**Great games for the next decade**

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Chess, for centuries now, has become a source of national pride for the Russian nation. They hold the highest number of Grand Master titles in the world, and rightfully so. A good chess player’s strategy involves creating a leadership vacuum, eliminating the enemy’s key assets, and finally, annihilating one’s opponent with a master stroke, or as it’s commonly called, a check-mate. Analysing Russia’s strategic manoeuvres in global politics over the past few centuries reveals the extent to which Russian leaders rely on their success in chess to navigate the unstable geopolitical world.

The origins of this application of game theory to real life issues can be traced back to the 17th century’s famed Russian Monarch, Peter the Great. With his small kingdom of Rus, he desired to halt the Ottoman advancement in Europe while simultaneously driving Tartar/Turk Khannates out of Russia. However, to achieve this task he needed to establish himself as the global saviour of the Christian faith. This goal was accomplished when Peter was aided by the Western world in transforming Rus from a small kingdom into a maritime superpower, controlling the Baltic and Caspian seas, successfully driving the Tartars out of the Crimea, defeating the Swedes, and defeating the Ottomans by forging a strategic alliance with Iran’s Nadir Shah. Peter’s efforts came to fruition a quarter century later, as one of his successors, Catherine the Great, established herself as the strongest monarch in Europe by defeating and occupying a large portion of the Persian empire in Central Asia and became a guarantor of European peace through her role as a key mediator in all major affairs of the continent, thus laying the foundation of the great Russo-German alliance for the next two centuries. Fast forward to the future, and over the past two decades Russia has been taking advantage of US engagement in Afghanistan and Iraq by cementing the historic German-Russo alliance by laying a seven hundred km Nordic gas pipeline to cater the future energy needs of Germany.

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A similar symbiotic relationship between games and politics can be found in another nation. Just as Chess is popular in Russia, Weiqi is one of the most popular games in China. As opposed to chess, the focus in Weiqi is to work in one’s own domain and utilising one’s own strengths too quickly and swiftly occupy empty spaces left by the opponent. Historically, China has strictly adhered to the Weiqi’s policy of prioritising one’s own domestic development.

While China has shown little interest in global leadership, it continues to expand its maritime and territorial claims in Asia, calmly playing on the global Weiqi board, reviving the Old Silk Road through it’s One Belt, One Road initiative, all of which will be an event to watch in the next decade.

Basketball is fairly close to a religion in the United States. The game is built around a strong Centre aided by a lightning speed offense and a solid defence. It’s a team effort, where the coordination between defence and offense is key, often with breathtaking results, and a huge contribution from the bench or supportive players. Since WWII, the US has led the NATO alliance with brilliance, coupled by great leadership and supportive allies in Europe, Asia, and the Middle East. The prime example of a typical US led coalition strike is the demolition of the communist Soviet Union in the nineties. The US used military means to keep communist expansion in check, placed punitive economic sanctions on the region, blocked technology transfer to Russia, and led a vicious anti-communist propaganda campaign, all of which succeeded in pummelling the Soviet economy, resulting in the crumbling of the Soviet Empire.

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With the rise of China as an economic power, old Asian allies and members from the ASEAN are counting on the US to withdraw its resources from the Middle East and start focusing on the Pacific rim. The US will continue to be a dominant force in Europe and Asia. However, going forward, to be a member of the US’ team, one will have to play by their rules, embracing their values and ideologies, such as women’s rights, freedom of speech and religion, democracy, and human rights, thus becoming key concepts to be imported in the near future.

All the major countries in South-Asia, the sub-continent, and Afghanistan excel in T20 cricket. The format of the game is short, erratic, and based on an extreme high risk and reward strategy. T20 game strategies are largely driven by aggression, which is often reflected in the region’s traditional manner of resolving international conflicts. The South Asian region currently resides over a billion and a half people, but over the last quarter of a century, it has not been able to produce a single comprehensive, all-inclusive security, environmental, or energy agreement. Part of the problem is the region’s past Imperial depredations and its reputation for being a budding ground for a global crisis. However, with the current inauspicious global backdrop, an honest, international broker to resolve regional disputes is highly unlikely and over the next decade, the regional players will have to take the responsibility of creating an amicable environment for regional peace.

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