

Federal State Budgetary Educational Institution of Higher Education

**«THE RUSSIAN PRESIDENTIAL ACADEMY OF NATIONAL ECONOMY  
AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION»  
VORONEZH BRANCH**

*As a manuscript*

**BAIRAMOV Timur Andreevich**



**The transformation of the role of sports: from the soft power tool to the  
instrument of political confrontation**

Abstract of the dissertation for the degree of candidate of political sciences in the  
specialization

5.5.2 Political institutions, processes, technologies

**Scientific supervisor:**  
Doctor of Political Science, Professor  
Slinko Aleksandr Anatolyevich

Voronezh - 2025

**Relevance of the dissertation research topic.** The transformation of the role of sports in the global political process is a significant phenomenon of our time. The influx of Western transnational capital that began in the 1990s created the conditions for an imbalance of power within the Olympic movement, which over time transformed global sports into both an arena of fierce confrontation between the West, which was losing its monopoly, and new centers of power, and a «testing ground» where new instruments and technologies of non-classical warfare are tested.

With the collapse of the bipolar system, the Olympic movement faced the urgent problem of adapting to a new global political reality, which formed a new constellation of values and ideologies. In the context of the «unipolar moment», the unsuccessful attempt by the leadership of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) to «privatize» the fight against doping led to the equal participation of nation states and international sports institutions within the framework of the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA), established in 1999. This became the starting point for the policy drift of the Olympic movement, leading to the «neoliberalization» of global sports and shrinking of the IOC to an instrument for ensuring the hegemony of the foreign policy interests of the United States and its allies.

A sign of the current stage of transformation of the role of sports in the global political process has been the decline in the potential of sports diplomacy as an instrument for projecting soft power while simultaneously increasing the practice of using sports as a punitive instrument of power relations between states. From a global perspective, it can be noted that in the context of the «political war» that has been unfolding since the middle of the second decade of the 21st century, the IOC is becoming an increasingly weak player, as the West, led by the US, seeks to maintain its leadership on an exclusively monopolistic and permanent basis, while Russia and China support a consensus on the multipolarity of the world order.

The disproportionate economic resources between the IOC and the transnational capital sponsoring the Olympic movement exacerbates the

disproportion in their political resources, hindering the autonomy of the IOC and ensuring the dominance of neoliberal discourse in global sports. It is worth mentioning that woke-culture, built around race, gender, sexuality, and many other markers of identity, has played a role in transforming the role of sport into an instrument of political confrontation. The concept of justice, reduced to the «material and deviant», legitimized a political rethinking of the value-symbolic foundations of the Olympic movement, paving the way for the atomization of the international sports community, making it conflict-ridden and susceptible to external manipulation by Western beneficiaries.

The current problem can be formulated as follows: how did the use of the Olympic movement by Western countries through transnational capital and human resources transform sports from the soft power tool to the instrument of political confrontation in the global political process? This formulation of the problem and its solution allow us to understand the dynamics of the influence of modern international relations on sports and to identify the political logic of the processes in the Olympic movement.

**The object of the research:** sports in the global political process.

**The subject of the research:** mechanisms and means of transforming the role of sports, which ensured its transformation from an instrument of soft power into an instrument of political confrontation.

**The purpose of the research** is to show the role of global sports in the context of the formation of new world order architecture and to prove its transformation into an instrument of political confrontation.

To achieve the purpose of the research, the following **research problems** have been set:

- To analyze the prerequisites that determined the direction of the Olympic movement's policy drift, identify the main stages and reference points, and substantiate the reality of the Olympic movement's hidden shrinking to the role of an instrument of political confrontation;

- To explore the institutional potential of global sports in the context of inter-state interaction, to analyze its role in the China-US-Russia strategic triangle and in bilateral relations, and trace the evolution of approaches to the development of sports diplomacy by Western countries and new centers of power;
- To identify the reasons behind the decline in the potential of sports as an instrument of soft power;
- To examine the influence of the neoliberal mainstream on global sports, to justify the change in its ideological and value vector of development in the form of «layering» the Western mainstream discourse of social justice with an emphasis on social deviations, encouraging the «status game» in the form of the phenomenon of sports elitism and the individualization of sports within the concept of the «entrepreneur of oneself» as the most characteristic components of the shrinking of the Olympic movement;
- To justify the destructiveness of the consequences of the IOC's policy drift by studying changes in the social ontology of global sports and the peculiarities of the neoliberal content of the normative pole of the Olympic movement. To describe the trend towards the «victimization» of sports and the imposition of «cancel culture»;
- To investigate the instruments of US sharp power used in the information and ideological space of global sports;
- To describe possible means of depoliticising the Olympic movement by studying the prospects for the development of minilateralism mechanisms in global sports.

**The chronological framework** of the dissertation research formally covers the period from the end of the Cold War to the present, but the author goes beyond the specified chronological period to solve research problems.

**The methodological basis** of the dissertation is general scientific research methods: from the abstract to the concrete, analysis and synthesis, induction and deduction, the unity of the logical and the historical, the method of comparison,

systems analysis, description, etc. Historical-genetic, comparative, typological, and systemic methods play an important role in the dissertation research.

**The degree of development of a scientific problem, sources and information base.** The specificity of the formulated research object predetermines the significance of researches in the field of world economy and international relations, among which the studies of E.S. Alekseenkova, U.Z. Artamonova, A.D. Bogaturov, K.V. Bogdanov, A.S. Davydov, V.I. Zhuravleva, O.G. Karpovich, V.B. Kuvaldina, A.V. Lukin, D.S. Polulyakh, T. Romanova and others. Among foreign studies, the classic works of G. Kissinger, K. Krauch, J. Mearsheimer, J. Nye, S. Huntington, and E. Todd should be highlighted.

Researches devoted to the study of sharp power and its application in modern non-classical wars are of great importance for this dissertation research. In this regard, the studies of S.A. Dyatlov, O.G. Leonova, S. Mann, D.V. Nerenets, A.A. Smirnov, K.S. Strigunov, and A.V. Manoilo are particularly relevant.

An examination of the global political process from the perspective of post-positivism is demonstrated in the studies of researchers such as W. Beck, S. Žižek, W. Davis, L. Kanfora, E. Levinas, and H. Plakrouz. These authors demonstrate that modern Western society has turned into a totalitarian system, where disagreement with the ultra-left agenda leads to the suppression and destruction of individuals and societies. The works of such classics as G. Agamben, A. Badiou, J. Baudrillard, F. Berardi, I. Kant, F. Nietzsche, P. Sloterdijk and others have also played a role in this research.

Existing scientific studies on the role of sports in the global political process can be classified as follows: (1) studies devoted to the functioning of the Olympic movement and other global sports institutions (L. Allison and A. Tomlinson, M.K. Belyaev, A. Di Marco, A.S. Markov, R. Parrish, S. Friedman, and others); (2) studies devoted to the analysis of sports as soft power tool (K. Abdi, Y. An, A. Billings, M. Betin, P. Brannagan, J. Grix, E.G. Ponomareva, I.V. Hilvoord, P. Shuaydon, etc.); (3) studies describing contemporary crisis processes in global

sports (K.S. Bastrakov, D.E. Voinov, I. Waddington, O.V. Gaman-Golutvina, D. Grassi, M.V. Degtyarev, H. Lenski, M. Hardy, D. Handstead, etc.).

**Compliance of the research's content to the passport of scientific specialization** 5.5.2. Political institutions, processes, technologies:

- 8. Political institutions: formation, development, and contemporary transformations;
- 20. Mechanisms and technologies for managing political change;
- 26. Social and political conflicts: causes, factors, types, and technologies of regulation;
- 28. Political identity: essence, types, structure. Mechanisms of political identification of individuals and social groups.

**The scientific novelty of the research:**

- An analysis of the evolution of IOC policy from the collapse of the bipolar system to the present day through the prism of policy drift theory has been carried out. It has been established that the result of the IOC's drift policy has been the shrinking of global sports into the role of an instrument of political confrontation.

- The approaches of the participants in the China-US-Russia strategic triangle to the use of sports in foreign policy activities have been studied. It was found that at the present stage, the sports diplomacy of Beijing and Moscow is aimed at building and projecting soft power, while Washington seeks to organize the world of sports around the principles of a zero-sum game.

- The nuances characterizing the trend towards the decline of the instrumental potential of sport as a means of soft power have been identified.

- It has been established that as a result of the drift of the Olympic movement, the ideological and value vector of global sports development has shifted towards the neoliberal mainstream. The main components of the «neoliberalization» of sports have been studied. It has been concluded that the neoliberal content of the normative pole of the Olympic space has had a key



influence on the transformation of the role of sport from the soft power tool to the instrument of political confrontation.

- The destructive consequences of the political drift of the Olympic movement in the form of changes in its social ontology are proven. The phenomenon of neutral status is considered, and a trend toward the «victimization» of sports and the implementation of a policy of «cancellation» in relation to non-marginal groups of athletes and representatives of certain countries is identified and described.

- The tools of US sharp power are examined, and its technologies are classified based on the criteria of attack and defense used against geopolitical opponents in the information and ideological space of global sports.

- It has been established that the transformation of sports into an instrument of non-classical warfare has led to a crisis of multilateralism in global sports, the response to which is the development of minilateralism mechanisms in the form of international competitions held under the auspices of intergovernmental associations with a distinctly depoliticized character.

### **Provisions submitted for defence**

1. In the context of the transformation, reform, and adaptation of the social protection institutions of Western European social democratic welfare states to new socio-economic conditions, the advent of neoliberal globalization and the construction of Pax Americana, US expansionism spread to international institutions, ensuring the policy drift of the Olympic movement by preventing the «repair» of global sports institutions, their readjustment through micro-transformations, and the superimposition of new institutions from above. The hidden shrinking of the Olympic movement, which was the result of this drift, took place in three stages, corresponding to the forms and conditions of institutional change: 1) the conversion stage (late 1990s – early 2000s), caused by the aggressive period of Western democratization and modernization; 2) the drift stage (early 2000s – mid-2010s), which consolidated the course towards the shrinking of the Olympic movement in the context of intensifying global competition; 3) the

layering stage (mid-2010s – present), aimed at filling the normative and value pole of the Olympic space with Western identity studies built around race, gender, sex, sexuality, and many other markers of identity (8. Political Institutions: Formation, Development, and Contemporary Transformations, 28. Political Identity: Essence, Types, Structure. Mechanisms of Political Identification of Individuals and Social Groups).

2. The hidden shrinking of the Olympic movement as a result of drift has led to destructive processes in global sports. The change in the IOC's value-ideological paradigm under the influence of the neoliberal mainstream contributes to the atomization of the international sports community and the secondary rationalization of the pragmatic redistribution of power within the Olympic movement, hindering the formation of value-institutional alternatives. The phenomenon of sports elitism in the form of a «status game» replaces the concept of an «athlete» as a subject with UN-enshrined rights in the field of physical culture and sports, regardless of country of origin, with a multitude of amorphous groups defending their political rights on the one hand, and, on the other, holders of neutral status, whose rights are significantly curtailed and who are unable to politicize their position. The social orientation of sports is being replaced by its individualization within the concept of the «entrepreneur of oneself», which implies the athlete's renunciation of national identity in favor of economic enrichment. As a result of the neoliberal filling of the normative and value pole of the Olympic space with Western identity studies, the IOC is pursuing a policy of «victimization» and «cancellation» for political reasons, which ensures the chaos of global sports and the consolidation of double standards (28. Political Identity: essence, types, structure. Mechanisms of political identification of individuals and social groups, 20. Mechanisms and technologies for managing political change).

3. The imposition of global geopolitical relations on the modern world of sports has placed the Olympic movement into a new context, seriously reducing its autonomy and filling the vacuum of political power with neoliberal attitudes. There is a clear trend toward the unconditional and unquestionable commitment of the



US and Western countries to reformatting the modern world of sports, which implies both the preservation of the rudiments of unipolarity in the form of inscribing the Olympic movement into the logic of a «rules-based order» and the formation of elements of bipolarity in the form of artificial barriers for geopolitical opponents. This, in turn, reinforces the trend towards rapprochement between Russia and China in the field of sports diplomacy and lays the foundation for fundamentally new mechanisms of inter-state cooperation in sports. At the same time, the potential of sports diplomacy is becoming relevant in the bilateral context as part of the beginning of the negotiation process between Russia and the US in 2025. A possible restart of Russian-American relations could stimulate the lifting of sports sanctions against Russia, but their ideological focus gives Washington the opportunity to play the «Olympic card» as part of a comprehensive review of Russian-American relations (20. Mechanisms and technologies for managing political change, 26. Social and Political Conflicts: Causes, Factors, Types, and Regulation Technologies).

4. Currently, there is a trend toward the decline of the instrumental potential of sport as a means of soft power. In the context of the reconfiguration of global centers of political and economic power, the hosting of a number of international sporting events by non-Western countries has not only contributed to the strengthening of their national pride and identity, but has also become a characteristic marker of the redistribution of power on the world stage. In turn, the decline in the appeal of the liberal international order has contributed to the formation of a kind of watershed between supporters of international law and the «rules-based order», expressed in the discrediting of those with «undeserved» appeal, the politicization of Olympic values, the policy of disintegrating the international sports community, and the involvement of the Olympic movement as an active participant in hybrid warfare. The Rodchenkov Act, adopted in parallel, effectively enshrined the right of the United States to impose unilateral sanctions and prosecute any person who violated anti-doping rules during competitions involving American athletes or sponsors, finally creating the conditions for the

targeted exclusion of the West's geopolitical opponents from the Olympic community with the aim of completely isolating them (20. Mechanisms and technologies for managing political change, 26. Social and Political Conflicts: Causes, Factors, Types, and Regulation Technologies).

5. The transformation of sports from the soft power tool to the instrument of political confrontation is due to the US implementation of the concept of «controlled chaos» within the Olympic movement through the use of sharp power instruments, aimed at establishing total control over international sports institutions through the atomization and desolidarization of the international sports community, the creation of narratives of conflict, and the transformation of global sports into a space for a «zero-sum game». The US's tactics for waging information and ideological warfare involve the use of three groups of sharp power technologies. First, by creating and spreading narratives about an existential challenge to the integrity and sustainability of global sports from Russia and China, the West is imposing on the Olympic movement and the countries of the global majority Western-centric view of the world. Secondly, internal problems in American sports are masked by policies of «countering disinformation» and «reputational security», which serve to shield the global sporting audience from the informational influence of ideological opponents. Third, the use of a separate group of sharp power technologies, combining offensive and defensive characteristics, is aimed not only at discrediting Russian and Chinese sports and limiting their access to international formats, but also at consolidating a narrow range of discourse that excludes critical consideration of certain political positions. Destabilizing blows are dealt both to the geopolitical opponents of the United States and to the Olympic movement itself in cases where it attempts to go «beyond the limits of what is permissible», have predictable cascading effects, are aimed at securitizing Western-centric discourse and institutionalizing the results achieved in the form of excluding countries from international sports competitions and retrospectively revising previously achieved results (20. Mechanisms and

technologies for managing political change, 26. Social and political conflicts: causes, factors, types, and technologies of regulation).

6. The crisis of multilateralism in global sports, caused by the chaos in the Olympic space and the use of sporting sanctions as a means of waging non-classical warfare, is forcing Russia to develop and promote new formats for international sporting cooperation, particularly within the BRICS framework. This policy has limited support from China, which at the same time does not seek confrontation with the Olympic movement, understanding the IOC's interest in the Chinese market and its own ability to project discursive power through global sports institutions. There is a great potential for the development of alternative CAS international sports arbitration bodies, operating on the basis of universally recognized principles and norms and acting as elements of a unified system for the resolution of international sports disputes, based on integration associations, as well as the advanced development of national legislation in terms of ensuring the protection of athletes' rights (8. Political Institutions: Formation, Development, and Modern Transformations, 26. Social and Political Conflicts: Causes, Factors, Types, and Regulation Technologies).

**The theoretical significance of the dissertation research** lies in the fact that it presents original conceptual approaches to considering the role of sports in the global political process. Of particular importance is the identification and systematization of the patterns that have led to the decline of sport's potential as a means of soft power and its transformation into an instrument of political confrontation. The study of the policy drift of the Olympic movement has independent scientific and practical significance, as it allows for the prediction of the IOC's future policy. The conclusions formulated by the author can be used in the process of scientific understanding of the causal relationships between the «integration» of the Olympic movement into the neoliberal paradigm and the growing crisis in global sports, the instrumental potential of sports as a means of soft power and sports diplomacy as its applied direction, on the one hand, and as an instrument of political confrontation, on the other.

**The practical significance of the dissertation research** lies in the objective analysis of the role of sports in the global political process, which can be used to solve the problem of identifying the most effective mechanisms and formats for the gradual overcoming of the crisis in global sports and its return to the universal principles of neutrality, respect and observance of human rights and the development of Russia's future policy on participation in the Olympic movement and global sports in general.

#### **Approbation of research results**

The results of the dissertation research were approved at the following Russian and international **conferences**:

- XIV RISA Convention (MGIMO University). Moscow, 2022
- IX Annual International Scientific Conference of Young Scientists «Current issues of world politics» (The Diplomatic Academy of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs). Moscow, 2022
- XV RISA Convention (MGIMO University). Moscow, 2023
- XI Annual International Scientific Conference of Young Scientists «Current issues of world politics» (The Diplomatic Academy of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs). Moscow, 2024

#### **List of the author's publications:**

Articles in publications included in the List of Publications Recommended by the Higher Attestation Commission of Russia for the Publication of the Main Scientific Results of Dissertations for the Degree of Candidate (Doctor) of Science:

1. Bairamov T.A. Double standards in the international Olympic movement: the problem of the dependence on extremist ideology / T.A. Bairamov // Theories and Problems of Political Studies. - 2023. – Vol. 12, N 5A-6A. - P. 63-71. - DOI: 10.34670/AR.2023.34.77.011.
2. Bairamov T.A. Sport diplomacy: issues and challenges / A.A. Slinko, T.A. Bairamov // IR scientists' herald. – 2023. – Vol. 24, N 2. – P. 210-225.
3. Bairamov T.A. Politicization of Sports in the Transforming World Order: The Role of Critical Theories / A.A. Slinko, T.A. Bairamov // Theories and

Problems of Political Studies. - 2023. – Vol. 12, N 1A. – P. 81-87. - DOI: 10.34670/AR.2023.82.23.010.

4. Bairamov T.A. Global sports in contemporary political processes: factors and prospects / T.A. Bairamov // Proceedings of Voronezh State University. Series: History. Political science. Sociology. – 2025. - N 3. (accepted for publication).

Other author's publications:

5. Bairamov T.A. BRICS Games as a new mechanism of minilateralism in global sports / T.A. Bairamov // Current issues of world politics. XI Annual International Scientific Conference of Young Scientists, December 4, 2024 (collection of articles) / ed. by O.A. Timakova; The Diplomatic Academy of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. – Moscow, 2025. – P. 44-54.

6. Bairamov T.A. Changing the main vector of the International Olympic Committee's value policy: evolution or degradation? / T.A. Bairamov // Postgraduate Notebooks: Collection of Scientific Articles of the Scientific and Methodological Seminar of Young Scientists, Voronezh, December 18, 2023. – Voronezh: Federal State Budgetary Educational Institution of Higher Education «The Russian Presidential Academy of National Economy and Public Administration», 2024. – P. 14-19.

7. Bairamov T.A. Sports diplomacy as a tool of soft power in sports / T.A. Bairamov // Current issues in professional education: goals, objectives, and prospects for development: Proceedings of the 20th anniversary All-Russian scientific and practical conference with international participation, Voronezh, April 22, 2022 / Editorial board: E.S. Podvalny [et al.]. – Voronezh: Publishing and Printing Center «Scientific Book», 2022. – P. 156-160.

8. Bairamov T.A. Sport as a complete instrument of international relations / T.A. Bairamov, A.A. Slinko // State and Society in Contemporary Politics: Collection of Scientific Articles from the 9th International Scientific and Practical Conference, Voronezh, December 4, 2021. Vol. 9. – Voronezh: Publishing and Printing Center «Scientific Book», 2022. – P. 12-17.



9. Bairamov T.A. The creation of the World Anti-Doping Agency as a part of a Western global project / T.A. Bairamov, I.V. Kasymov // State and society in modern politics: Collection of scientific articles based on materials from the 8th International Scientific and Practical Conference, Voronezh, December 4, 2020. Vol. Issue 8. – Voronezh: Publishing and Printing Center «Scientific Book», 2021. – P. 41-52.

10. Bairamov T.A. The Olympic spirit in the face of global threats / I.V. Kasymov, T.A. Bairamov // Megatrends in world politics: Collection of scientific articles based on materials from the 7th interuniversity scientific and practical conference of young scientists. Voronezh, 2020. - P. 73-78.

**The structure and content of the dissertation** are determined by the range of issues under study and correspond to the stated goals, objectives, object, and subject of the research. The dissertation consists of an introduction, three chapters, a conclusion, and a list of sources and literature used.

The text of the dissertation research is 224 pages long, and the total volume of the research is 302 pages.