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WHEN IS A NATIONAL TEAM NOT A NATIONAL TEAM by Steve Menary

I'll start with a question? What is an international match? The answer seems pretty obvious - a game between two countries.

And that would be why earlier this year FIFA rejected an application from Zanzibar, which is part of Tanzania, to join – or was it?

Just a few months earlier, FIFA accepted an application from New Caledonia but New Caledonia is a French overseas territory so why can they join and Zanzibar can't? I wanted to know why FIFA rejected Zanzibar and accepted New Caledonia so I asked them.

SLIDE 2

FIFA pointed to its entry criteria but Zanzibar and New Caledonia are both members of their regional confederations, the CAF and Oceania respectively, and both had the permission of Tanzania and France respectively to try and join FIFA.

SLIDE 3

FIFA also said New Caledonia has some autonomy and an independence referendum planned for 2012. But Zanzibar also has some autonomy and its clubs don't play in the Tanzania's league system any more.

These weren't FIFA's only reasons for rejecting Zanzibar. Another was that the African island is only 30 to 40 minutes by boat from the Tanzanian mainland, which isn't mentioned in FIFA's entry criteria!

And that sort of crazy reasoning is why FIFA has more members than the United Nations.

SLIDE 4

The most important of FIFA's criteria is that new members have to be recognised by the international community but what exactly is that? The international political community? The international sporting community? The international economic community?

Does the international community mean the world as defined by the United Nations? I asked FIFA and they wouldn't say.

Perhaps, as world football's governing body, FIFA doesn't want to be seen to be merely aping the UN in terms of membership but UEFA couldn't afford not to.

SLIDE 5

A few years ago, UEFA's membership ballooned as the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia broke up, a number of new independent states emerged.

At the same time, old European micro-states like Liechtenstein and San Marino started taking advantage of generous grants from UEFA and FIFA to start playing internationals too.

Every four years, full members of UEFA get between 500,000 and 1.1 million Swiss francs depending on contributions to youth and women's football. If they join FIFA too, they get another U\$1 million dollars every four years.

That is why places like Andorra and Liechtenstein are fielding international teams that are slowly getting more competitive. Both of these teams have won matches in the latest world cup qualifiers.

This surge in entries culminated in the Faroes, which is part of the Danish commonwealth and certainly not a country as defined by the UN, being allowed to join in 1994.

That gave the British colony of Gibraltar ideas but when the Gibraltarians tried to join, Spain threatened to pull out of all UEFA's competitions.

SLIDE 6

No Champions League without Real Madrid or Barcelona? No World Cup without Spain? Of course, UEFA or the G14 clubs could never allow that to happen so UEFA moved the goal posts and started using UN membership as entry criteria to prevent Gibraltar joining.

So, ultimately the five permanent, veto-wielding members of the UN's Security Council - the US, Russia, China, the UK and France – now decide who plays international football in Europe.

Gibraltar claim UEFA's change was made after they applied to join and on the 24th of this month, the two sides go to the Court of Arbitration for Sport in Switzerland to dispute the matter again with Spain's threat to pull out if Gibraltar is allowed in still standing.

Gibraltar is convinced its case is legally sound and points to a large number of other places that are clearly not countries or UN members that have been playing international football for some time.

I asked FIFA if they could tell me how many of its members are not countries? In response, John Schumacher from FIFA's media department helpfully said: "We invite you do to do the comparison count by yourself." So I did and here they are.

SLIDE 7

As FIFA didn't want to explain what the 'international community' was, I used UN membership as the criteria. Of FIFA's 207 members, 23 are not countries at all. That's nearly ten per cent of all countries playing international football.

And that number gets even larger if you include places that are playing international football as part of FIFA's six regional confederations but not yet FIFA members.

SLIDE 8

Of the 213 teams playing international football as part of FIFA or its six confederations, there are 29 national teams from places that aren't countries at all according to the UN.

SLIDE 9

Some are anachronisms like the only non-nation to win the world cup. Everyone in the UK accepts England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland as countries but none are UN members. To get round this, FIFA's statutes enshrine membership for places like Wales that until recently had less autonomy than Jersey, which is barred.

And there are other examples of comparable territories being allowed into FIFA or being left out in the cold.

SLIDE 10

Palestine has been a FIFA member since 1994 but plays home games in Qatar and trains in Egypt.

If a territory can be a FIFA member without being either a country or playing at home, why can't Tibet play internationals?

Tibet was annexed by China half a century ago yet Hong Kong and Macau, now no longer even colonies but part of China again, still play internationals as FIFA members.

SLIDE 11

An exiled team of Tibetans – surely no different to Palestine playing in Qatar – played Greenland four years ago and were due in France last month for a match against the region of Occitania.

But the game had to be delayed then cancelled after the French government denied the Tibetan team visas.

When Tibet came here to Denmark four years ago to play Greenland, China threatened Greenland's US\$30 million a year prawn export industry but that match went ahead watched by 5,000 people here in Copenhagen.

SLIDE 12

But then Denmark is not on the UN Security Council unlike France and China.

FIFA also tried and failed to stop that match and has been embarrassed again over Tibet. Two years ago, FIFA had to apologise to China after accidentally referring to Tibet as a neighbouring country in a press statement.

Like Tibet, FIFA rejected Greenland's attempts to just play international friendlies even though the Faroes have been playing competitive internationals for over a decade.

With a population half the size of Greenland, the British colony of the Cayman Islands also plays world cup qualifiers.

Four years ago, the Caymans fielded a team of players with no connection to the islands at all. Instead, the Caymans association used an agent to recruit players from the England and Scottish leagues to try and provide a competitive side.

The Caymans' world cup qualifiers against Cuba went ahead and they lost but Gibraltar, where players must be registered Gibraltarians to play, remains barred. For now, at least.

And so do places like Greenland and Guernsey with as much autonomy as the Caymans and teams featuring their own players.

SLIDE 13

Also left out in the cold are disputed territories like Northern Cyprus, Somaliland and Western Sahara.

Because of international politics and the UN Security Council, FIFA will not recognise any of these teams as countries but they all have national teams.

There is even a team representing the Chagos islands. Cleared by the UK government three decades ago to make way for a US air base that George Bush uses to bomb his axis of evil, there are 6,000 people from the Chagos living on the Seychelles, Mauritius or in the UK.

You might ask, how they can they be a national team as they could never play at home? But then neither does Palestine. And the number of Chagos is not so different to the people from the British colony of Montserrat, which is a member of FIFA.

Players from these national teams that FIFA and the UN Security Council will not let exist all have more sense of national identity than the ageing pro's recruited by the Caymans.

Rejected by FIFA and the international community, many of these places are now part of a new organization called the NF Board that next year will host a 16-team world cup for national teams that don't exist in Northern Cyprus.

SLIDE 15

The NF Board wants to be a waiting room for countries aiming to join FIFA but after the two sides met in Zurich this July, FIFA told the NF Board it didn't want to admit any new members for several years.

Unlike FIFA, the NF Board has a vague concept of what defines a nation that can incorporate Zanzibar and tribal teams like the Sami team from Lapland that could never be members of the UN or FIFA.

SLIDE 16

Of course, apart from Monaco, none of these places are countries at all according to the UN so why should they play international football?

Their answer would be that they feel a sense of national identity even if politics, economics, colonial history, the UN Security Council and FIFA will never allow them to be countries.

Unless they can be a national team, another distinct part of the world will be swallowed up.

These national teams that do not exist would also answer that if nearly 30 other places that are not countries either are playing international, why can't they join in too?

ENDS

WHEN IS A NATIONAL
TEAM NOT A NATIONAL
TEAM?

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FIFA STATUTES

- Article 10
- "Any association which is responsible for organising and supervising football in its country may become a member of FIFA. In this context, the expression "country" shall refer to an independent state recognised by the international community."

FIFA STATUTES

- Article 10 (Continued)
- "Only one association shall be recognised in each country.
- "Each of the four British associations is recognised as a separate member of FIFA
- "An association in a region which has not yet gained independence may, with the authorisation of the association in the country on which it is dependent, also apply for admission to FIFA."

NATIONAL TEAMS vs NATIONS

- FIFA - 207 members
- United Nations - 191 members

UEFA STATUTES

- Article 5
- "Membership of UEFA is open to national football associations situated in the continent of Europe, based in a country which is recognised by the United Nations as an independent state, and which are responsible for the organisation and implementation of football-related matters in the territory of their country."

Gibraltar



FIFA'S NON-COUNTRIES

- American Samoa
- Bermuda
- England
- Hong Kong
- Northern Ireland
- Palestine
- Tahiti
- US Virgin Islands
- Anguilla
- British Virgin Islands
- Faroe Islands
- Macau
- Netherlands Antilles
- Puerto Rico
- Taiwan
- Wales
- Aruba
- Cayman Islands
- Guam
- Montserrat
- New Caledonia
- Scotland
- Turks & Caicos

OTHER NON-COUNTRIES PLAYING INTERNATIONAL FOOTBALL

- French Guiana
 - Martinique
 - Saint Marten
- Guadeloupe
Sint Maarten
Zanzibar

NON-UN MEMBERS PLAYING INTERNATIONAL FOOTBALL

- American Samoa
- Bermuda
- England
- Guam
- Macau
- Northern Ireland
- Palestine
- Scotland
- Taiwan
- Wales
- Anguilla
- British Virgin Islands
- Faroe Islands
- Guadeloupe
- Martinique
- Netherlands Antilles
- Puerto Rico
- Sint Marten
- Turks & Caicos
- Zanzibar
- Aruba
- Cayman Islands
- French Guiana
- Hong Kong
- Montserrat
- New Caledonia
- Saint Marten
- Tahiti
- US Virgin Islands

IF THEY PLAY, WHY CAN'T WE?

- Wales so why not Jersey
- Hong Kong & Macau so why not Tibet?
- Bermuda so why not Guernsey?
- The Cayman Islands so why not Gibraltar?
- The Faroe Islands so why not Greenland?
- Palestine so why not the Chagos?

Tibet



Tibet vs Greenland



Go Tibet or Go Greenland : Audience cheering for thier respective Team.

Greenland vs Guernsey



THE NF BOARD



THE NATIONAL TEAMS THAT DON'T EXIST

NF BOARD MEMBERS

- Chagos
 - Western Sahara
 - Zanzibar
 - West Papua
 - South Cameroon
 - Sealand
- Chechnya
 - Tibet
 - Somaliland
 - South Moluccas
 - Occitania
 - The Roma
- Monaco
 - North Cyprus
 - South Lower Saxony
 - The Sami
 - Saugeais

APPLICATIONS PENDING

- Greenland
- The Maasai
- Easter Island

ALSO INTERESTED

- Jersey
 - Kosovo
- Gibraltar
- Kurdistan