

Owls Diplomacy News



NOVEMBER 2006

Welcome!

As you can see, I've tried to improve the look of the newsletter. I'm also planning to circulate this in pdf format to improve readability.

One of the youngest Diplomats on the dpjudge, Adonai Zahi, has contributed his thoughts on Russian opening play. I have written some thoughts about 'power' and Alexander Lomski has contributed an interesting analysis of country performance.

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Power Diplomacy

by Thorin Munro

What is power? I like the working definition taken from physics, that power is the rate at which work is done! Or expressed as a formula $\text{power} = \text{work} / \text{time}$. The more power you have the more work you'll be able to do. And while in a game of Diplomacy, power is more likely to be thought of in terms of influence and control, considering it in terms of 'the ability to get work done (to your advantage)' is very relevant!

Ultimately success in a game of Diplomacy will boil down to how well you can get other players on the map to work with you. Typically the way to do this is to find objectives or uncover leverage that meets others needs while also delivering your own agenda. It is all about 'power', understanding the power you have and how you go about using it...

When considering 'power' most people will immediately think of the negative connotations of power; abuse, manipulation, corruption. As a result many people have an aversion to the concept and also the use of power. It feels dirty and corrupting! However when considered in the light of power equating to the ability to get things done, power begins to have a more

constructive and useful face. In fact understanding power in all its forms and impacts becomes a key for success in Diplomacy and life!

There are six formal 'power bases' which when exercised have differing impacts on peoples actions, thinking and feelings. An awareness of these types of power and an ability to judge which power/s to exercise in a given situation, will be the hallmark of a superior Diplomat!

Power	Action	Thoughts	Feelings
Coercion	Y	-	-
Reward	Y	+/-	+/-
Positional	Y	=	=/-
Information	Y	=	+
Expertise	Y	=	+
Referent	Y	+	+

The first power base most of us learn to use is **Coercion**, Direct Force or Threat. This is the classic 'Stick' approach. "You will do what I say because if you don't there will be negative consequences". In a Diplomacy game this will usually be the threat of loss of territory, centres and elimination but it can be psychological coercion. "If you don't do what we agreed I will be angry or will form an alliance with another player," are threats that can often be very powerful. The problem with this power base is that whilst applied, it does produce immediate action in the desired direction, but there will likely be a building underground resentment and desire for revenge. If the threat or leverage is lost, there is often a reaction based on this build-up.

The next power base most people who work in a job will be familiar with is **Reward** or the 'carrot' approach. In its constructive form it can be fair payment offered for services rendered. It can however be corrupted into bribery and pay-offs. Related to Diplomacy the obvious reward is a supply centre. But a creative Diplomat will be attuned to what other players want in the context of the game, and can shape rewards in that manner. For example one player may have never survived a game, and offering that may be a strong inducement. Or another may have been wronged by a neighbour and not have the forces to do

anything about it, whereas you do... Reward is a double-edged sword. It is right to compensate someone in exchange for what you gain. However prices have a tendency to escalate, and beware the recipient finding someone else prepared to pay a higher price. Loyalty base purely on a payment is not likely to be very strong.

Positional or Legitimate power usually refers to powers vested in a specific role. Policemen, judges, managers and even game-masters have power based purely on their function and laws or agreements. It is probably not a power that accessible to players in a Diplomacy game. But there are times when a player will try to leverage the power of the game-master. Exercising legitimate power will get action but may not change attitudes. A speeding ticket will get you to slow down in the short term but how effective it is in the longer term is debatable.

The use of **Information** is a power base key to any Diplomats success. Gaining information from allies will be critical to your plans and actions. Sharing information or spreading misinformation will similarly influence actions by others. As discussed in a previous article on lying, lies are a valid element in the game, but breaking ones word is one of the most important strategic decisions you will make in the game. One of the best ways to build a reputation as a reliable ally is through the judicious sharing of information. The more credible your reputation as a source of good information the more influence you are likely to have with other players actions. This virtuous cycle can keep building until you have reached the decision to play for a solo. Being found to spread misinformation is likely to paint you as a target by others.

Closely aligned with the information power base, **Expertise** as a power base means you leverage past experience to try to influence actions. Have you had experience in a particular alliance, in organising a stalemate line, invading a country, and playing a power or with another player? Sharing this experience is a solid way to build credibility and influence action. The challenge is to do it in such a way as to avoid coming across as a know-it-all, because no one likes a know-it-all!

Finally the **Referent** or Trust power base is where you have built a credible, respectful relationship and are able to leverage it to gain action from another. Operating from this power base is likely to maintain or even enhance

goodwill and regard from others. The reward is the relationship itself. Some players are very skilled at establishing this rapport. Often it is established over time through exercising a combination of the previous power bases. But it can be built on chatting about family, holidays, politics etc. The referent power base is the hardest to build but is usually the most powerful one to be operating from. With the relationship primary, there is a great reluctance to stab or break an agreement. I would argue that in the context of the game, building this power dynamic is a strong way to play for the solo – if you are ruthless enough!

So what is the **'best'** power base to use? In my view it is purely situational. There are times when a direct threat is the only way to prevent or influence an action. The classic would be “If you attack me I will throw the game to France.” A very powerful threat, if real and carried out. However the more sophisticated power bases up to Referent are more sustainable. Threats, Reward and to some extent Positional power are only able to maintain traction through constant exercising of them. Once you remove the threat or reward or oversight, actions are very likely to shift, probably adversely to your interests.

The other factor to note is that it is rare for a power base to be present in pure form. Combinations and layers of power are used constantly. Highlighting them as discrete forms is purely to give more clarity to the range of options and levers available to Diplomats.

So remember, power is not a dirty word. You want to have as much power as possible in your Diplomacy games. This is how you will get things done. The art is to not overtly display it at all times, rather use it well and wisely. The awareness of these different forms of power will broaden your arsenal and help improve your ability to shape the fate of Europe.

Have fun!

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Russia - Operation Assorabrab

by Adonai Zahi

Early Russian power is often centered on the north or south of the board, and a few brave souls are able to juggle a split of power between the two fronts. General Diplomacy lore holds that Russia should grow from the Balkans, and then shift their eye north and west. Most players are comfortable with sticking to this standard strategy... and are

often called crazy if they deviate from it. If you agreed with three sentences above, I hope to change your viewpoint. If you're one of those 'crazy' players up for a little fun, what follows should suit you perfectly.

Spring 1901 - Russia
F STP/sc - GOB
A WAR - SIL

Ever seen Russia move to Silesia before? If you have, you likely played in Owls_109, which saw me attack Germany... and be promptly eliminated in 1903. That game taught me some valuable lessons concerning the move that should allow me (and you) to live past 1904, and perhaps even win!

First, the Southern Front - the Balkans often comprise the majority of Russia's growth. It's important to remember that even though your focus will be elsewhere you can still gain from the south. Even if you won't make much headway, you can pick up a Supply Center through Rumania. In Owls_109 I made the foolish mistake of ordering Moscow to Warsaw in combination with my move to Silesia. While I still smile at the look I imagine the Kaiser wore when he saw my orders, removing everything but my fleet from the South proved to be my Achilles' Heel. While the Sultan was officially at peace with me, he quickly took advantage of the situation and stabbed me... he went on to take all my cities except Saint Petersburg (that was taken by England) and later a solo. That's basically a long way for me to say that I messed up big time, and paid for it. Lesson learned - keep Moscow within reach of the south.

I therefore recommend ordering A MOS - UKR. This can be coupled with F SEV - RUM or BLA or simply H depending on your diplomatic situation. To the North things are simpler. Talk to England and France, trying to convince them to attack Germany. Mess up number two in my game was a failure to plan and coordinate with England. If the King gets on-board with your plan, you should be set. Give them a token center or two so that they stay happy and then watch England fight France in a long drawn out conflict that causes them to ignore you.

Let's look at our current situation, and if everything worked out reasonably well, gloat over the current layout.

Russia: A SIL, F GOB, A UKR, F BLA/RUM/SEV
Germany, using the moves most often seen:

F DEN, A KIE, A RUH/ BUR/MUN
Turkey: A BUL, A CON, F ANK/CON/BLA

Austria really is the wildcard. Germany and Turkey have a pretty standardised opening, with minor room for deviations that will yield approximately the same end situation. Your hope is for Austria to either be neutral, anti-Turkish, or anti-Italian. That should leave Austria with a layout similar to F ALB, A SER, A TRI/VEN/BUD. However Austria could easily move F TRI - VEN, or much to your dismay A VIE - GAL.

Diplomatically, the situation will *hopefully* be close to this; Turkey is willing to work with you against Austria, and is worrying about which way Italy will swing. Austria is interested in working with you against the Sultan, or is pre-occupied by an early Italian stab. Italy is a worry to both Austria and Turkey. France is picking up as many neutral provinces as possible, and eyeing both England and Germany. England, after seeing your desire to take down Germany, has decided to work with you. Best of all Germany is screaming its head off for help, and turning purple from the exertion.

Of course, Diplomacy is full of variables - this opening proves just how sudden the game's balance can change. One of the best parts of this opening is that you can counter nearly all of the possible problems that could arise. Below I'd like to discuss what to do with your position during the next few years:

First, what to do if everything goes through without a major hitch. You can say good-bye to Sweden - Germany is definitely not letting you in there. That leaves you with two options; uselessly bounce him with your fleet, or move F GOB - BAL. Why waste your fleet bumping with Germany when you get push right to its heart? Of course, this move is merely an appetiser to the main course of this opening; the swing unit in Silesia.

Silesia is a province that offers its occupier an amazing position. It touches 3 Supply Centers, and can greatly influence what goes on in Galicia. Using this opening the Tsar has the opportunity to exploit both advantages. First, it's a massive pain for Germany. If the Kaiser moved Munich to Ruhr, or even better Burgundy, they'll have to consider the defense of two of their home Centers. In Owls_109 the opening did not go nearly as I envisioned it, but one part did work you rather well - Germany recalled both its armies to defend it's Supply

Centers... and I ordered my army to hold. The German was deprived of one of its 'assured' builds, adding insult to injury (how often do you see a 4 SC Germany) and gaining a valuable position. From there, preferably with the help of one or both of your western now-neighbours, you can press on to Germany's heart. You'll definitely get Berlin, and you have 'dibs' on Sweden, Denmark, Munich, and Kiel.

If things in the South are going better than expected for you or Turkey or Austria, it may be worthwhile to swing your army in Silesia around to Galicia. You can even force your way into Galicia with support from Ukraine. If you want to be completely unpredictable you could move to Bohemia, though it likely won't prove to be a profitable gamble.

This isn't your typical Russian opening at the moment. Maybe everyone that reads this will be inspired to try it and I'll start a Russian opening revolution, but I doubt it. My hope with this article, though, is to make Russian players think about the left and right (well, just left) as well as up and down.

P.S. People with an interest in WW2 (ie. most players) should have figured out why I called the opening Operation Assorabrab. Assorabrab is Barbarossa spelt backward, since this opening is basically Operation Barbarossa in reverse. I thought that was pretty clever of myself...

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Analysis of Country Performance

by Alexander Lomski,

I have compared the average scores players achieve playing the various countries in the Owls series. Also to check if there are any noticeable differences in results when playing certain countries between the "elite" and "average" players.

Results table:

Power	Black &	Brown	All Players	
	Avg Score	Percent	Avg Score	Percent
Austria	15.62	11.7%	6.24	11.1%
England	15.94	12.0%	8.96	15.9%
France	22.35	16.8%	9.93	17.6%
Germany	18.57	13.9%	7.67	13.6%
Italy	17.77	13.3%	6.78	12.0%
Russia	23.26	17.4%	7.85	13.9%
Turkey	19.82	14.9%	8.91	15.8%
TOTAL	133.32	100.0%	56.34	100.0%

In the table there are two groups of players analysed. First the top two belts (black and

brown). Second, all players combined, including first two belts.

Commentary:

For all players: The best average score is achieved when playing France (9.93), followed by a close tie between England (8.96) and Turkey (8.91). Fourth place belongs to Russia, with Germany being quite close. Sixth place belongs to Italy, which is lagging behind Germany by 1.09 points, and the seventh is Austria.

What is a surprise is the low position of Russia. Despite its force advantage in the beginning of the game, it holds the fourth place and the average score for Russia is 2.08 points lower than that of France. Turkey and England seem to show a better performance than Germany - their defensive positions seem to matter more than their slow growth in the beginning.

For elite players: The best average score is achieved when playing Russia (23.26), followed closely by France (22.35). Turkey is again the third and Germany the fourth. Then follows Italy (17.77), which is noticeably higher than England (15.94). The last is Austria, though the difference between Austria and England is minimal (0.32 points).

Major surprises are high results when playing Turkey and very low results for England. We should conclude that in a game with experienced players, England performs even worse than Italy, and close to Austria.

Now regarding differences between the player's results. These are percentiles since the absolute values of the average score differ for elite and regular players. So let's see how differently elite and regular players are handling their countries.

1. Austria: No big differences, Austria always sucks (to coin a technical term).

2. England: One of the best choices for regular players, England is one of the worst choices for elite players. It seems that in the games with experienced players, cracking natural English defences is not that big a problem...

3. France: Outstanding results for both regular and elite players, though it still goes a bit better for average punter.

4. Germany: No big differences, it is an average country no matter if the player is elite or not.

5. Italy: Despite its stigmas, Italy is not that bad a choice for elite players. They earn 13.3% of their scores from games as Italy, almost the same as Germany (13.9%).

6. Russia: The country is mediocre in the hands of a regular player, but in the hands of an elite player it becomes a solo-winning monster. It seems elite players have the skill required to balance the war on two fronts.

7. Turkey: Quite a good country coming third in ranking for both regular and elite players, despite being a slow-grower.

Final Comments: I was very surprised with low performance of Russia in the hands of the average Diplomacy player. And the other notable result was the poor performance of England in the hands of the elite players.

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Owls Player Feedback

Thorin, I think I've got the origins of an **England** article coming to fruition. Got the ideas outlined (lessons learned from my games as England). Wanted to hear any thoughts / suggestions from you on writing articles for the owls newsletter. Regards, Rob Schwartz

Thorin, I am planning on writing about my favourite **German** opening for next month's newsletter. Do you have any guidelines on length or anything like that? Andrew Crollard.

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Rob and Andrew (and to all aspiring authors),

That's music to my ears! I think Jonty's early Italy and French articles are good guides. They inspired a number of players to use them in Owls games. Or if you're thinking left field creative, James's Austrian opening article was great.

I'd suggest trying to cover some aspects like:

- Intro comments about England / your experiences
- Key strategic / diplomatic considerations
- Moves / variations
- Opening / Midgame / Endgame thoughts
- Reference some of your games

Look forward to reading them. And I'm more than happy to receive a draft and give some feedback.

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Hi Thorin, I'm writing to thank you for setting up the Tournament. It is undoubtedly contributing to the enrichment of the Owls' Diplomacy playing experience.

I hope you (or someone else -- so you can take part as a player) may host such tournaments in the upcoming years as well. **[TM: Two new tournaments have just started. Chris Zepf is mastering the Dpjudge Tourney and Robert Thatcher mastering iCon. And yes the Owls Tournament will be on again in 2007].**

For future tournaments I'd like to suggest an improvement to the scoring system. The top tables of the second and third rounds of the Tournament are much more competitive than most or all other games in the Owls series, including invitational games. I don't find it quite fair that the players in those games don't even get as much as your 25% invitational bonus even though all Tournament games are originally formed as invitational. **[TM: I agree, so in Rd 2 & 3, the games in the top half will gain the 25% rating bonus when added to the Owls Rating List at end of Tournament]**

In the future, I'd much favour a system that would add a guaranteed minimum to each player's score in the second and third rounds depending on their table ranking. E.g. in a twelve-table tourney, 11 pts should be automatically added to each player's score at the Top Table, 10 pts at Table B, 9 pts at Table C etc., with zero bonus at the bottom table. What do you think about it? And do you hear anything to that effect from other players? **[TM: Thinking about this idea, I quite like the flat score per round. Much the same as in a chess tournament. It allows players to stay in the hunt after a poor start...]**

Cheers, Andrius

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Hi Thorin, I still think you should have a minimum number of games to be considered on the rating list - say 5 completed games. Cheers, Chris Burgess. **[TM: I agree that 5+ games gives a truer indication of playing ability. Splitting the list is just a little more work than I can do right now!]**

**Thorin Munro
Sydney, 1st November 2006.**