

Poker vs Chess from a Soviet Perspective

Description

Republished comment.

Ed. Note: How much of this is the Anglo-Saxon *perfidious Albion* component and how much is Jewish Shylock of The Merchant of Venice? This reminds one of the concept of the “fine print” in any American legal document, whether a user manual, a contract, or any legal agreement. It is always written by the dominant party under the terms of *Caveat Emptor* (buyer beware). The poor inattentive schmuck can only blame himself if he loses his shirt at the end of the day. He signed it and can’t blame anyone, not even the other party, while the other party can cheerfully and in perfect legalese jargon exult: “I tricked you, ha, ha. Can’t help you. Next time get a lawyer. Ha, ha.”

My father once told me that “Americans play poker, we play Préférence.”

He never did learn how to play Poker, yet he was highly critical of it. I tried to teach him how to play it properly outside of the rules alone, but the very nature of the game was anathema to him. As he said, “the nature of Poker is to bluff”, and this was simply something he could not comprehend nor execute in a game. It was alien to him, perhaps even incomprehensible.

Of course, he taught me to play Chess and we played often, but he would never allow me to win. I defeated him perhaps three times at most from what must have been several hundreds of games. As a fan of board games and family events, I tried to introduce many popular games over the years. He would reject games like “Betrayal at House on the Hill” outright, yet took to “Settlers of Catan” immediately.

The point of all this personal story-telling is that Russians, or perhaps more accurately Soviets, have an entirely different psychological profile than people in the West do. Western games which children play are rooted at core in the ability to deceive and charm. Eastern classics like Chess and Go are openly visible to both players and depend entirely on mental skill. Perhaps “Connect Four” still remains popular as a children’s game in the US at best, when the young ones are not clutching to a Nintendo Gameboy or Switch.

And so we now see the results of this in real-time. American politicians operate on the principle of the “bluff”. It is not that they lie, but that they may be lying or they may not be lying. Imagine how frustrating this must be to a negotiator who does not know how to lie when engaged in diplomacy.

Putin, Xi, Modi, and others communicate with their Western counterparts directly and mathematically, assuming that their opposition will do likewise. Yet the West in turn negotiates by bluffing, and assuming that their counterparts comprehend bluffing and will respond in kind. Perhaps what all parties say is true, perhaps not. It is always ambiguous, formless, and without meaning. Powell can hold up a bottle of white substance at the UN and the US invades Iraq. It was a “bet”, and a “bluff”. He and the US administration were likely very surprised when Russia demanded to actually access that vial.

As such, we are now caught in an exponential feedback loop in which neither party trust the other, and this very lack of understanding and trust feeds the action/reaction chain. American statesmen assume that Russian counterparts think the way they do, and vice versa Russian statesmen assume that their American counterparts do the same.

Yet they are not only speaking different languages but quite literally thinking in different psychological languages.

When one party (Russia) makes its intentions clear, the opposition must ask the question, “is this a bluff or not?” instead of treating it seriously.