

ENGLISH LEARNING FOR CURIOUS MINDS



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Episode #292

Chess & The Cold War

26th Aug, 2022

[00:00:00] Hello, hello hello, and welcome to English Learning for Curious Minds, by Leonardo English.

[00:00:11] The show where you can listen to fascinating stories, and learn weird and wonderful things about the world at the same time as improving your English.

[00:00:21] I'm Alastair Budge, and today we are going to be talking about Chess and the Cold War.

[00:00:28] Chess is often called the ultimate game of strategy, a game where two players have exactly the same pieces, and they need to use all of their mental abilities to **outsmart**¹ the other.

[00:00:40] And although chess may be a game, during the Cold War it was used as a way to play out a very real world conflict, the conflict between East and West.

¹ defeat by being smarter

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Chess & The Cold War

[00:00:53] So, in this episode we will tell this amazing story, of how the chess board became the battleground for the Cold War, and how one country, the USSR came to dominate the international game in a way that no other country has done, either before or since.

[00:01:12] OK then, Chess and The Cold War.

[00:01:16] Before we go back in time, let's take a moment and stay in the present day, or at least in the 21st century. 2022 and the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

[00:01:28] There are few areas of life that the conflict has not touched.

[00:01:33] Energy sanctions, rising food prices, the fastest growing refugee crisis since the end of World War II, and thousands of civilians dead: these are just some of the consequences of Europe's first military conflict between states since the Second World War.

[00:01:51] You might be surprised to learn that, on a far less significant level of course, even the international chess scene has been affected.

[00:02:01] Almost as soon as Russia invaded Ukraine in February of 2022, the world of professional chess became a [flashpoint²](#) in the war.

[00:02:11] Within a week of the invasion, the International Chess Federation had pulled, it had cancelled, major tournaments from Russia and Belarus.

² a point of serious disagreement or dispute

[00:02:22] For Russia too, chess quickly became a factor in its [propaganda](#)³ calculations.

[00:02:29] In April of 2022, the Russian state media regulator blocked the online chess website chess.com for publishing interviews with Ukrainian players about the invasion.

[00:02:43] Russia also faced [pushback](#)⁴ from its own chess champions – the pride and joy of a nation that won all but one World Chess Championship between 1948 and 1990.

[00:02:55] Many [grandmasters](#)⁵ left the country in protest.

[00:02:59] A [grandmaster](#)⁶, by the way, is a [prestigious](#)⁷ title awarded by the International Chess Federation, and it's second only to the World Champion title.

[00:03:09] So, some [grandmasters](#) left, other [grandmasters](#) who were abroad at the time chose not to return to Russia.

[00:03:17] Some who remained wrote an open letter to Putin criticising the government's actions.

³ information used to affect people's opinions while not showing the whole truth

⁴ negative reaction

⁵ chess players of the highest class

⁶ chess player of the highest class

⁷ causing respect and admiration

[00:03:24] Yet this isn't the first, nor the most dramatic, time that the game entered the geopolitical stage.

[00:03:32] In the six decades after the end of World War Two, chess was [caught up](#)⁸ in the global [stand-off](#)⁹ between the communist USSR and the capitalist United States, otherwise known as the Cold War.

[00:03:47] Back then, the game's international profile grew like never before.

[00:03:53] Chess' global popularity during this time [owed to](#)¹⁰ the fact that it became an arena of ideological and cultural competition between the two dominant powers.

[00:04:04] Because of the game's importance in [showcasing](#)¹¹ national brilliance, many players became celebrities and heroes both in their own nations and abroad.

[00:04:16] One of them was the Soviet player, Anatoly Karpov, who was born in 1951.

[00:04:23] Being born right at the start of this global conflict, you could say Karpov was a Cold War baby.

[00:04:30] He would go on to become a Cold War star.

⁸ involved, in the middle of

⁹ a situation in which both sides were equally competing against each other

¹⁰ was caused by

¹¹ showing, displaying

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[00:04:34] He came from a poor family but by the age of 15 he had become the world's youngest international chess master.

[00:04:43] Now, he is regarded as one of the best chess players in history.

[00:04:49] Although he clearly had a brilliant mind, Karpov also enjoyed the full support of the Soviet state throughout his career.

[00:04:58] From the 1970s onwards, he actively [collaborated](#)¹² with the KGB, the intelligence agency of the Soviet Union.

[00:05:07] And in return, the [regime](#)¹³ [showered him](#)¹⁴, they covered him with [privileges](#)¹⁵.

[00:05:13] So how did a [humble](#)¹⁶ board game become so important that its players were seen as valuable intelligence [assets](#)¹⁷ in a global conflict?

¹² worked (with)

¹³ government

¹⁴ covered him

¹⁵ advantages

¹⁶ simple

¹⁷ very useful and valuable people

[00:05:24] To answer this question, it's important to remind ourselves of what was actually happening during the Cold War, and why the 64 black and white squares of a board game became one of the places where the war was fought.

[00:05:40] In 1947, just two years after the end of history's deadliest war, the world was [plunged¹⁸](#) into a new and altogether stranger conflict.

[00:05:52] Capitalist America and the communist USSR emerged as the [sole¹⁹](#) [unchallenged²⁰](#) superpowers at the end of World War II.

[00:06:01] For the next four decades, these [irreconcilable²¹](#) economic and political systems would fight for [supremacy²²](#) in the postwar world.

[00:06:11] With military and economic resources that [dwarfed²³](#) their nearest rivals, they quickly [carved the world up²⁴](#) between themselves.

¹⁸ caused to move or fall

¹⁹ only

²⁰ accepted by everyone, not questioned

²¹ opposite, conflicting

²² the leading position

²³ cause them to seem small or insignificant in comparison

²⁴ separated or shared the world

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[00:06:20] On the one side, America led the Western [bloc](#)²⁵ of capitalist countries that stretched across Western Europe and much of the Middle East. On the other stood the USSR, which drew Eastern Europe, Cuba, and parts of Latin America into its [orbit](#)²⁶.

[00:06:37] International affairs suddenly became a black and white game.

[00:06:42] Smaller world players faced a [stark](#)²⁷ choice: [ally](#)²⁸ with either the capitalists or the communists, or else leave themselves exposed to the political ambitions of both.

[00:06:55] The two superpowers [stockpiled](#)²⁹ ever-more advanced weapons at a [manic](#)³⁰ intensity.

[00:07:03] However, as we know, fortunately they never engaged directly in battle.

²⁵ a group of countries with similar political interests

²⁶ area of influence

²⁷ simple, obvious

²⁸ agree officially to support

²⁹ collected and kept for future use

³⁰ full of activity, wild

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[00:07:09] Because the slightest **provocation**³¹ risked a nuclear war to end all wars, mutually assured destruction as it was called, **tensions**³² **held out**³³ without an end in sight.

[00:07:21] Across the ideological divide, the superpowers watched each other's every move with **hawk-eyed**³⁴ intent, each watched the other very closely.

[00:07:31] This was a war of nerves where **tensions bubbled away**³⁵ beneath the surface.

[00:07:37] Because they could not be resolved in the heat of battle, they resurfaced in the most unlikely of arenas.

[00:07:44] Chess was one of them.

[00:07:46] In this rule bound world, the most rule-governed of games **reigned**³⁶ supreme.

³¹ action planned to make the other angry

³² intense states of disagreement or hostility

³³ continued to exist

³⁴ watching very closely

³⁵ continued to be intense

³⁶ was the most important one

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[00:07:53] Now, you may know that chess has long been associated with [statesmanship](#)³⁷.

[00:07:59] Just like diplomats and kings and queens are [constrained](#)³⁸ by the rules of the international system, the pieces on the board are governed by a simple set of allowable moves.

[00:08:12] The history of the game of chess reveals this relationship well.

[00:08:16] The earliest written account of the game comes in the Persian Chatrang-namak, which explains that it was introduced to Persia by 'Dewasarm, a great ruler of India' in the 6th century.

[00:08:29] In the 17th century, King Charles I of England, a king who would go on to lose his head after a rebellion, He owned a chessboard inscribed with a Latin phrase: “With these, subject and ruler [strive](#)³⁹ without [bloodshed](#)⁴⁰”.

[00:08:46] Fast forward to 1947 and chess had transformed from a symbol of governance to an actual [blueprint](#)⁴¹ for foreign policy.

³⁷ the quality of making good decisions like an experienced politician

³⁸ limited, regulated

³⁹ fight each other

⁴⁰ killing and violence

⁴¹ design plan

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[00:08:57] In this year, the US diplomat George Kennan gave a lecture at the US Army War College in Pennsylvania.

[00:09:04] Here, he **formulated**⁴² a grand vision for America's international strategy based on the game of chess.

[00:09:13] To achieve security in this newly divided world, Kennan said that America had to “**marshal**⁴³ all the forces’ at their disposal on the world chessboard...in such a way that the Russian sees it is...in his interests to do what you want him to do”.

[00:09:32] Kennan would become famous for being the mastermind behind what's called ‘**containment**⁴⁴ strategy’. This was a foreign policy approach that really **shaped**⁴⁵ international relations during the 1950s and 1960s. It proposed maintaining two fixed spheres of influence.

[00:09:51] One would be **presided over**⁴⁶, controlled by America, the other by the Soviets.

[00:09:58] Crucially, neither side could **encroach on**⁴⁷, could go into, the others’ sphere.

⁴² developed or presented all the details of it

⁴³ bring together

⁴⁴ involving the prevention of the expansion of states

⁴⁵ formed

⁴⁶ controlled

⁴⁷ go into

[00:10:04] Neither could they [resort to](#)⁴⁸ violence.

[00:10:07] Instead, opponents would have to be cornered into, forced to make, weaker moves by [canny](#)⁴⁹, strategic decisions and movements.

[00:10:15] And, just like in chess, tactical sacrifices would be needed to win the wider war.

[00:10:23] Chess only grew in significance as the conflict developed.

[00:10:27] As nuclear weapons made direct military engagement a suicidal [prospect](#)⁵⁰, culture replaced armed combat as a way of attracting prestige and allies.

[00:10:38] The game was not just a strategic [metaphor](#)⁵¹ anymore. It also became a way for communists and capitalists alike to prove their cultural superiority on the world stage, and thereby appeal not only to their own people but also to attract countries that had to date not chosen a side.

[00:10:59] Karpov would express this well in his autobiography called 'Chess is My Life', which he published in 1980.

⁴⁸ use it as a final solution

⁴⁹ clever

⁵⁰ possibility

⁵¹ something considered as representative or symbolic of it

[00:11:08] In it, he [sneered](#)⁵² at, he laughed at, a 1972 international tournament in Texas that was [sponsored](#)⁵³ by a businessman who had made his money through selling fried chicken.

[00:11:21] To him, the so-called 'Fried Chicken Tournament' symbolised the [vulgar](#)⁵⁴ character of capitalist society where individual wealth and cheap [gratification](#)⁵⁵ were more important than a collective effort to pursue greatness.

[00:11:37] So, although international sports like football and ice hockey were also ways of projecting national superiority during the Cold War, nothing compared to chess for [showcasing](#) moral and intellectual strength. And in this field, by the start of the Cold War, the Soviets already had a strong [edge](#)⁵⁶, a strong advantage, over the Americans.

[00:12:01] This was because chess was already popular in 19th century Tsarist Russia, but it was after the communist revolution of 1917 that the game really exploded.

[00:12:12] Chess-playing institutions became developed and supported by the state.

⁵² laughed

⁵³ financed, supported financially

⁵⁴ of low quality and showy

⁵⁵ pleasure, satisfaction

⁵⁶ advantage

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[00:12:17] Josef Stalin, the communist leader who came to power in 1922, was an [enthusiastic⁵⁷](#) supporter of these chess [initiatives⁵⁸](#).

[00:12:27] To Stalin, skill in chess could prove the intellectual [acumen⁵⁹](#), the brainpower, of the Soviet people, and particularly their talents for problem solving – the sort of [cognitive⁶⁰](#) skills that he thought would help his country overtake the West in its economic and technological development.

[00:12:46] One of the earliest people who [lobbied⁶¹](#) the Communist [regime](#) to back chess, to support chess, was a man called Nikolai Krylenko, a 1917 revolutionary who became a high-ranking Soviet politician.

[00:13:01] He sold the game to the party as an ideologically useful form of relaxation.

[00:13:07] It would encourage logic and reason among the masses, he said. This would [discourage⁶²](#) them from the religious ideas that were so hated by the communists.

[00:13:17] His appeals were successful.

⁵⁷ showing great interest and excitement

⁵⁸ activities, proposals

⁵⁹ brainpower

⁶⁰ relating to thinking

⁶¹ tried to persuade or to make them do it

⁶² make them feel less positive about them

[00:13:20] The government set up the All-Union Chess Section, a state body that organised mass chess events in workers clubs and factories.

[00:13:29] The grandest of these was the All-Union Workers competition, which attracted tens of thousands of players from all across Soviet society. It began in 1924 and happened every year for the next five decades.

[00:13:45] 1925, however, was the real turning point for the game in the USSR. The government awarded a prize of 30,000 rubles for the world's first state-sponsored chess tournament, which was held in Moscow.

[00:13:59] The new tournament attracted the best Russian players and [fuelled](#)⁶³ the game's meteoric rise.

[00:14:06] "Chess fever" [broke out](#)⁶⁴ and the 1920s became a period where many later [grandmasters](#) first became [hooked on](#)⁶⁵ the game.

[00:14:15] What is perhaps [striking](#)⁶⁶ looking back on the Moscow tournament today is how open it was.

[00:14:22] Back then, international champions were invited to compete.

⁶³ supported, powered

⁶⁴ began suddenly

⁶⁵ very interested in

⁶⁶ very noticeable and amazing

[00:14:27] This all changed after World War II when relations between the West and East grew more and more [strained](#)⁶⁷, more difficult. By the 1950s, the [containment](#) theory of international relations was in full force.

[00:14:43] The border between the communist east and the capitalist west became fixed.

[00:14:49] Suspicion [reigned](#) on both sides, and there was little opportunity for Soviet chess players to compete against their Western [counterparts](#)⁶⁸.

[00:14:57] Then, in the 1960s, both sides began to push for a more aggressive foreign policy.

[00:15:05] [Containment](#) was out and a new strategy, known as [rollback](#)⁶⁹, was in.

[00:15:11] The USSR and America began actively trying to bring more countries in their orbit of influence, often by arming groups in small foreign nations to fight [proxy wars](#)⁷⁰ on their behalf.

[00:15:24] Under these new conditions, chess became charged with political significance for the Soviet [Regime](#).

⁶⁷ worrying, difficult

⁶⁸ chess opponents

⁶⁹ a strategy that involved forcing a change in the major policies of the state

⁷⁰ wars between smaller countries that each represented the interests of the two larger powers, and had support from them

[00:15:31] And in the early 1960s, just when passive [containment](#) was abandoned in favour of active [rollback](#), a new young contender emerged as Russia's next top chess player.

[00:15:44] Yes, you've already heard his name. It was our Cold War baby, Anatoly Karpov.

[00:15:51] After showing early promise, his rise as a chess player and public figure was carefully [cultivated](#)⁷¹ by the state intelligence services, the KGB.

[00:16:01] The KGB's influence ran right across Soviet society, and the chess scene was no [exception](#)⁷².

[00:16:09] From the 1950s onwards, the KGB accompanied every major chess player to international tournaments.

[00:16:16] The US similarly saw chess tournaments as potential battlegrounds.

[00:16:22] Because foreign chess tournaments were one of the rare moments that people from the capitalist and communist [blocs](#)⁷³ would meet and mix relatively freely, it was a prime opportunity for both sides to recruit spies.

⁷¹ prepared, planned

⁷² something that didn't follow that rule

⁷³ groups of countries with similar political interests

[00:16:38] The KGB [nurtured](#)⁷⁴ communist loyalists within the chess world in several ways.

[00:16:44] They gave a comfortable state [stipend](#)⁷⁵, a state salary, for top players.

[00:16:50] For the best, they went even further.

[00:16:53] Boris Spassky, one of the greats of chess history and a world champion in the 1970s, was given access to luxurious resorts all around the USSR.

[00:17:04] Yet Spassky had the sort of [temperament](#)⁷⁶ that made the [regime wary](#)⁷⁷, that made it nervous. He was critical, [outspoken](#)⁷⁸, and [temperamental](#)⁷⁹ – signs that he could never be completely trusted, and as we'll find out shortly, the Soviet authorities had reason to be [wary](#).

[00:17:25] Another player who was [a thorn in the side](#)⁸⁰ of the [regime](#) was Viktor Korchnoi.

⁷⁴ took care of

⁷⁵ salary

⁷⁶ nature, personality

⁷⁷ nervous

⁷⁸ expressing strong opinions very directly

⁷⁹ changing moods without reason, unpredictable

⁸⁰ annoying, causing problems

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[00:17:32] Like Spassky, Korchnoi was brilliant but [non-conformist](#)⁸¹ in character. As a result, he was closely watched for any sign that he may [defect](#)⁸² to the West.

[00:17:44] Anatoly Karpov, however, was a different story.

[00:17:47] First, he was a chess [prodigy](#)⁸³.

[00:17:51] In 1969 aged only 18, he was named as an international master - a rank just below world champion that is awarded for life by the International Chess Federation.

[00:18:03] Second, he was the perfect party representative. Karpov respected the [regime hierarchy](#)⁸⁴ and was a true believer in the USSR's project.

[00:18:14] Unlike the [unpredictable](#)⁸⁵ Spassky or Korchnoi, Karpov's [deferential](#)⁸⁶ character marked him out as a reliable [regime asset](#)⁸⁷, as someone who could be trusted.

⁸¹ someone who thought in a way that was different from other people

⁸² abandon his country in favour of the opposing one

⁸³ a young person with amazing qualities or abilities

⁸⁴ ruling body or group arranged in ranks

⁸⁵ likely to change suddenly and without reason

⁸⁶ respectful, obedient

⁸⁷ a useful and valuable person

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[00:18:26] Sometime in the late 1960s or early 70s, when he was perhaps still a teenager, Karpov was recruited as a KGB agent under the code name Raul.

[00:18:38] From then on, Karpov would be accompanied by KGB agents to all the tournaments he attended outside the USSR.

[00:18:46] His relationship with the KGB [culminated](#)⁸⁸ in 1978, before the World Chess Championship in Manila, in the Philippines.

[00:18:55] The previous year, Karpov had won the world title for the first time.

[00:19:00] In Manila, he would have to defend it.

[00:19:04] In the lead up to this [crucial](#)⁸⁹ tournament, the KGB and the party had decided that the 26-year-old star would receive all their help to [retain](#)⁹⁰ his title.

[00:19:15] This was because his challenger would be the [troublesome](#)⁹¹ individualist, Korchnoi.

[00:19:21] Two years earlier, both Korchnoi and Spassky had done what the KGB had always feared: they had betrayed their country.

⁸⁸ reached its highest point of development

⁸⁹ extremely important

⁹⁰ keep

⁹¹ causing problems

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[00:19:31] In 1976, Spassky had set a wedding date to marry a lady called Marina, a French embassy employee in Moscow.

[00:19:41] Ever since the Soviet authorities had heard of their romance, they had been trying to break the couple apart. The KGB went to [hideous](#)⁹² lengths to achieve this. In the [lead up](#)⁹³ to Spassky's departure, they broke into Marina's apartment in order to infect her underwear with [venereal disease](#)⁹⁴.

[00:20:01] The attempt was thankfully unsuccessful.

[00:20:06] The [final straw](#)⁹⁵ came when the Soviet government forced Marina to leave the country before their wedding day.

[00:20:13] Spassky immediately joined her to live in Paris because he believed that she would never be allowed to return.

[00:20:20] In spite of the fact that Spassky was allowed to keep his Soviet citizenship, this was a real [blow](#)⁹⁶ for the Communist party.

[00:20:28] Worse was to come.

⁹² extremely ugly or bad

⁹³ events before

⁹⁴ a disease that is spread through sexual activity

⁹⁵ the last in a series of bad things that happened to make him very upset or angry

⁹⁶ hit

[00:20:31] 1976 was also the year when Korchnoi fled.

[00:20:35] The final push for him came after his loss to [regime](#) favourite Karpov in a 1974 Moscow chess tournament. The press had been criticising him harshly and his state salary had been reduced.

[00:20:51] Ever since 1974, Korchnoi had been looking for any opportunity to [defect](#). This came when he played at a chess tournament in Amsterdam in 1976. After the match, he simply didn't turn up to the airport for his return flight. Instead, he went to the nearest police station to ask for [political asylum](#)⁹⁷.

[00:21:14] By 1978, before the Manila world tournament, he was a stateless resident in Switzerland.

[00:21:21] This was why it was [paramount](#)⁹⁸, it was extremely important, for the USSR that their party loyalist Karpov should stay on top at the 1978 world championship.

[00:21:34] For him to be beaten by a stateless [defector](#)⁹⁹ and critic of the [regime](#) would be a huge [propaganda blow](#) for the country.

⁹⁷ protection as a political refugee

⁹⁸ extremely important

⁹⁹ someone who abandoned his country in favour of another one

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[00:21:43] Orders to support a Karpov victory at all costs originated from the leader of the USSR himself, Leonid Brezhnev, filtering down to the head of the KGB, and then to the head of KGB's [shadowy](#)¹⁰⁰ agency, the 'Fifth Directorate'.

[00:22:00] To boost his chances, Karpov was sent to Manilla with an [entourage](#)¹⁰¹ of 12 KGB personnel.

[00:22:07] Back in the USSR, the KGB had already imprisoned Korchnoi's son on [spurious](#)¹⁰² charges to [put off](#)¹⁰³ his father before the match.

[00:22:18] The British [grandmaster](#) Michael Stean would later say that the 1978 Manilla tournament was the 'most [bewildering](#)¹⁰⁴ and dirty' championship match in the history of chess.

[00:22:31] Both sides [resorted](#)¹⁰⁵ to [outlandish](#)¹⁰⁶ measures, ridiculous and unbelievable lengths, to give their players an advantage.

¹⁰⁰ secret, mysterious

¹⁰¹ a group of people surrounding him

¹⁰² false

¹⁰³ cause him to lose interest and distract him

¹⁰⁴ confusing, complicated

¹⁰⁵ did it as a final solution

¹⁰⁶ too strange and unusual to accept or like

[00:22:40] The second game already gave [indications¹⁰⁷](#) that this would be no ordinary match.

[00:22:46] When Karpov was given a pot of yoghurt by his [handlers¹⁰⁸](#), the Korchnoi team was [up in arms¹⁰⁹](#), saying that the pot was a coded instruction to Karpov, a secret message, about game strategy.

[00:23:00] In perhaps the strangest tactic ever used in the game, the KGB used a [parapsychologist¹¹⁰](#) named Zoukhar to [destabilise¹¹¹](#) Korchnoi mentally.

[00:23:12] Korchnoi claimed that this famous Soviet [hypnotist¹¹²](#) was there to [hypnotise¹¹³](#) him from the audience stand by [staring¹¹⁴](#) intently at him.

¹⁰⁷ signs

¹⁰⁸ people who managed or directed him

¹⁰⁹ very angry, protesting in an intense way

¹¹⁰ someone who studied paranormal or "psychic" phenomena such as telepathy or knowing the future

¹¹¹ upset, damage

¹¹² someone who put people into a mental state like sleep, in which their thoughts could be easily influenced

¹¹³ put him into a mental state like sleep, in which his thoughts could be easily influenced

¹¹⁴ looking in a fixed way

[00:23:22] By the eighth game, the [jury](#)¹¹⁵, the people controlling the game, decided to move Zoukhar to a row further back to prevent him from [disrupting](#)¹¹⁶ the player's concentration.

[00:23:35] By the nineteenth game, Korchnoi's team brought out its own group of [parapsychologists](#)¹¹⁷, in addition to two [cult](#)¹¹⁸ leaders from a [sect](#)¹¹⁹ called Ananda Marga, who came dressed in [saffron](#)¹²⁰ [robes](#)¹²¹, bright red [cloaks](#)¹²².

[00:23:51] These [cult](#) leaders sat down near the game in a [lotus](#)¹²³ position.

[00:23:57] The Soviet delegation, who referred to the [cult](#) leaders as 'terrorists', said that they must not be allowed any contact with Karpov's own team.

¹¹⁵ people controlling the game

¹¹⁶ disturbing, disorganising

¹¹⁷ people who studied paranormal or "psychic" phenomena such as telepathy or knowing the future

¹¹⁸ religious group with extreme or strange views

¹¹⁹ a group of people with different or strange religious beliefs

¹²⁰ orange-yellow

¹²¹ loose pieces of clothing reaching to the ankles

¹²² loose outer pieces of clothing without sleeves

¹²³ a cross-legged position for meditation, with the feet resting on the thighs

[00:24:08] Throughout the tournament, these **cult** leaders would train Korchnoi in mental techniques. One exercise they got him to do was to **pierce**¹²⁴ an orange that symbolised his opponent Karpov's head.

[00:24:21] It has also been claimed that, had it looked like Korchnoi was going to win, the KGB agents would have found a way to stop the game and **poison**¹²⁵ Korchnoi's food, so that he would be killed instead of beating the Soviet champion.

[00:24:37] After 32 gruelling games, including 21 draws, Karpov finally won the match and held onto his world title.

[00:24:47] Upon his return to Russia, he was congratulated by Brezhnev and awarded the Order of the Red Banner of Labour.

[00:24:55] Soviet Russia had won, but only just.

[00:25:00] In 1981, Karpov won once more time against his **dissident**¹²⁶ rival Korchnoi, but his **supremacy** wasn't last.

[00:25:08] Soon, he would face a much more formidable challenger in the form of Garry Kasparov.

¹²⁴ make a hole in it using a sharp tool

¹²⁵ put a substance that was capable of causing death in it

¹²⁶ challenging, opposing

[00:25:15] When Karpov first played Kasparov in 1975, he beat the young [contender](#)¹²⁷ easily.

[00:25:22] But in 1984, when they met again to compete for the world title, the balance of power had shifted.

[00:25:30] After losing the first nine games, Kasparov recovered in spectacular style. He won for the very first time against Karpov, the former world champion and [darling](#)¹²⁸ of the Soviet State.

[00:25:44] Like Korchnoi before him, the [rebellious](#)¹²⁹ Kasparov was never fully trusted by the [regime](#).

[00:25:51] Even as a teenager, Kasparov was very critical of Communism. Yet despite efforts by the party to [hinder](#)¹³⁰ his career, to stop his career, Kasparov would become perhaps the greatest chess player of all time.

[00:26:07] Once the Communist [regime](#) fell in 1989, he left the party and in 2013, he left Russia altogether to escape political persecution. Since then, he has been a [vocal](#) [champion of](#)¹³¹ Western liberal democracy.

¹²⁷ competitor, challenger

¹²⁸ someone who was very much loved by

¹²⁹ showing a desire to resist authority or control

¹³⁰ stop

¹³¹ someone who openly supported it

[00:26:22] And today, he is one of the most famous and [outspoken critics](#)¹³² of Vladimir Putin.

[00:26:29] On the surface, chess provided huge [propaganda](#) victories for the Soviets. The country won all but one World Championships from 1948 to 1990.

[00:26:40] However, this could not disguise the fact that the [regime](#) had created a society hostile to creatives and intellectuals.

[00:26:49] Many of the chess players who left did so because they felt managed by their government in a way that [suffocated](#)¹³³ their talents.

[00:26:57] And what about the politics of chess in the present day?

[00:27:02] Since 2017, many foreign policy experts have argued that a new Cold War is beginning.

[00:27:10] This time, the Eastern [powerhouses](#)¹³⁴ of China and Russia are challenging the Western might of America and Europe.

[00:27:18] And chess is still a powerful [metaphor](#) for conflict, a point of comparison used by commentators and chess players alike.

¹³² people who express their disapproval or disagreement with him

¹³³ caused them to be trapped, limited

¹³⁴ countries with a lot of power and influence

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Chess & The Cold War

[00:27:27] In an [eerily](#)¹³⁵ familiar echo of Cold War thinking, the anti-Putin chess [grandmaster](#), Garry Kasparov tweeted in April of 2022: “Putin’s war on Ukraine is not chess, it’s true. But it is black and white, good vs evil.”

[00:27:47] OK then, that is it for today's episode on Chess and the Cold War.

[00:27:52] I hope it's been an interesting one, and that you've learnt something new.

[00:27:56] As always, I would love to know what you thought about this episode.

[00:28:00] Are you a chess player?

[00:28:01] What do you think causes this game, above almost every other, to be used as a [metaphor](#) for military conflict?

[00:28:09] For the Russian listeners out there, how are these chess players remembered in your country?

[00:28:15] I would love to know, so let’s get this discussion started.

[00:28:19] You can head right into our community forum, which is at community.leonardoenglish.com and get chatting away to other curious minds.

[00:28:27] You've been listening to English Learning for Curious Minds, by Leonardo English.

¹³⁵ in a strange and frightening way

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Chess & The Cold War

[00:28:32] I'm Alastair Budge, you stay safe, and I'll catch you in the next episode.

[END OF EPISODE]

Key vocabulary

Word	Definition
Outsmart	defeat by being smarter
Flashpoint	a point of serious disagreement or dispute
Propaganda	information used to affect people's opinions while not showing the whole truth
Pushback	negative reaction
Grandmasters	chess players of the highest class
Grandmaster	chess player of the highest class
Prestigious	causing respect and admiration
Caught up	involved, in the middle of
Stand-off	a situation in which both sides were equally competing against each other
Owed to	was caused by
Showcasing	showing, displaying

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Chess & The Cold War

Collaborated	worked (with)
Regime	government
Showered him	covered him
Privileges	advantages
Humble	simple
Assets	very useful and valuable people
Plunged	caused to move or fall
Sole	only
Unchallenged	accepted by everyone, not questioned
Irreconcilable	opposite, conflicting
Supremacy	the leading position
Dwarfed	cause them to seem small or insignificant in comparison
Carved the world up	separated or shared the world
Bloc	a group of countries with similar political interests
Orbit	area of influence

Chess & The Cold War

Stark	simple, obvious
Ally	agree officially to support
Stockpiled	collected and kept for future use
Manic	full of activity, wild
Provocation	action planned to make the other angry
Tensions	intense states of disagreement or hostility
Held out	continued to exist
Hawk-eyed	watching very closely
Bubbled away	continued to be intense
Reigned	was the most important one
Statesmanship	the quality of making good decisions like an experienced politician
Constrained	limited, regulated
Strive	fight each other
Bloodshed	killing and violence
Blueprint	design plan

Chess & The Cold War

Formulated	developed or presented all the details of it
Marshal	bring together
Containment	involving the prevention of the expansion of states
Shaped	formed
Presided over	controlled
Encroach on	go into
Resort to	use it as a final solution
Canny	clever
Prospect	possibility
Metaphor	something considered as representative or symbolic of it
Sneered	laughed
Sponsored	financed, supported financially
Vulgar	of low quality and showy
Gratification	pleasure, satisfaction
Edge	advantage

Chess & The Cold War

Enthusiastic	showing great interest and excitement
Initiatives	activities, proposals
Acumen	brainpower
Cognitive	relating to thinking
Lobbied	tried to persuade or to make them do it
Discourage	make them feel less positive about them
Fuelled	supported, powered
Broke out	began suddenly
Hooked on	very interested in
Striking	very noticeable and amazing
Strained	worrying, difficult
Counterparts	chess opponents
Rollback	a strategy that involved forcing a change in the major policies of the state
Proxy wars	wars between smaller countries that each represented the interests of the two larger powers, and had support from them

Chess & The Cold War

Cultivated	prepared, planned
Exception	something that didn't follow that rule
Blocs	groups of countries with similar political interests
Nurtured	took care of
Stipend	salary
Temperament	nature, personality
Wary	nervous
Outspoken	expressing strong opinions very directly
Temperamental	changing moods without reason, unpredictable
A thorn in the side	annoying, causing problems
Non-conformist	someone who thought in a way that was different from other people
Defect	abandon his country in favour of the opposing one
Prodigy	a young person with amazing qualities or abilities
Hierarchy	ruling body or group arranged in ranks
Unpredictable	likely to change suddenly and without reason

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Chess & The Cold War

Deferential	respectful, obedient
Asset	a useful and valuable person
Culminated	reached its highest point of development
Crucial	extremely important
Retain	keep
Troublesome	causing problems
Hideous	extremely ugly or bad
Lead up	events before
Venereal disease	a disease that is spread through sexual activity
Final straw	the last in a series of bad things that happened to make him very upset or angry
Blow	hit
Political asylum	protection as a political refugee
Paramount	extremely important
Defector	someone who abandoned his country in favour of another one
Shadowy	secret, mysterious

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Chess & The Cold War

Entourage	a group of people surrounding him
Spurious	false
Put off	cause him to lose interest and distract him
Bewildering	confusing, complicated
Resorted	did it as a final solution
Outlandish	too strange and unusual to accept or like
Indications	signs
Handlers	people who managed or directed him
Up in arms	very angry, protesting in an intense way
Parapsychologist	someone who studied paranormal or "psychic" phenomena such as telepathy or knowing the future
Destabilise	upset, damage
Hypnotist	someone who put people into a mental state like sleep, in which their thoughts could be easily influenced
Hypnotise	put him into a mental state like sleep, in which his thoughts could be easily influenced

Chess & The Cold War

Staring	looking in a fixed way
Jury	people controlling the game
Disrupting	disturbing, disorganising
Parapsychologists	people who studied paranormal or "psychic" phenomena such as telepathy or knowing the future
Cult	religious group with extreme or strange views
Sect	a group of people with different or strange religious beliefs
Saffron	orange-yellow
Robes	loose pieces of clothing reaching to the ankles
Cloaks	loose outer pieces of clothing without sleeves
Lotus	a cross-legged position for meditation, with the feet resting on the thighs
Pierce	make a hole in it using a sharp tool
Poison	put a substance that was capable of causing death in it
Dissident	challenging, opposing
Contender	competitor, challenger

Darling	someone who was very much loved by
Rebellious	showing a desire to resist authority or control
Hinder	stop
Vocal champion of	someone who openly supported it
Critics	people who express their disapproval or disagreement with him
Suffocated	caused them to be trapped, limited
Powerhouses	countries with a lot of power and influence
Eerily	in a strange and frightening way

We'd love to get your feedback on this episode.

What did you like? What could we do better?

What did you struggle to understand?

Let us know in the forum community.leonardoenglish.com