prevent the expulsion of Israel from FIFA have to be understood in the context of the ISO’s longstanding leadership position on the issue.

Conclusions

This paper analysed the role of FIFA as an actor on the global stage, with particular reference to its involvement in the Israeli-Palestinian issue and the assault on Gaza by the state of Israel. It showed how FIFA’s behaviour on the issue cannot be explained exclusively according to FIFA’s “institutional” logic, which should see FIFA protecting the game and its role within it. Rather, the organisation has taken an active and political role on the issue, particularly through its presidents. Sepp Blatter in his last years of presidency has sought to use football to “bring peace to the region”. Gianni Infantino pushed further his predecessor’s football for peace strategy, often acting more like the leader of a country than the head of an ISO in his approach to the organisation’s global role and to Palestine and Israel in particular. As such, Infantino threw his weight behind a particular vision of the Middle East region, promoted by actors such as the US and Israel. The FIFA presidents’ (at least so far) successful interventions aimed at preventing FIFA from suspending Israel despite its clear violations of FIFA rules are therefore clearly consistent with their previous stance on the issue. More broadly, these interventions confirm how presidents have been the driving force beyond the development of what we defined here as FIFA’s ‘foreign policy’, the organisation’s position on issues such as Palestinian-Israeli relations and more recently on the war on Gaza. The dynamic nature of the relation among FIFA’s organs (particularly the presidency and the congress), however, means that presidents constantly have to work to impose their preferred stances on controversial matters. Furthermore, the

potential (albeit remote) always exists for other actors to successfully challenge the leaders' stance and change the organization's position on issues such as the suspension of Israel from FIFA.

The analysis carried out also sheds light on a few aspects that apply to all ISOs. While the International Football Federation is unique (together with the IOC) due to its size and the popularity of the game it controls, it does share some key features with other International Sport Organisations. In particular, the existence of institutional and political aims is not unique to FIFA, and the global role of any ISO can in some cases be characterised by the tension between these two sets of goals. Therefore, in order to understand the global role of individual ISOs as well as ISOs collectively, the internal dynamics that define their "political" aims are just as relevant as their institutional goals. While the aim of this study was to analyse the role of FIFA in relation to one specific issue, further studies taking a more theory-driven approach could expand our understanding of ISOs and their work by drawing on theoretical frameworks such as historical institutionalism. The use of comparative methods and of long-term historical analysis, both typical of historical institutionalism, would be particularly effective in shedding light on the global role of International Sports Organisations.

References

Al Jazeera (2023) 'Puma to end sponsorship of Israel's national football team in 2024'. *Al Jazeera*, 12 December. Available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/12/puma-to-end-sponsorship-of-israels-national-football-team-in-2024> (accessed 16 December 2024).

Al Jazeera (2024) 'FIFA delays again review of Palestinian call to suspend Israel'. *Al Jazeera*, 31 August. Available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/sports/2024/8/31/palestinian-call-for-israel-football-suspension-delayed-again-by-fifa> (accessed 20 December 2024).

Allison L and Tomlinson A (2017) *Understanding International Sport Organisations: Principles, Power and Possibilities*. 1st edn. Abingdon and New York: Routledge. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315743875>.

Archer C (1992) *International Organizations*. 2nd edn. London and New York: Routledge.

BBC Sport (2024) 'FIFA to make legal assessment after Palestine federation calls for Israel suspension'. *BBC Sport*, 17 May. Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/sport/football/articles/cyx65r72d50o> (accessed 20 December 2024).

Beck P (2022) 'Gianni Infantino and using "the power of football" to make a troubled globalized world "a more peaceful place"'. In: Maguire J, Liston K and Falcous M (eds) *The Palgrave Handbook of Globalization and Sport*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

BeIN Sports (2017) 'Blatter sought Nobel Peace Prize for FIFA'. *beIN SPORTS*. Available at: <https://www.beinsports.com/en-mena/football/articles/blatter-sought-nobel-peace-prize-for-fifa-1> (accessed 28 December 2024).

Belcastro F (2023) 'A game of politics? International sport organisations and the role of sport in international politics'. *The International Spectator* 58(2): 107–122.

Broda P (2022) 'FIFA as referee of the match Israel-Palestine from 1920 to 2020: An institutional approach'. *Sport in History* 42(1): 76–95.

Dart J (2017) 'Showing Israel the red card: Activists engaged in pro-Palestinian sport-related campaigns'. *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics* 9(3): 521–539.

DIEM25 (no date) 'Suspend Israel from international sports'. Available at: <https://internal.diem25.org/en/petitions/93?id=93> (accessed 26 November 2024).

FIFA (2003) *FIFA statutes*. Available at: <https://digitalhub.fifa.com/m/5eb-2b45e547ff39f/original/ndfxogwkouoe4dm3uk0-pdf.pdf> (accessed 14 April 2023).

FIFA (no date) *FIFA legal handbook*. Available at: <https://digitalhub.fifa.com/m/bd789dd9dfbf3dd/original/FIFA-Legal-Handbook-2024.pdf> (accessed 24 December 2024).

FIFA (2022) 'FIFA/UEFA suspend Russian clubs and national teams from all competitions'. Media release. Available at: <https://inside.fifa.com/tournaments/mens/worldcup/qatar2022/media-releases/origin1904-p.cxm.fifa.com/fifa-uefa-suspend-russian-clubs-and-national-teams-from-all-competitions> (accessed 16 December 2024).

FIFA (2017) 'FIFA Council statement on the final report by the FIFA Monitoring Committee Israel-Palestine'. *FIFA.com*. Available at: <https://inside.fifa.com/about-fifa/organisation/fifa-council/media-releases/fifa-council-statement-on-the-final-report-by-the-fifa-monitoring-comm-2917741> (accessed 18 October 2022).

Homewood B and Lewis O (2015) 'Israeli FA presses Blatter in effort to avert suspension'. *Reuters*, 19 May. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/sports/israeli-fa-presses-blatter-in-effort-to-avert-suspension-idUSKBN0NR0XQ/> (accessed 24 December 2024).

Infantino G (2023) 'FIFA President tells IOC Session sport is most "powerful tool to unite people"'. *FIFA.com*. Available at: <https://inside.fifa.com/about-fifa/president/news/fifa-president-tells-ioc-session-sport-is-most-powerful-tool-to-unite-people> (accessed 26 November 2024).

Inside FIFA (2024a) 'FIFA Council takes key decisions on FIFA member associations and upcoming FIFA competitions'. Available at: <https://inside.fifa.com/about-fifa/organisation/fifa-council/media-releases/origin1904-p.cxm.fifa.com/fifa-council-takes-key-decisions-member-associations-upcoming-competitions> (accessed 21 December 2024).

Inside FIFA (2024b) 'FIFA update'. Available at: <https://inside.fifa.com/about-fifa/organisation/news/origin1904-p.cxm.fifa.com/fifa-update> (accessed 20 December 2024).

International Olympic Committee (2023) 'IOC media release'. *Olympics.com*. Available at: <https://olympics.com/ioc/news/ioc-issues-recommendations-for-international-federations-and-international-sports-event-organisers> (accessed 16 December 2024).

Khalidi I (2012) *100 Years of Football in Palestine*. Amman: Al Manhal.

Red Card Israeli Apartheid (no date) 'BDS movement'. Available at: <https://www.bdsmovement.net/tags/red-card-israeli-apartheid> (accessed 14 December 2024).

Reuters (2015) 'FIFA president Sepp Blatter proposes Israel v Palestine "peace match"'. *The Guardian*, 19 May. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/football/2015/may/19/fifa-sepp-blatter-israel-palestine-peace-match> (accessed 7 October 2022).

Reuters (2023) 'FIFA president Infantino offers condolences in letter to Israel and Palestine FAs'. *Reuters*, 13 October. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/sports/fifa-president-infantino-offers-condolences-letter-israel-palestine-fas-2023-10-13/> (accessed 20 December 2024).

Steinmo S (2010) 'Historical institutionalism'. In: Della Porta D and Keating M (eds) *Approaches and Methodologies in the Social Sciences: A Pluralist Perspective*. Reprinted with corrections. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 118–138.

Sugden J and Tomlinson A (2005) 'Not good for the game: Crisis and credibility in the governance of world football'. In: Allison L (ed.) *The Global*

Politics of Sport: The Role of Global Institutions in Sport. London and New York: Routledge, pp. 24–41.

The New Arab (2021) 'FIFA head proposes joint Israel-UAE World Cup bid'. *The New Arab*, 12 October. Available at: <https://english.alaraby.co.uk/news/fifa-head-proposes-joint-israel-uae-world-cup-bid> (accessed 10 October 2022).

Vonnard P and Sberti N (2018) 'João Havelange: A businessman for world soccer'. In: Bayle E and Clastres P (eds) *Global Sport Leaders*. Cham: Springer International Publishing, pp. 127–151.

Walker A (2024) 'The Olympics have always been political'. *Politico*, 18 July. Available at: <https://www.politico.eu/article/paris-summer-olympics-2024-politics-sports/> (accessed 16 December 2024).

Warsaw A (2017) 'Sexwale says Israel/Palestine task force did its job, but did FIFA do theirs?'. *Inside World Football*, 1 November. Available at: <https://www.insideworldfootball.com/2017/11/01/sexwale-says-israel-palestine-task-force-job-fifa/> (accessed 7 October 2022).

Francesco Belcastro is a Senior Lecturer in International Relations at the University of Derby and a Fellow at the CSS, University of St Andrews. His areas of research are conflict, sport and politics and the politics of the Middle East (particularly Israel/Palestine and Syria). His current research looks at two areas: the intersection of sport and politics, both in the Bilad-Ash-Sham and at global level, and external actors' involvement in civil wars. He also co-hosts the FootPol Podcast- the podcast where football meets politics.
Email: f.belcastro@derby.ac.uk