

## Football sanctions are required, but not on Iran

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The [FT reported](#) this morning that:

*A top envoy to President Donald Trump has asked Fifa to replace Iran with Italy in the upcoming World Cup, setting up high-stakes US sports diplomacy involving a spurned ally and a sworn enemy.*

*US special envoy Paolo Zampolli suggested the swap to Fifa president Gianni Infantino and Trump, as leader of the country co-hosting the tournament. He argued that Italy's four World Cup titles justify awarding it the slot, according to people familiar with the matter.*

There is only one country that is, at present, barred from participation in the FIFA football World Cup, and that is Russia. The ban was imposed because of its illegal invasion of Ukraine in 2022, and it is still in force, and rightly so. A country that wages an illegal war should not be allowed to participate in international sport.

Nor should any country that organises or supports institutional racism be permitted to take part. For this reason, sanctions were imposed on South Africa for almost three decades as a consequence of its apartheid system, and again, entirely appropriately so.

There are now two leading states in the world that should face bans for this reason. They are the USA and Israel. Embarrassingly, the USA is hosting the event. Israel has not qualified since 1970. The USA is pursuing an illegal war. Israel is pursuing apartheid, genocide and illegal war.

But, utterly bizarrely, instead of the US being banned and the event being cancelled, we are seeing a call for Iran, the abused country in this current war, to be banned. That is wholly inappropriate.

Will it happen? Who can tell in the corrupt world that FIFA has long inhabited, and which saw it present Trump with a bizarre award not long ago. The possibility that it might is real. This call could all be part of a coordinated stage management process.

If that happens, the required response is obvious. I would have to boycott the World Cup. That would be annoying. I enjoy football. But if FIFA punishes the victim of an illegal war, then its credibility will have disappeared for good. That does not mean I think Iran is a virtuous nation. It is not. But perspective is required here. And this call is profoundly inappropriate when the sanctions required are on the aggressors in this war.