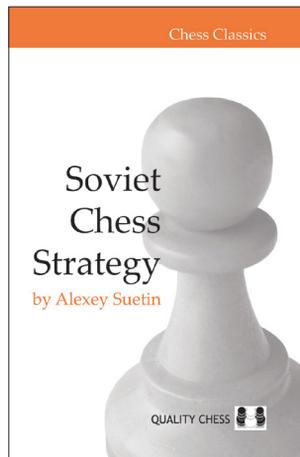


Chess Classics

Soviet Chess Strategy

By

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Chapter 1

General Questions of Strategy and Tactics

The game of chess has many facets. Its attraction lies above all in the inner beauty of its ideas – its aesthetics. At the same time the laws of logic are applicable to it – which is what constitutes its affinity with science. The development of creative thought in chess, especially since the Renaissance era, vividly demonstrates that chess is an inseparable part of world culture.

By what process do the artistic ideas of chess arise? In what does the logic of chess find expression? This question, of no small importance, is what we shall illuminate first and foremost. In this connection let us ponder some widely familiar and basic chess truths.

In a game of chess the fundamental law of development is struggle. After the first few moves which are needed to bring the two opponents' forces into contact, a battle is already unfolding, in which the active means of fighting (a move, a threat, an operation, a plan, etc.) are constantly opposed by various defensive and counter-aggressive measures.

Among the principles on which the chess struggle is founded, we must include such elementary concepts as the scale of relative values of the pieces and pawns, and the fighting qualities and characteristics of each piece type. Another important factor is the role of the king in the game.

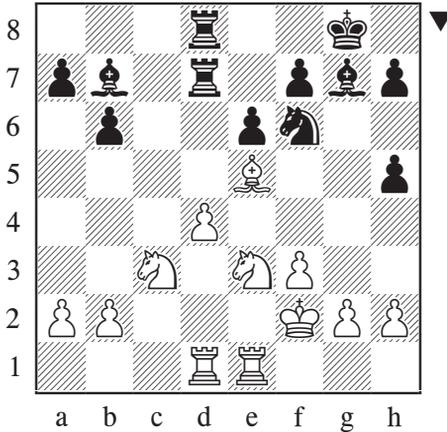
The material factor is inseparable from the various properties of the area where the battle takes place – the chessboard. Depending on its position on the board, and its interaction with other pieces – those on its own side as well as those of the opponent – the power of a fighting unit (a piece or pawn) may noticeably change. Even an inexperienced player cannot help being struck by the fact that the outward contour of the position frequently influences the strength of a particular piece. Such *positional elements* as centralization, strong and weak squares, the character of the pawn structure and so on, are generally familiar.

As we can easily see, it is in pursuit of the main aim of gaining positional and material assets that the battle is fought out. In this process (and here in fact is one of the key characteristics of the chess struggle), all the elements I have mentioned are primarily weapons in the fight. Thus in a chess game the distinction between an object of attack and the forces in action is decidedly relative. In the course of play it may sometimes happen that an object of attack is instantly transformed into an active force.

The following example is instructive.

Alexander Kotov – N. Novotelnov

Moscow 1947



An object of attack has arisen in the white camp, namely the isolated pawn on d4, against which Black has directed the pressure of his forces. The most logical move here was probably 23...♖d5, blockading the weakness. However, Black chose a more straightforward plan.

23...♖e8 24.♘c2 ♘d6?

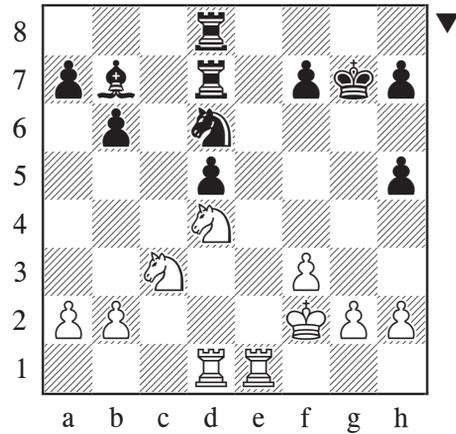
The threat of 25...♗f5 looks most unpleasant. However, Black has overlooked that the d4-pawn is not only an object of attack but also a fighting unit in his opponent's hands. Grasping the opportunity, White rids himself of his weakness.

25.d5!

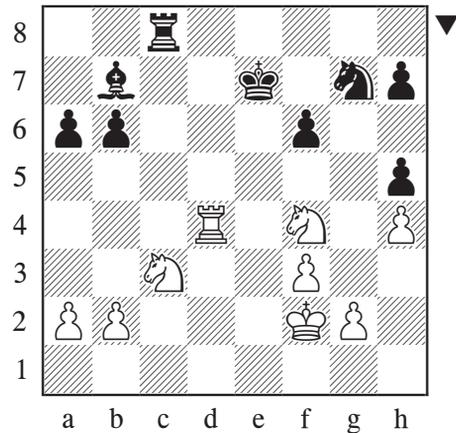
The pawn sacrifices itself, but the pieces dramatically gain in activity.

25...exd5 26.♙xg7 ♜xg7 27.♘d4!

Unlike Black, who forgot about the principle of blockade, White is firmly blocking the dangerous passed pawn on d5. It now becomes clear that Black's scattered pawns are coming under pressure. His position rapidly deteriorates.



27...♗f6 28.♘ce2 ♖f5 29.♗f4 ♘g7 30.h4
 ♙e7 31.♞xe7 ♜xe7 32.♞e1† ♜d7 33.♞e5
 f6 34.♞e2 ♞c8 35.♞d2 a6 36.♘de2 ♜e7
 37.♘c3 d4 38.♞xd4



White has regained his pawn while keeping a large positional plus, which he confidently proceeded to turn into a win.

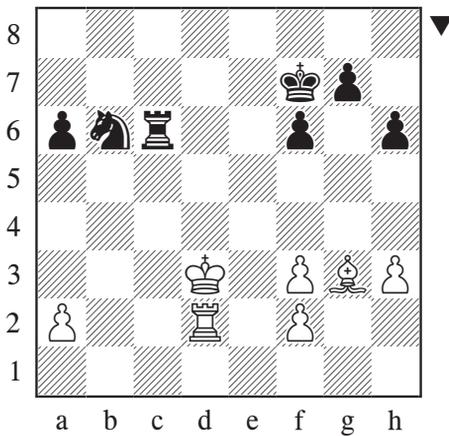
In the chess battle the distinction between *engaged forces* and *reserves* is also relative.

Naturally, if there is a major disturbance in the balance of the position, the game ought to end in one player's favour. But then we also encounter positions where just the slightest advantage in the interplay of forces creates

realistic conditions for victory. Of course there are also exceptions – such as standard endgames where a material plus proves insufficient to win, or the rare phenomenon of so-called “positional draws” where the stronger side is again unable to exploit its trumps.

Isaak Boleslavsky – Vassily Smyslov

Leningrad 1948



There are few pieces left on the board, and the position looks drawish. On each wing the pawns are numerically balanced. But on careful analysis, Black’s advantage stands out. His kingside pawn position is more elastic, and in this kind of situation the pairing of rook and knight works much better than that of rook and bishop.

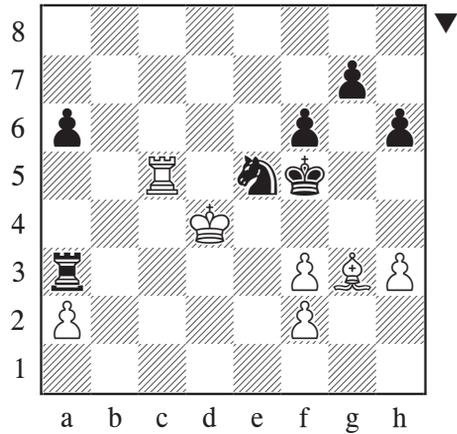
By bringing his king into play, Black strengthens his position and proceeds to exploit White’s weaknesses.

1...♖c5

The rook heads for a5.

2.♖b2 ♘d7 3.♙d4 ♖a5 4.♖c2 ♙e6 5.♖c6† ♙f5 6.♖c7 ♘e5 7.♖c5

White seeks salvation in exchanges. The following powerful move dashes his hopes.



7...♖a3! 8.♙xe5 ♖a4†! 9.♖c4

Simplifying Black’s task. After 9.♙e3 fxe5 10.♖c2 ♖a3† 11.♙e2 White could still offer prolonged resistance.

9...fxe5† 10.♙d5 ♖xa2 11.♖g4 g5

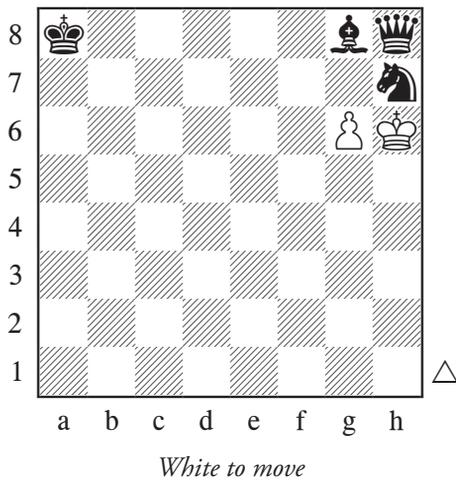
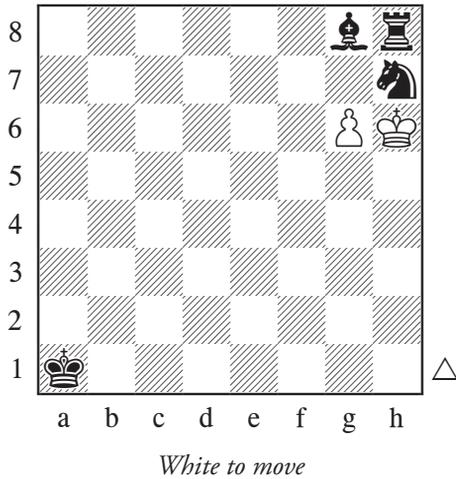
White resigned.

This example demonstrates the role of minute, sometimes barely perceptible, advantages in the chess struggle.

A game of chess amounts to a *process* of struggle, in which each move alters something more than the outward aspect of the position. All the material and positional elements already mentioned are in a state of motion. This is what defines the role of the *move*, the unit of time in chess. *Time* should also be counted among the basic factors of the struggle. If chess can be compared to a film, the frames of the film are like the positions that succeed each other with each move in the game.

The concept of a chess position embraces the elements of space, time, the material correlation of forces, and also the way the pieces are arranged – their mobility, co-ordination and so forth. This last factor undoubtedly plays a most important role in the game. Sometimes you can acquire an advantage in material, in time and in space, but still not win.

I will give a pair of examples.



In the first position Black has an overwhelming material plus, but the co-ordination of his pieces is in disarray. After 1.g7 he is forced to cease resistance. In the second position, after 1.g7, Black is still unable to win: 1...♔xg7† 2.♕xg7, and White proceeds to pick up one of the minor pieces.

A game of chess develops according to the principles of strategy and tactics.

The *strategy* of chess embraces questions about the general co-ordination of the fighting forces that are employed to achieve the key aims at a particular stage of the struggle. The basis of strategy is a *plan* – a purposeful method of action. As the art of chess develops, strategic plans are enriched by constantly adopting new forms. Of course, many new plans later become accepted as “standard”.

A plan in a game of chess is always founded on an *evaluation* of the position from which the plan begins – an appraisal of the essential peculiarities of that position. The game plan is a guideline to be followed during the struggle. If the conditions of the struggle alter, so does the plan – since every change in the position, sometimes even just a minor one, demands new strategic decisions.

Planning always accompanies a chess game from the first move to the last, as though illuminating its course. Sometimes the strategy of the game stands out in bold relief. At other times it becomes, you might say, imperceptible. Planning recedes into the background whenever *tactics* begin to play the key role. Tactics is the second integral component in the process of the struggle.

If strategy gives a player principles for the general management of his forces, tactics demands a concrete approach to the particular position, the closest possible attention to the specific details of the conflict. As Euwe pointedly observed: “Strategy requires deliberation, tactics requires penetrating vision.”

Tactics in chess is the art of fighting. It takes account of the fighting qualities and peculiarities of the pieces, the various ways in which they act together. The plans a player has devised are implemented through tactical devices and operations.

The basis of a tactical operation is a threat (in the broad sense of the word). Threats can differ sharply in character:

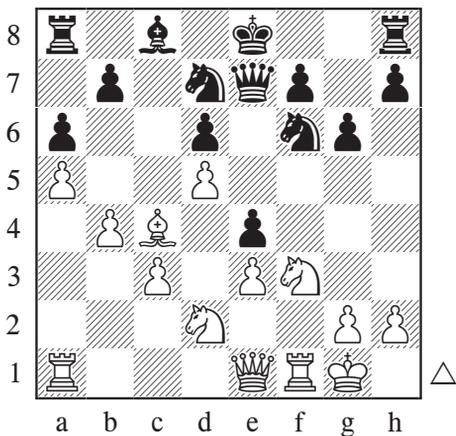
- ❖ a threat to the enemy king
- ❖ a threat to gain a material advantage
- ❖ a threat to gain space and restrict the mobility of the opponent's pieces
- ❖ a threat to exchange the opponent's attacking pieces in order to ease the defence
- ❖ and so on. This variety is one more reflection of the inexhaustible wealth of chess.

Let us look at some examples that illustrate tactical devices.

One of the effective tactical ploys is a *manoeuvre*. It is often fairly concise, consisting of two or three moves. But manoeuvres that are several moves long, outwardly striking and memorable, are not infrequent either. The following example is characteristic.

Alexander Alekhine – Siegbert Tarrasch

Mannheim 1914



20. ♖g5!

There might seem to be more point in immediately directing the knight to d4 (where it will be very actively placed) but Alekhine is in no hurry to do so. He will only occupy

d4 after a few more moves. His knight is travelling along the route f3-g5-h3-f4-e2-d4. The idea of this remarkable manoeuvre is that by means of a combinative attack against e4, White first wants to induce a weakening of Black's pawn position and thus gain control of the f5-square.

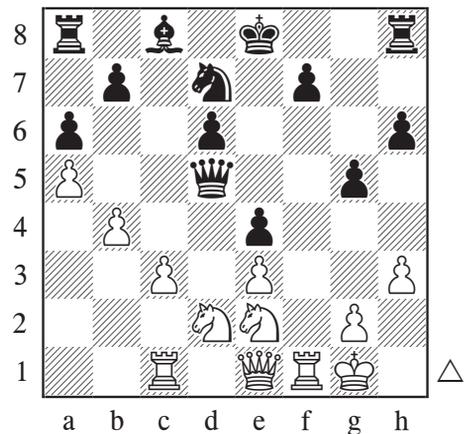
20...h6

20...♗e5 is strongly answered by 21.♙b3!
♙f5 22.♙a4† ♔f8 23.♙c2!

21. ♗h3 ♔e5 22. ♖c1 ♗g4 23. ♗f4!

The knight continues on its way.

23...g5 24.h3 ♗gf6 25.♗e2 ♗xd5 26.♙xd5
♗xd5



27. ♗d4!

The manoeuvre is completed. The possibility of invading the kingside with the knight via f5 decides the outcome of the game.

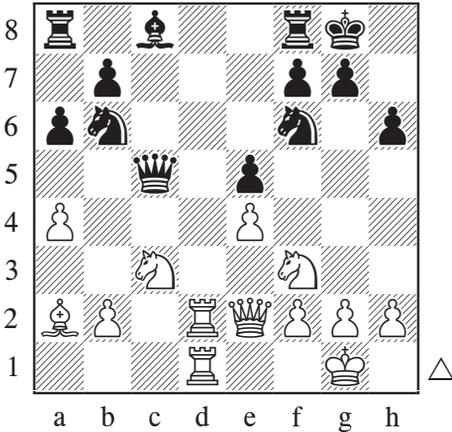
27...♔e5 28.♗c4 ♔d5 29.♗f5! ♔f8
30.♗fxd6

White soon won.

Frequently a useful tactical ploy for improving your position is exchanging your opponent's important pieces. The following example is noteworthy.

Mikhail Botvinnik – N. Sorokin

Moscow 1931



In this case it is simplification that enables White to improve his position further.

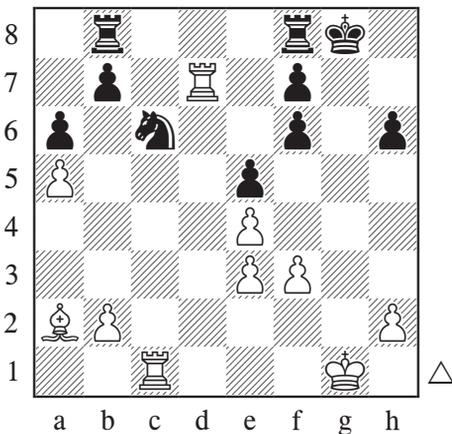
20. ♖e3! ♜xe3 21. fxe3 ♙g4 22. a5 ♘c8
23. ♖c1 ♙xf3 24. gxf3 ♘e7 25. ♘d5!

The exchanges increase White's superiority, making it easier for him to break through to the seventh rank with his rooks.

25... ♘c6

25... ♘fd5 could be answered either by 26. exd5 or 26. ♙d5 ♘d5 27. ♖xd5.

26. ♘xf6† gxf6 27. ♖d7 ♖ab8



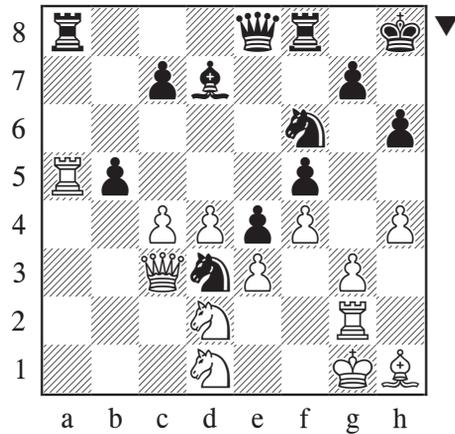
28. ♘f2! ♘xa5 29. ♖cc7 ♖bc8 30. ♖xf7 ♖xc7
31. ♖xc7† ♘h8 32. ♙d5!

White won easily.

Of course, among the range of tactical procedures, the most powerful and effective is a *combination*, which introduces an element of aesthetics and art into chess and lends it its peculiar attraction. The combination usually involves a sacrifice of material.

Efim Bogoljubow – Alexander Alekhine

Hastings 1922



Alekhine finds an exceptionally beautiful combination, drastically changing the course of the struggle to his own benefit.

29... b4! 30. ♖xa8 bxc3! 31. ♖xe8 c2!!

