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## Militarization of Physical Culture and Sport in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea

### Introduction

In any part of the world, physical culture and sports include a political component as well as certain militaristic connotations. In some countries, physical culture and sports play a role in physically developing strong citizens with the capacity to defend their homeland. In undemocratic political regimes, the government monopolizes the sports industry at all levels – from mass, amateur, club, trade union – to the professional level of the Olympics. In these regimes, state policy in the field of physical culture and sports is determined, implemented and controlled by the party's top political leadership and personally by the country's leader. For instance, in the USSR the standard "GTO" ("Gotov k trudu i oboronie" – "Ready for work and defense") was introduced to prepare the youth for the so-called peaceful construction of communism and the defense of the socialist motherland. For this purpose, other mass defense and sports organizations were enacted, namely, the Society for the Promotion of Defense, Aviation and Chemical Construction (OSOAVIAKHIM), and later – the Voluntary Society for the Promotion of the Army, Aviation and Navy (DTSAAF). Physical culture and sports are considered by the Russian Federation authority as an important element of national security, evidenced by President Putin's restoration of the All-Russian physical culture and sports GTO complex<sup>1</sup> and Studzachet<sup>2</sup> standards. A fully politicized physical education and sport is also promoted in the

<sup>1</sup> Decree of the President of the Russian Federation as of March 24, 2014 № 172 "On the All-Russian physical culture and sports complex "Ready for work and defense" (RWD), <https://rg.ru/2014/03/26/gto-dok.html>, [accessed: 3.06.2021].

<sup>2</sup> Regulations on the implementation of the All-Russian youth project to promote and involve students in the preparation and implementation of test standards (tests) of the RWD complex "From Studzachet to the RWD badge of distinction", Moscow, 2018, <https://www.tspu.edu.ru/files/sportclub/18-19/sportclub/Polozenie.pdf>, [accessed: 3.06.2021].

Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK). These examples demonstrate the subordination of physical culture and sports to military-political goals, i.e. the militarization of sports as one of the aspects of politicization.

### **Analysis of the research and publications**

Publications concerning sports facilities<sup>3</sup> and certain sports<sup>4</sup> provide a picture of the militarization of sports in a given context. North Korean official sources form an example of classical propaganda, i.e. the glorification of the ideas and work of the Kim family, "the labor feat of the people". Therefore, this study mainly uses original publications by Ukrainian and Russian authors, which paid at least brief attention to the development of physical culture and sports and which contain less propaganda. The DPRK actively cooperates with the Russian Federation, so Korean studies are a separate area of research<sup>5</sup>.

The reports of experts<sup>6</sup> and tourists<sup>7,8</sup> about their stay in the "hermit kingdom" (as the Western press often calls the DPRK) and their visit to the Gymnastics and Artistic show "*Arirang*" at the Rungrado May Day Stadium turned out to be informative. North Korean sports expert Merkel, who has repeatedly visited the country's sports facilities, says that despite the high level of poverty, leading athletes train in modern gyms<sup>9</sup>. BBC correspondents analyzed the attempts of the North Korean authorities to disrupt major international sporting events in South Korea. The title of

<sup>3</sup> *North Korea is a country of people's happiness. Arirang*, <https://www.korea-foto.ru/arirang.htm>, [accessed: 20.03.2021]; *May Day Stadium*, <http://football-stadiums.ru/asia-oceania/north-korea/rungrado-may-day-stadium/>, [accessed: 20.03.2021]; *May Day Stadium: the world's largest stadium*, <https://pagetravel.ru/stadion-pervogo-maya-samyj-bolshoj-v-mire-stadion/>, [accessed: 20.03.2021].

<sup>4</sup> *Behind the Iron Curtain (football in the DPRK) – UA-Football*, <https://www.ua-football.com/userblogs/post/8c20d3dfd5ba7cd98b7a827c88542272#>, [accessed: 18.03.2021]; I. Pavelko, *The Tale of the «World Champions»: Football in the DPRK*, [https://www.euro-football.ru/article/49/1003141349\\_skaz\\_o\\_championah\\_mira](https://www.euro-football.ru/article/49/1003141349_skaz_o_championah_mira), [accessed: 18.03.2021].

<sup>5</sup> A. Lankov, *North Korea: Yesterday and Today*, [https://thelib.ru/books/lankov\\_andrey/\\_severnaya\\_koreya\\_vchera\\_i\\_segodnya.html](https://thelib.ru/books/lankov_andrey/_severnaya_koreya_vchera_i_segodnya.html), [accessed: 20.03.2021].

<sup>6</sup> J. Ryall, *Tourism in the DPRK: pros and cons of a trip to a dictatorial country*, "Deutsche Welle", 1.07.2019, <https://www.dw.com/uk/%D1%82%D1%83%D1%80%D0%B8%D0%BB%D0%BC->, [accessed: 1.06.2021].

<sup>7</sup> *North Korea: how a country that threatens America lives*, <https://antonivtours.com/2017/11/pivnichna-koreya-yak-zhive-kra%D1%97na-yaka-pogrozhuje-americ/>, [accessed: 6.03.2021].

<sup>8</sup> A. Andriev, *Blogs. Exclusive report from a trip to closed North Korea!*, <https://lowcost.ua/north-korea/>, [accessed: 6.03.2021].

<sup>9</sup> U. Merkel, *The Politics of Sport and Identity in North Korea*, "International Journal of the History of Sport" 2014, vol. 31 (3), pp. 376–390, [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/271857166\\_The\\_Politics\\_of\\_Sport\\_and\\_Identity\\_in\\_North\\_Korea](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/271857166_The_Politics_of_Sport_and_Identity_in_North_Korea), [accessed: 6.03.2021].

these materials is to the point – “*The plane crash and the Olympics in Seoul*” (1988) and “*Battle at Sea and the 2002 World Cup*”<sup>10</sup>.

Evidence on North Korea is incomplete, often contradictory and even deliberately falsified, and sources of information are unreliable. Morillot and Baek believe that the testimony of defectors should therefore be treated with caution; “There is such a high demand for knowledge from North Korea<sup>11</sup>. It almost incentivizes people to tell exaggerated tales to the media, especially if that comes with nice pay cheque. A lot of defectors who do not want to be in the media are very critical of ‘career defectors’”<sup>12</sup>. Based on such fragmentary data, we tried to critically explore the peculiarities of the militarization process of physical culture and sports in the DPRK.

## Purpose and research methods

The purpose of the article is to examine the peculiarities of the politicization of physical culture and sports, namely their militarization, by the DPRK authorities in domestic and foreign policy and international relations. The author used the following research methods: structural and functional analysis (to study the work of governing bodies of physical culture and sports in the DPRK), content analysis (to analyze speeches of the leader, the decisions of the country’s authorities on the development of physical culture and sports), event analysis (to study sports competitions, celebrating national holidays in the country), comparative analysis (to compare features of the militarization of sports in non-democratic countries), and psychological analysis (to research friendship and behavior of the leader with famous athletes).

## Militarization of physical culture and sports in the DPRK domestic policy

The DPRK government creates an atmosphere of tension in the region and destabilizes international relations in general. North Korea’s numerous armed forces, space and nuclear programs, the constant testing of ballistic missiles, and disregard for international law have led to the imposition of sanctions by the international community (UN Security Council resolutions implemented: October 2006; June 2009; January, March 2013; March, November 2016; August, September, December 2017). According to the deputy of the Russian Federation State Duma, the well-known chess player Karpov, “North Korea is like little Sparta. This is Sparta, surrounded by huge Rome”<sup>13</sup>. Within the Korean People’s Army and guaranteeing the national security of the DPRK, great importance is attached to the development of physical

<sup>10</sup> North Korea vs. South Korea: Bombs, Sports and Diplomacy, <https://www.bbc.com/russian/features-42621787>, [accessed: 22.04.2021].

<sup>11</sup> M. Mohan, *Rape and no periods in North Korea’s army*, BBC World Service, 21.11.2017.

<sup>12</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>13</sup> A. Karpov, *9th Congress of Socialist Youth of the DPRK and a duck about the shooting of ministers with anti-aircraft guns*, <https://grigoriy-karpov.livejournal.com/16107.html>, [accessed: 22.04.2021].

culture and sports, with policy in this area is monopolized by the state. This form of power is embodied in the domestic and foreign policy arenas. Some features of this process, led by "Supreme Leader of the Party, State and Armed Forces Comrade Kim Jong-un" are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1. Features of the militarization of physical culture and sports in the DPRK domestic policy**

Features	Everyday practice
Subordination of the bodies of physical culture and sports to the military and party leadership of the country	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– the first person of the state "patronizes" the physical culture and sports development and everyday life of athletes;</li> <li>– officials combine party, political and sports positions;</li> <li>– the Ministry of Physical Culture and Sports, the State Commission for Physical Culture and Sports Management function in the country;</li> <li>– the state authority aims to transform the DPRK into a world sports power;</li> <li>– the North Korean style of training is created in certain sports;</li> <li>– requirements to the appearance of athletes are developed</li> </ul>
The use of stadiums by the authorities as places for public executions	<p>the convicted of political crimes are executed in front of a large number of spectators</p>
Forced imposition of "sports atmosphere"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– mandatory daily collective morning exercise and ten thousand steps, attending sports events;</li> <li>– training of the country's residents in contact sports – boxing, taekwondo and shooting;</li> <li>– initiation and organization of Korean People's Army (KPA) sports competitions</li> </ul>
Militarization of the content of sports competitions	<p>military themes are obligatory, for example, the staging of dance performances to the musical accompaniment of military-patriotic songs</p>
Physical education and sports as an element of the system of preparation of the population for service in the KPA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– adherence to the ideology of <i>Juche</i> and <i>Songun</i>: physical education and sports means the defense of the Motherland;</li> <li>– compulsory military service for the entire population of the country for a period of 7 to 12 years;</li> <li>– activities of numerous defense sports associations;</li> <li>– existence of a network of specialized children's sports boarding schools</li> </ul>
The Arirang festival and other mass sports events as an element of preparing young people for service in the KPA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– annual holding of national mass games-artistic and gymnastics performance "<i>Arirang</i>" at the May Day Stadium;</li> <li>– organization of cultural and sports events on the occasion of national and state holidays, anniversaries</li> </ul>
Various sports clubs are "attached" to the law enforcement ministries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– funding and support of sports clubs by the KPA, the Ministry of National Security;</li> <li>– militarization of the sports clubs titles;</li> <li>– providing servicemen with a day off to attend football matches at stadiums</li> </ul>

Source: the author.

The detailed evidence of the features of the domestic and foreign policy arenas of DPRK in Table 1 are outlined below:

1. Subordination of the bodies of physical culture and sports to the military and party leadership of the country.

“Dear Respected Leader Comrade” Kim Jong-un, who simultaneously holds the positions of Chairman of the Workers’ Party of Korea (WPK), Chairman of the State Council, Supreme Commander-in-Chief of the DPRK Armed Forces, considers sport a part of his policy aimed at further development of the DPRK and stresses the big role of sport in public life. To this end, the Ministry of Physical Culture and Sports operates in the country.

The proof of the politicization, and hence militarization, of sport in this country is the fact that in the early 1990s the famous North Korean statesman and military leader Choe Ryong-hae headed several sports organizations in the country, namely, in 1990 – the football federation, since 1991 – the taekwondo federation. In 1998, he left these positions and moved to party and political work. He was later elected a member of the State Defense Committee, deputy chairman of the Central Military Council, was introduced to the Politburo of the Central Committee of the WPK, and he also headed the Main Political Department of the KPA. In 2013, some media outlets called Choe Ryong-hae the second person in North Korean politics after Kim Jong-un. The Minister of Physical Culture and Sports is also the chairman of the National Olympic Committee of the country.

In November 2012, at an extended meeting of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the WPK, the establishment of the State Commission for the Management of Physical Culture and Sports was approved. The task of the Commission was to turn physical culture and sports into a mass movement, to make physical education a part of everyday life and to bring the development of sports science in the DPRK to the world level. Departments of the Commission were established in all military institutions of the country<sup>14</sup>. In 2012–2013, the State Commission was headed by the Vice Chairman of the State Committee for Defense Jang Song-thaek, Kim Jong-un’s uncle; later – by Choe Ryong-hae, since 2018 – by Vice Chairman of the Central Committee of the WPK Choe Hwi. Thus, physical culture and sports are kept closely controlled by state powers.

According to Kim Jong-un, the transformation of the DPRK into a sports state will strengthen national power and demonstrate unbridled spiritual strength. The party and political leadership set the task for athletes to win gold medals at international competitions and “to justify the trust of such great people as Kim Jong-il and Kim Jong-un”. “Dear Respected Leader Comrade” Kim Jong-un emphasizes the importance of creating a Korean style of training in certain sports, such as figure skating, to “demonstrate the advantages of Songung Korea in the international

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<sup>14</sup> *Kim Jong-un speaks out for the transformation of the DPRK into a sports power*, <https://telegraf.com.ua/mir/aziya/200966-kim-chen-yin-vyiskazalsya-za-prevrashhenie-kndr-v-sportivnuyu-derzhavu.html>, [accessed: 18.04.2021].

arena”<sup>15</sup>. A red flag and portraits of Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il are required on each athlete’s chest. According to the 2012 Olympic weightlifting champion Om Yun-chol, who was awarded a new comfortable apartment by the country’s leadership for his high sporting achievements, “athletes were able to glorify the DPRK by winning gold medals at international competitions thanks to Kim Jong-un’s deep love and care. He led them instilling strength and courage”<sup>16</sup>. This positive description of the leaders ‘deep love and care’ comes from a political environment where residents cannot critique the state, especially if they have personally benefited in the form of apartments.

2. The use of stadiums by the authorities as places for public executions is done to threaten the residents of the state. Lankov, a specialist in Korea, claims in his book *“North Korea: Yesterday and Today”* that until the 1970s, public shootings in the presence of a large number of spectators were a common sight in Pyongyang’s stadiums. During these events, the convicted person was tied to a pole in the center of the sports arena and shot in front of a crowd after the verdict was read. The presence of the convict’s colleagues among the spectators was a mandatory requirement. Sometimes university students and even high school students were brought in for educational purposes – in 1984 a whole class was brought to one of the executions<sup>17</sup>. In the late 1990s, North Korean army generals accused of assassinating Kim Jong-il were burned at the May Day Stadium<sup>18</sup>. At present, public executions are carried out only in the provinces. Thus, in November 2013, at one of the stadiums, the authorities forced the locals to be present at the shooting watched by ten thousand people, including children<sup>19</sup>. The executed individuals were found guilty of watching South Korean TV shows and TV series and of so-called ‘immoral behavior’, including distributing pornography and gambling. According to representatives of the South Korean NGO *“Transitional Justice Working Group”*, executions often take place on river banks, near fields, markets, schools and stadiums<sup>20</sup>.

3. As a further means of control, the DPRK mandates physical education and sports for the population, aiming for what Grand Marshal Kim Jong-un terms a “sporting atmosphere”<sup>21</sup>. For North Koreans, sport is the third most mandatory

<sup>15</sup> Kim Jong-un gave North Korean skaters “the best skates”, <https://focus.ua/ukraine/216076>, [accessed: 18.04.2021].

<sup>16</sup> In the DPRK the champions were presented with apartments, <https://dni.ru/sport/2013/10/5/261218.html>, [accessed: 18.04.2021].

<sup>17</sup> A. Lankov, *North Korea: Yesterday...*, op. cit.

<sup>18</sup> May Day Stadium, op. cit.

<sup>19</sup> In North Korea, 80 people were executed for watching South Korean programs, <https://ua.korrespondent.net/world/3206183-u-pivnichnii-korei-stratly-80-osib-za-perehliad-pivdennokoreiskykh-prohram>, [accessed: 8.05.2021].

<sup>20</sup> Hundreds of landfills for public executions have been discovered in North Korea, [https://dt.ua/WORLD/u-pivnichniy-koreyi-viyavili-sotni-poligoniv-dlya-publichnih-strat-314234\\_.html](https://dt.ua/WORLD/u-pivnichniy-koreyi-viyavili-sotni-poligoniv-dlya-publichnih-strat-314234_.html), [accessed: 8.05.2021].

<sup>21</sup> D.A. Pinkston, *Sports and Ideology in North Korea*, “Asia Society”, <https://asiasociety.org/korea/sports-and-ideology-north-korea>, [accessed: 20.11.2021].

activity, after honoring the Kim family and community service. Residents are obliged to do a daily group morning exercise and attend sporting events, as well as to have a daily walk of ten thousand steps. Due to the lack of private cars and public transport units, the population commutes to work by foot or by bicycle.

In the 1980s, the authorities also launched a campaign to train the country's residents in contact sports – boxing, taekwondo and shooting. Competitions organized by KPA are constantly held. According to North Korean expert Madden, when the country's population is covered by any general physical activity organized by the authorities, the regime may not worry<sup>22</sup>.

4. Militarization of the content of sports competitions, military themes are always present in the performances of athletes. Thus, during the demonstration performances at the Pyongyang Ice Palace in singles and doubles, the skaters performed to the accompaniment of well-known songs in North Korea – “Thunderstorm over Jong-il Peak”, “General’s Thoughts”, “The Country We Defend”, “Glory to Our Great Party”<sup>23</sup>. Thus, the militarization of sports helps incite trust in the strength of the army, the omnipresence of the country’s leadership in the minds of the population.

5. As a further element of militarization, physical culture and sports form a key element of the system of training the population for service in the armed forces of North Korea: the main principles of the state ideology of the DPRK are outlined in the concepts of “Juche”, which means reliance on personal strength and willingness to endure hardships, as well as “Songun”, i.e. a military-oriented policy, “everything for the army”. According to the Juche doctrine, there is no separation between the nation and the army, there is a single armed nation. The Korean People’s Army is one of the largest regular armies in the world (4<sup>th</sup> place); numbering 1.19 million people, with another four million are in reserve, and a total of 10 million eligible for military service. The population of the DPRK is 24.7 million people, that is 4–5% of the population serve in the KPA which can be considered a world record<sup>24</sup>.

Authorities have turned the country into a huge military camp ready to counter the attack from South Korea or the United States. The government claims that 15% of the country’s budget (2017) is spent on the army, but counselling centers estimate that the real figure is 40%. The entire population is required to serve in the military for a period of seven years – for women (conscription age is 17) to twelve years – for men (18 years, respectively). This is the longest term of compulsory military service in all countries of the world<sup>25</sup>. Women have been volunteering for the army for a long time, until 2003 they served for ten years. Many sources have reported that since 2015 all women under the age of 23 have been required to serve in the

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<sup>22</sup> M. Madden, *North Korean athlete selfie: What happens next?*, “BBC News”, 10.08.2016, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-37030696>, [accessed: 5.05.2021].

<sup>23</sup> Kim Jong-un gave North Korean skaters..., op. cit.

<sup>24</sup> The DPRK Armed Forces: History, Structure and Weapons, <https://militaryarms.ru/armii-mira/vvooruzhennye-sily-kndr/>, [accessed: 22.04.2021].

<sup>25</sup> M. Mohan, *Rape and no periods...*, op. cit.

military<sup>26</sup>. Exhausting training, lack of conditions for normal hygiene and reduced diet have a negative impact on the health of women servicemen<sup>27</sup>.

To prepare the population for service in the armed forces there are various defense sports associations – like departmental sports associations in the former USSR. *Pyongyang Sports Association* (established in 1956, awarded the “Honored Sports Association”) has trained many famous athletes – winners of national and international competitions.

There are also sports societies of the KPA defense sports – *the Amnokgang Defense Society* (shooting)<sup>28</sup> and the *April 25 Sports Club*. In addition, there are national teams of servicemen in various sports. Evidence of the importance of *Amnokgang*'s activities for the country's defense potential is the fact that since its founding in 1947, it has been twice awarded the Red Banner of the Three Great Revolutions. In the DPRK, children with relevant physical abilities are forcibly and without parental consent sent to special sports boarding schools. Gifted students in sports are exempt from service in the armed forces. Thus, in the DPRK, the militarization of sports takes place under the sauce of patriotic fever and personal devotion of athletes to the leader. The presence of a significant number of sports events is a critical element of the system of training young people to serve in the armed forces of the DPRK.

6. The arrangement of the “*Arirang*” festival and numerous sports events as elements of preparation of the youth for service in the KPA: annually at the world's largest May Day Stadium national mass games, i.e. a gymnastics and artistic performance “*Arirang*” is held. The games were first shown in 2002 on the occasion of the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of the “Great Leader” Kim Il-sung and the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of founding the KPA. This performance, awarded with the Kim Il-sung Prize, takes place on September 9 – marking the founding of the DPRK. The plot of the show contains national militaristic motives as it describes the love story of a young man Riran and his girlfriend, who were separated because he went to war against Japan<sup>29</sup>. His image symbolizes North Korea's struggle for self-determination. *Arirang* consists of four pictures, a prologue, an epilogue and thirteen acts. The story describes the last hundred years of North Korean life, about the ascent of the North Korean star in 1912 – the birth of the “Great Comrade Leader” (this is the official title) of Kim Il-sung. One hundred thousand actors take part in the show: 20 thousand of them are involved in the back panel, and 80 thousand in a performance on stage. Among the actors, there are winners of international and national awards, students, schoolchildren and pupils of kindergartens. The program includes acrobatic and

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<sup>26</sup> North Korean Army: numbers and armaments, <https://uk.stuklopechat.com/novosti-i-obschestvo/74252-armiya-severnoy-korei-chislennost-i-vozrashchenie.html>, [accessed: 22.04.2021].

<sup>27</sup> M. Mohan, *Rape and no periods...*, op. cit.

<sup>28</sup> The 10 best athletes and coaches of the DPRK in 2019 have been named, <https://hansanglab.com/2020/01/13/nazvanye-10-luchshih-sportsmenov-i-trenerov-knrd-2019-goda/>, [accessed: 22.04.2021].

<sup>29</sup> May Day Stadium: the world's largest stadium, op. cit.

gymnastic performances, dances, as well as “live mosaic” and “live screen”, located on one of the stands composed of colorful plates which are synchronously changed by the actors. The panel depicts various subjects – from scenes on the work of sectors of the economy to ideological scenes that glorify the country’s leaders and symbolize the unity of the “two Koreas”. In 2007, the performance at the stadium in honor of the prosperity of North Korea and the glorification of *Juche* ideas was fixed in the Guinness Book of Records as the world’s largest theatrical performance<sup>30</sup>.

In the DPRK, there is a steady trend to increase the number of domestic and international sports competitions dedicated to the celebration of national holidays, commemorations and anniversaries. Thus, military parades, mass cultural and sporting events are held annually on the occasion of the largest national holiday – *the Day of the Sun*. This is the birthday of the country’s founder Kim Il-sung which is celebrated annually on April 12<sup>th</sup>. Another national loudly celebrated holiday is the anniversary of Kim Jong-un’s appointment to the highest state position, and a marathon is held on this day.

7. North Korean sports clubs are “attached” to law enforcement ministries, and the DPRK uses the Soviet model of financing and supporting sports clubs. The most titled is the national football club team “April 25” (Nampho, 1949); the club of the Korean People’s Army (similar to CSKA – in the USSR) which can “conscript” any North Korean player. The name of the club contains signs of militarization because it dates from the founding date of the Anti-Japanese People’s Guerrilla Army – April 25, 1932. The FC “Amnokgang” (Pyongyang, 1947) is the main rival of the “Army”. It belongs to the Ministry of National Security and is named after the river that flows between the DPRK and China. At one time, the Pyongyang Club was subordinated to the Pyongyang Sports Society (1956)<sup>31</sup>. The DPRK law enforcement agencies, therefore, pay considerable attention to football. There are always a lot of soldiers in the stands of stadiums because they are given a day off to attend football matches<sup>32</sup>. There are strict requirements to the form and symbolism of teams, the appearance of players, and the behavior of fans, thus lending a performative aspect to these events.

The militarization of sports in North Korea has reached its extreme manifestation; it covers the whole society: government officials, government agencies and labor collectives, athletes and spectators. The militarization of sport in the domestic policies of the DPRK is closely related to the following factors.

- State ideology and the cult of the Kim family. Various sports festivals and shows at the country’s stadiums created favorable conditions for “communication” (i.e. control) of the DPRK leader with a significant number of young people – children, schoolchildren, students who participate in them. During the artistic

<sup>30</sup> Largest Gymnastic Display. Guinness World Records, <https://www.guinnessworldrecords.com/world-records/largest-gymnastic-display>, [accessed: 2.06.2021].

<sup>31</sup> *Behind the Iron Curtain..., op. cit.*

<sup>32</sup> I. Pavelko, *The Tale of the «World Champions»..., op. cit.*

and gymnastic performance “*Arirang*” thousands of children perform costumed mass musical and acrobatic dances with complex choreography. There was also a significant militarization of the content of national sports competitions.

- Creation of modern sports halls, training centers for athletes who take part in international competitions such as the Olympic Games. The chosen athletes are equipped with the latest technology, despite the mass poverty of the DPRK population.
- Demonstration of patriotism, the solidarity of workers and military power by the citizens. Authorities have imposed daily physical activities on the population and closely monitor these activities.

Table 2 shows the most essential features of how physical culture and sports influence the DPRK international relations.

**Table 2. Features of the militarization of physical culture and sports in the DPRK foreign policy**

Features	Everyday practice
Control over the departure and stay of athletes abroad by state security officers	The behavior of athletes is under total control during their travels and performances, in everyday life, in the circle of their communication; athletes are banned to give interviews to foreign journalists
Militarization of sports as a factor of destabilization of the socio-political situation in the Republic of Korea on the eve and during sports events on its territory	Committing terrorist acts in the run-up to the <i>1988 Seoul Olympics</i> and military provocations during the <i>2002 FIFA World Cup</i>
Militarization of sports as a way to strengthen the status and prestige of the country in the international arena	Militarization of sports as a confirmation of the “strong” foreign policy of the DPRK in relations with allies – Russia and China and a demonstration of readiness to repel the aggression of the enemy – the United States, Japan, South Korea
Militarization of international tourism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– the country's authorities forcibly include the obligatory attendance of the show “<i>Country of the People</i>” in the stay program of foreign tourists;</li> <li>– tourists are a stable source of currency, which the country's leadership spends on military needs</li> </ul>
Kim Jong-un's friendship with D. Rodman, the “star” of the National Basketball Association	The American basketball player coached players and teams of the DPRK, organized friendly matches with the participation of other famous basketball players. Instead, Kim Jong-un demonstrated the weapons and training skills of KPA servicemen to his friend.

Source: the author.

Evidence for each of the above statements is now outlined below.

1. Constant control over the departure and stay of athletes abroad by state security officers: DPRK citizens do not have domestic passports, and a foreign passport is issued for a specific trip only<sup>33</sup>. Therefore, for example, any football player from the

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<sup>33</sup> North Korea: how a country that threatens..., op. cit.

DPRK who plays outside the country falls under strict control. Agents are attached to him, they follow him in everyday life and control with whom and on what topics he communicates. Athletes are not allowed to give interviews to the media or to participate in events directly unrelated to sports<sup>34</sup>. The DPRK authorities allow legionnaires to play in the championships of Japan, South Korea, Thailand, Russia, Serbia, and Sweden. In some of these countries, there are North Korean diasporas with special organizations and institutions that North Korean footballers must visit in order not to lose ideological ties with the country outside its borders.

Thus, the militarization of sports in North Korea can be traced back to daily personal control of athletes who play in the championships of other countries. The choice of Russia and Serbia is since the authorities of these countries support the DPRK's position in the international arena. The funds that foreign clubs pay for a player, their salary goes to the state budget and later this money goes to finance the country's military-industrial complex.

2. The militarization of sports in the DPRK has been a factor in destabilizing the situation in South Korea on the eve and during major sports forums on its territory. In November 1987, on the eve of Seoul's preparations for the Olympic Games, North Korean agents planted an explosive device aboard a Korean Air Airlines flight from Baghdad to Seoul. Agents left the plane while refueling in Abu Dhabi, and a few hours after takeoff, it exploded over the Andaman Sea. All 115 persons onboard died. Later, one of the detained DPRK agents admitted in an interview that a high-ranking official told her that they would destroy the South Korean plane before the Games in Seoul to create an atmosphere of chaos and confusion in South Korea. As a result, the DPRK boycotted the 1988 Olympic Games in Seoul.

In a further example, the Battle at Sea and the 2002 FIFA World Cup, hosted by Japan and the Republic of Korea, "coincided". The South Korean team, which had not won a single match in the World Cup Finals until then, defeated strong rivals and made it to the semifinals. This success has become a top topic in the international press. On June 29<sup>th</sup>, during a match for third place between the teams of South Korea and Turkey, two North Korean patrol boats crossed the North Line of demarcation in the Yellow Sea and opened fire on South Korean coast guard vessels near Yeonpyeong island. Nine South Koreans were killed and six were seriously injured in the attack<sup>35</sup>.

In this way, Pyongyang has repeatedly inflicted political "blows" on the Republic of Korea in order to intimidate foreign athletes and fans from participating in international sports competitions, to prevent or disrupt their holding.

3. A central feature of the militarization of physical culture and sports in North Korea is their internationalization, i.e. the establishment and development of contacts between the DPRK and similar undemocratic political regimes, such as the Russian Federation. Fifteen-year-old Naumova from the Moscow region, a master of sports of international class in powerlifting, a world record holder among teenage

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<sup>34</sup> I. Pavelko, *The Tale of the «World Champions»...*, op. cit.

<sup>35</sup> *North Korea vs. South Korea...*, op. cit.

girls visited the DPRK as an activist of the Komsomol organization at the invitation of Kim Jong-un in June 2014. "Komsomolka Naumova", who visited Russian schools and orphanages, told children how important it was to play sports to become a defender of the homeland, attended the training of the DPRK Olympic team, met with a Korean Orthodox priest and local pioneers<sup>36</sup>. She stated that she considered her North Korean experience a success and wanted to repeat it in Syria.

Thus, the militarization of physical culture and sports in the DPRK under the pretext of defending 'the Motherland' is closely combined with ideologizing, internationalizing and expanding contacts in this area with countries which leadership adheres to anti-Western positions and authoritarian style of governance.

4. Militarization of international tourism: tourists are allowed to travel around the country only as part of tourist groups, and only to places allowed by the authorities. For North Korea, tourists are a stable source of cash, as tours are booked by a record number of tourists who are interested in seeing this "closed" country with their own eyes. In 2018, the DPRK was visited by about 100,000 tourists. The vast majority of them come from neighboring China<sup>37</sup>. Most tourists are attracted by "Arirang", because all the other times they are not allowed to the stadium, and American tourists can visit North Korea only during the festival. The cost of the entrance ticket depends on the class of the place and the location of the stands: in 2011 foreigners were offered tickets to choose from tickets for €50, €100 and €150, in 2012 – the price ranged from €80 to €150 for standard seats, VIP-grandstand (central grandstand, leather chair, table covered with green cloth) cost €300<sup>38</sup>. The country's authorities arbitrarily include obligatory attendance of the play "*Country of the People*" in the program of stay of foreign tourists in the DPRK. The cost is €100 for the cheapest ticket and €800 for the VIP stand. Despite the advance payment and booking, the refusal is not accepted, because otherwise the visa is not opened<sup>39</sup>. Tourists admit there are 20–25,000 spectators and the same number of artists who previously performed at the "Arirang", because the theme of the play is the same.

The money that tourists spend in the country goes directly to Kim Jong-un's political funds; he uses these resources to buy the loyalty of politicians and the military, and further secure power<sup>40</sup>. Thus, ticket prices for foreign tourists to various shows with militaristic motives continue to rise, and the money obtained will be directed to the military needs of the political regime of North Korea.

5. Kim Jong-un's friendship with National Basketball Association star Dennis Rodman. The leader of North Korea is a fan of the NBA and M. Jordan, Kim played

<sup>36</sup> Russian Komsomol member visited the DPRK: rumors about the poverty of Koreans are exaggerated, <http://newsru.co.il/world/06aug2014/mariana456.html>, [accessed: 4.05.2021].

<sup>37</sup> J. Ryall, *Tourism in the DPRK...*, op. cit.

<sup>38</sup> North Korea is a country of people's happiness..., op. cit.

<sup>39</sup> A. Andriev, *Blogs. Exclusive report...*, op. cit.

<sup>40</sup> J. Ryall, *Tourism in the DPRK...*, op. cit.

basketball while studying at a private school in Switzerland. It was Kim Jong-un who invited D. Rodman, the “star” of American basketball, to the DPRK. In 2013, as part of the show “*Vice*” from the HBO TV channel, Rodman together with the players of the team “*Harlem Globetrotters*” held a demonstration basketball match with the local team (which ended in a draw). Since then, he has been friends with Kim Jong-un. Although visits of the US citizens to the DPRK are not recommended, Rodman often visits North Korea, and calls Kim Jong-un “his friend”. The former athlete is trying to create a positive image of North Korea in the perception of Western countries. So, on the occasion of celebrating Un’s birthday, he organized a friendly meeting with the participation of former NBA players, in addition, he opened a basketball school, prepared the DPRK national team for the *2016 Olympic Games*. Proof of the leader’s high level of trust in the five-time NBA champion is the fact that, according to Rodman, Kim Jong-un showed him “his guns and military”. “I saw everything”, the basketball player summed up<sup>41</sup>. Rodman even promised to organize a meeting with the leaders of the DPRK and the United States. In turn, the DPRK government strongly supports the manifestations of hatred of D. Rodman, who, being a US citizen, promotes the anti-USA sentiments and supports North Korea propaganda.

Thus, the former NBA “star” is a mouthpiece for the ideology of Kim Jong-un in the international arena. The anti-Americanism of Rodman’s behavior and his statements are circulated by the North Korean authorities in their press, and they are also disseminated in their mass media by the partner countries – Russia and China. Personal relations – the friendship between the leader of the country and the famous American basketball player is needed by the North Korean authorities to confirm the “correctness” and support of the course of its foreign policy.

The militarization of physical culture and sports in the foreign policy and international relations of the DPRK can be traced back to:

- The expansion of international humanitarian contacts with countries with troubled political regimes and their leaders – Russia and China.
- Government intervention in the development of international tourism.
- Attempts to destabilize the socio-political situation in the region on the eve of and during international sports forums there. The purpose of such actions is to create tension in the society, to sow public distrust in the government institutions of neighboring countries and to prevent the holding of sports events. During the performances of North Korean athletes at international competitions, there are constant problems with the broadcast, especially if they are attended by athletes from countries that Pyongyang considers enemies, i.e. the United States, Japan, South Korea.

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<sup>41</sup> “*I saw his guns*”: basketball player Dennis Rodman talks about partying with Kim Jong-un, [https://focus.ua/lifestyle/455346-ia\\_videl\\_ego\\_pushki\\_dennis\\_rodman\\_rasskazal\\_o\\_vecherin-kakh\\_s\\_kim\\_chen\\_ynom](https://focus.ua/lifestyle/455346-ia_videl_ego_pushki_dennis_rodman_rasskazal_o_vecherin-kakh_s_kim_chen_ynom), [accessed: 18.04.2021].

## Conclusions

Since the founding of the DPRK, its leadership has totally militarized physical culture and sports, reflecting the peculiarities of North Korea's political regime. The militarization of sports has embraced all government departments, government agencies, NGOs, and every citizen. The purpose of this process goes beyond the established understanding of the tasks of physical culture and sports in democratic countries, namely: caring for the health and efficiency of the population and involving them in sports. In the DPRK, this power is compounded by the increasing strength of the Korean People's Army, the education of its citizens in patriotism and responsibility for the country's defense, and the attraction of financial resources to the country as a way to strengthen the country's status and prestige in the international arena. His personal preferences, passion for basketball and friendship with the famous American player Rodman also form part of the militarization of North Korea's foreign policy.

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## **Militarization of Physical Culture and Sport in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea**

### **Abstract**

The Democratic People's Republic of Korea is one of the most closed and self-isolated states today. The authoritarian political regime of the Kim dynasty totally militarized physical culture and sports. The country has a Ministry of Physical Culture and Sports, the State Commission for the Management of Physical Culture and Sports, and various defense sports associations. The purpose of the militarization of these branches in domestic politics is to strengthen military power and national security, to consolidate the power of the Kim family, to instill the citizens' responsibility for the country's protection and defense, to control over their behavior. We consider the consequences of militarization in North Korea's foreign policy and international relations to be a kind of "improvement" of the country's international image, "militarization" of international tourism and attempts to destabilize the socio-political situation in the region.

**Key words:** security, defence, Juche, Ministry of Physical Culture and Sports, Korean People's Army, Defense Sports Associations

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