

FIDE President Folke Rogard
the lawyer who organized modern chess
in the shadow of the cold war
Henrik Malm Lindberg

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Author: Henrik Malm Lindberg

Editor: Daniël Vanheirzeele

Typeset: Dirk Dewitte

Proofreading: Andrew Burnett

Cover Design: Mieke Mertens

Picture back cover: Henrik Malm Lindberg

Production: BESTinGraphics, Belgium

ISBN 9789083429038

D/2024/31732/13

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All sales or enquiries should be directed to Thinkers Publishing, 9850 Landegem, Belgium.

E-mail: info@thinkerspublishing.com

Website: www.thinkerspublishing.com

First edition 2024 by Thinkers Publishing.

This book is printed on environmentally friendly paper.

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Acknowledgement

Never before in any scholarly work have I required, requested, and received so much help. Therefore, I am deeply grateful to numerous scholars, chess historians, chess officials and players, archive personnel, the Rogard family, and many others. The journey I have spent with Folke Rogard and his career as a chess organizer now comes to a halt with this book, but not a full stop, I assume.

This research has relied on the use of archives and libraries, as well as the dedication of archivists and librarians. First and foremost, I thank the library of Tresoar in Leeuwarden and its distinguished staff. Tresoar also aims to make chess and other mind games more known to the general public and Martha Kist, in charge of that effort, and her colleagues always gave me excellent service. At the World Chess Hall of Fame, Nicole Tessmer provided me with material I did not know about. The Cleveland Public Library and John G. White Collection assisted me with material many times, and my gratitude goes to Raymond Rozman, among others. The National Archives of Sweden, especially the great staff in Arninge, were fundamental in the early stages of this work, and I could not have managed to get a grip on the material without them.

The proofreaders Lars Falk and Peter Holmgren have had a busy schedule reading my manuscripts but have always delivered excellent comments both in style and in content, thereby showing their encyclopaedic knowledge on many issues. I extend a special thank you to all my friends at Schackets Kulturhistoriska sällskap, Calle Erlandsson, Peter Holmgren, Uno Karlsson, Tomas Silfver, and the chairman, Arne Johansson, who all have given valuable support. The Swedish Chess Federation, led by chairman Håkan Jalling, along with staff, have also provided good help in different ways.

Members of Folke Rogard's family have been of great help during the process: Jonas Cronqvist, Mats Erik Cronqvist, Per Haukaas, Anita Rogard, Lena Tabori, Helen Wiven Nilsson, and Jonas Wiven Nilsson should be mentioned in particular. Your relative, Folke, turned out to contain so many interesting stories and sides that it was impossible to include them all, but I trust my efforts have enhanced our understanding of him as a chess organizer.

Many others have guided me in various ways throughout my endeavours. Everything from details, pictures, stories, sources, corrections, and company have been given from all the following:

Jan Berglund, Tor Bergman, Georges and Marianne Bertola, Leslie Bisno, Rolf Bowin, Øystein Brekke, John Donaldson, Willy Iclicki, Börje Jansson, Sthig Jonasson, Terje Kristjansen, Morten Lilleøren, Nils Lundahl, Claes Løfgren, Benjamin Martin, Ingrid Malm Lindberg, Juan Sebastian Morgado, Per Ofstad, Fridrik Ólafsson, Stellan Persson, Cecil Rosner, Henri Serryus, Andrew Soltis, Kevin Spraggett, Peewee Van Voorthuijsen, Olof Wenell, Michael Wierzbicki, Eric De Winter, Edward Winter, and Stephen Wright.

Abbreviations

AACM	Association of American Chess Masters
ACSF	All-China Sports Federation
AMPO	Allied Military Permit Office
ATO	Allied Travel Office
BCF	British Chess Federation
BCM	British Chess Magazine
CFC	Chess Federation of Canada
CFSA	Chess Federation for Southern Africa
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
DSU	Danish Chess Union (Dansk Skakunion)
FADA	Argentine Chess Federation (Federación Argentina de Ajedrez)
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
FFE	French Chess Federation (Fédération Française des Échecs)
FIDE	The World Chess Federation (Fédération International de Échecs)
FRG	Federal Republic of Germany (Bundesrepublik Deutschland)
GDR	German Democratic Republic (Deutsche Demokratische Republik)
GSB	Greater German Chess Federation (Grossdeutscher Schachbund)
HNSF	Hungarian National Sport Federation
ICF	Icelandic Chess Federation (Skáksambands Íslands)
IOC	International Olympic Committee (Comité international Olympique)
ISC	International Student Conference
IUS	International Union of Students
KNSB	The Dutch Chess Federation (Koninklijke Nederlandse Schaakbond)
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NCF	Nordic Chess Federation (Nordiska schackförbundet)
NSA	National Students Association
NSF	Norwegian Chess Federation (Norsk Sjakkförbund)
PCF	Philippine Chess Federation (National Chess Federation of the Philippines)
PRC	Peoples Republic of China i.e. Mainland China

RA	The National Archives of Sweden (Riksarkivet)
RF	The Swedish Sports Confederation (Riksidrottsförbundet)
ROC	Republic of China i.e. Taiwan
RWR	American Committee for Russian War Relief
SAP	Social Democratic party (Socialdemokratiska Arbetarepartiet)
SASK	Stockholm's Common Chess club (Stockholm's Allmänna Schackklubb)
SEK	Swedish krona, currency code
SFS	Sweden's United Student Unions (Sveriges förenade studentkårer)
SKP	The Communist Party of Sweden (Sveriges Kommunistiska Parti)
SSF	The Swedish Chess Federation (Sveriges schackförbund)
SSL	Finnish Chess Federation (Finlands Schackförbund/Suomen Shakkilliito)
SSS	Stockholm Chess Society (Stockholms schacksällskap)
StSF	The Stockholm Chess Federation (Stockholms schackförbund)
SÄPO	Swedish Security Service (Säkerhetspolisen)
TfS	Tidskrift för Schack
TT	TT News Agency (Tidningarnas Telegrambyrå)
UASS	Upsala Chess Club (Upsala Allmänna Schacksällskap)
UN	United Nations
USCF	United States Chess Federation
USD	United States dollar, US Currency code
USSR	Union of Socialist Soviet Republics
VOKS	All-Union Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries (Vsesoiuznoe Obshchestvo Kul'turnoi Sviazi s zagranitsej)

1

Introduction

On the evening of March 15, 1951, in the Tchaikovsky Concert Hall in Moscow, the day before the opening game in the match between the reigning champion Mikhail Botvinnik and the challenger David Bronstein, FIDE President Folke Rogard spoke to the audience. It was an evening of festivities where invitees drank and toasted to the coming match as well as to the beauty of chess. Folke Rogard addressed the ways in which FIDE¹ managed international chess and what chess may contribute to and signify for global friendship. He asked the audience rhetorically: “...how is a good and sincere international cooperation possible in these days of misunderstandings and suspicions...” He responded by stating that FIDE had such ambitions: “...The World Chess Federation [is] an organisation working not only for chess and chess players, but also for human brotherhood all over the world”. Rogard emphasized the federations’ unity and solidarity, as well as the need to strengthen the chess community.²

Two days after the inauguration, Rogard had another tone in his message to his FIDE vice president, Viacheslav Ragozin. His voice was worried because, to put it gently, the present state of FIDE and the Soviet actions had raised concerns. It was evident, even without using plain language, that Rogard did not appreciate the Soviet Union’s boycott of several international events and tournaments. As for improving international chess and fostering understanding, Rogard stated: “FIDE is a fine instrument but not strong enough to resist too many difficulties”. And now the lack of cooperation has put the whole organization at risk.³



Folke Rogard at the World Championship match between Botvinnik and Bronstein in Moscow, 1951.

1 FIDE stands for Fédération Internationale de Échecs. In the material I have researched, it is often written as F.I.D.E., and nowadays Fide is sometimes used, but in the book FIDE is commonly used.

2 Script for speech held by Folke Rogard on March 15, 1951, FIDE-archive Tresoar.

3 Letter Folke Rogard – Viacheslav Ragozin, 17th March 1951, FIDE-archive Tresoar

These two tiny fragments of chess history allude to the two main themes in this book. Firstly, the organization of modern chess, a feature that Rogard took very seriously from the point he started out as chess organizer in the late 1910s up until he left the FIDE presidency in 1970, half a century later. Secondly, Rogard's efforts took place within the context of the Cold War. Both sides in this struggle for world dominance also sought to win the "hearts and minds" at home and abroad, and chess became a major arena in that regard. But the Cold War also affected chess in other ways since it significantly added to the difficulties for FIDE in building a strong and unified chess community.

Furthermore, these fragments also point out that much was hidden from chess and other audiences regarding the events, tournaments, conflicts, and main happenings in chess history. One thing was stated in the open, and another version – sometimes less flattering – was hidden in letters and conversations that were not meant to be public. Archival research can, at least to some extent, lift the veil and uncover what really took place. Some of the events and stories in this book are certainly well known to those interested in chess and its history, but never before have they been told from the viewpoint of the FIDE President during these turbulent decades.

This book is, in one way, a biography of Folke Rogard, focusing mostly on his roles as FIDE President and organizer of modern chess. However, it only briefly discusses the other facets of his life as a father, husband, lawyer, businessman, and in private. The portrayal of Rogard primarily centers on his organization of chess and his presidency of FIDE, a position he held for more than two decades. Being in that genre, it aims to capture his personality – what his driving forces were and the constraints that held him back.

In another respect, this book is also a portrayal of the history of FIDE for two decades, when the organization was living in the shadow of the Cold War, sometimes turning hot and at other times in a milder phase. However, the book does not provide a comprehensive account of FIDE's



Folke Rogard at work during the FIDE congress in Moscow in 1956.
Private photo Margareta Bowin collection

history, as it omits or only briefly mentions many important aspects. The FIDE motto *gens una sumus* — literally *we are one nation*, meaning that players are united by the common bond of chess — has always interfered with and been disturbed by politics. Before, during, and after the Rogard presidency, it is no understatement to claim that politics has interrupted but also shaped world chess. Since Rogard made his significant contribution during the Cold War, we must also place ourselves in that frame of mind in order to understand what happened.

The phrase: “... who organized Modern Chess” highlights one of the main themes, namely Rogard’s role as organizer. Being an economic historian, it was not hard to seek and find inspiration in the Austrian economist Joseph Schumpeter’s theories on entrepreneurship in the process of writing this piece. Not in the sense of introducing only technical innovations, but rather in generating new and innovative combinations of old ingredients. The entrepreneur is constantly seeking new “business opportunities” for his organization and uses his skills and expertise to create a favourable environment rather than just adjust to changing conditions.

To organize modern chess and generate these new combinations, Rogard needed to demonstrate leadership, meaning the ability to organize. That includes leadership in a variety of contexts, senses, and dimensions. Rogard repeatedly stressed the necessity for a stronger and more effective organization to promote and enhance chess in the contemporary era following World War II. The key question is how to achieve this, and the successes and challenges he faced will be a significant theme.

Readers who are familiar with modern chess will notice a significant difference between the chess world Rogard attempted to organize in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s. To begin with, it was much smaller. The first Olympiad, which Rogard hosted, had 16 teams competing; two decades later, in Siegen 1970, the number was 60, still far from the massive gathering of teams from all over the world that we see today (Chennai 2022 had 350 teams). The prizes for winning world championship contests were several thousand dollars, with a few hundred for qualifying. Furthermore, the pace was slow. World championship matches lasted months, with a best-of-24 format and games scheduled every other day. Games were adjourned and thoroughly analysed at night, which seems strange in light of the fact that we now have engines that can call the shots in seconds. The elite of the Rogard-era competed in a few top tournaments each year, playing something like 60–80 tournament games with classical time control, but players such as Botvinnik and Fischer could play much less for extended periods. Moreover, the chess varieties were more limited. There were no championships in rapid or blitz, let alone Fischerandom! Players were also restricted by rules that prevented them from competing in certain tournaments, and formats such as open Swiss tournaments were virtually non-existent. Finally, the chess infrastructure, including a universal rating and title system, was only beginning to emerge.

The term chess organizer is mentioned a lot but needs to be defined because it is used in multiple distinct contexts throughout the book. Of course, “organizing chess” might mean multiple things depending on the period and context. To help clarify, I’ve divided and distinguished the phenomenon into numerous different pieces or concepts.

The networker: To lead and organize, you will need a large network of both stronger and weaker links to be successful. By making and maintaining frequent contacts with others, you maximize the chances of gaining access to new information, expertise, and competence. However, networks connect people, which in turn can motivate and encourage them to be part of your creation. Many of the other abilities described below rely heavily on the capacity to network.

The lobbyist: All organizers must deal with political and economic restrictions, taxes, and other hurdles imposed by various agencies and authorities. The lobbyist must therefore be anchored at some place where the decisions are made in order to erase as many obstacles as possible for the organization’s success.

The mediator: Differences of interest will occur in all large organizations, but they are also inherent and unavoidable. As a result, the role of the mediator is fundamental to handling various kinds of conflicts. Mediators do not and cannot always decide the conclusion, but they can help the parties focus on the important issues needed to reach a resolution and convince them to see the larger vision rather than their own self-interest.

The rule maker: Chess is a game with very strict and specific rules, but in order for an organization to gain attraction and legitimacy, it is necessary to form various rules for the competitions, qualifications of different sorts, and in many other fields. Chess, like all other phenomena, requires a kind of “institutional infrastructure” which includes both official and informal rules, standards, and procedures that allow the organization to function properly.

The inspirer: This term refers to an important feature for organizers, namely how they can gain attention and power over time. With the help of features like charisma, an organizer can lead, motivate, and inspire members of the organization to follow and go above and beyond their initial commitment. Followers could be employees, colleagues, and also the press and media.

Chess during the Cold War

The Cold War, or more specifically, the first half of it, served as the backdrop and principal setting for Rogard's leadership of FIDE (1949–70). When we think of the concept of the Cold War, we typically envision images of military forces from the East and West, arms races, and proxy wars. While the military side of this battle was an important feature, the main battleground was in the civilian sphere – in areas such as economy, science, and technology, as well as culture and sports.

Chess, as a subset of the two latter, was, I would argue, a very important arena with significance in many dimensions and a less explored aspect of the battle. Averell Harriman, James Byrnes, Henry Kissinger, Dwight Eisenhower, Fidel Castro, Juan Perón, Joseph Stalin, Viacheslav Molotov, Andrey Zhdanov, and Nikita Khrushchev are among the Cold War chess figures who appear from time to time. Therefore, this story frequently involves the governments of the United States and the Soviet Union as well as their respective allies.⁴

This essentially means that three countries and federations receive more attention when FIDE issues are raised. Aside from the two previously mentioned leaders of their respective camps, the United States and the Soviet Union, Sweden is also in the spotlight. As representatives from a formally neutral nation, Swedes such as UN secretary Dag Hammarskjöld, IOC president Sigfrid Edström, and FIDE president Folke Rogard could use this neutrality for personal and organizational interests.

During the last decades, the politicisation of arenas like culture and sports and the notion of a “Cultural Cold War” have attracted tons of scholarly attention, and I am neither able to sum up the literature in this burgeoning field nor is this book the right place for such an effort. The Cold War essentially shaped a new arena for competing amongst great powers; new tools and avenues were created as well as ways to transfer and “sell” ideas and values that could give an advantage in winning the minds of common people either at home or abroad.⁵

A main theme in the book is chess as one of the cultural fronts during the Cold War, yet another sport with such a role. Such studies have primarily focused on diplomatic intent, cultural exchange, and the restructuring of the international sports community.⁶ During the Cold War, sport served as both a key policy initiative and a tool for other foreign policy ambitions. Sports – in the same way as music, the arts, literature, and dance – could emerge as symbols of national prestige, and successes could

4 Stevens, T. (2005)

5 Gienow-Hecht, J. (2010) pp. 398–399

6 Souvik, N. (2018) p. 180

symbolise the superiority of a political system.⁷ The term “sport diplomacy” can be defined as a tool used by various governmental actors to carry out a larger and more comprehensive political agenda. This understanding of sports diplomacy is part of a state’s overall diplomatic efforts. During the Cold War, the link between sport and politics became increasingly important in international affairs. Since nuclear proliferation resulted in a kind of military stalemate, confrontations in other arenas, particularly sports, assumed correspondingly greater political significance. As a result, it evolved into a formidable national policy weapon as well as an effective worldwide propaganda medium.⁸

Chess was widely used as a mega-metaphor for the real and ongoing Cold War, and it was also the classic game of expertise, an intellectual battle for dominance. Furthermore, chess serves as the foundation for a dramatic Cold War story since the game’s two diametrically opposed sides lend themselves naturally to the idea of a bipolar world conflict between similar contestants representing two different colours. Chess has often been used as a metaphor for the conflict between East and West, with each camp represented by a supreme commander: the Soviet leader and the US president. Thus, the Cold War became increasingly entangled with and tied to the game of chess.⁹

Chess in the Soviet Union was an activity that involved many thousands of people who lived, sometimes comfortably and sometimes struggling, under a hierarchical structure of players, trainers, instructors, judges, and officials. Being an integral part of something of utmost importance, chess was thoroughly and consistently saturated with propaganda.¹⁰ The view that chess could – and should – serve political purposes was put forward after the Bolshevik victory in the Civil War. As a result, the game was a means of raising the cultural level of ordinary men, stimulating their minds and thoughts, and making them more likely to study and take part in society. Therefore, in the Soviet Union, chess activities were Government financed and organized, and the number of players rose enormously from the revolution onwards.¹¹

When joining international chess after World War II, efforts were made to use the game to earn the affections of foreign countries, thereby potentially subverting them. What is most certainly less known is that the US also, at least to some extent, had chess on the radar and was able to utilise it as one of the many tools in foreign policy, sometimes counteracting Soviet actions and at other times using it more aggressively.

7 Wagg, S. & Andrews, D. J. (2007)

8 Domer, T. (1976); Rider, T. (2011)

9 Sprengeler, M. J. (2013)

10 Sosonko, G. (2023) p. 689

11 Richards, D. J. (1965)

The framing of competitions, tournaments, and matches was another aspect of chess during the Cold War era. The Iron Curtain, for example, obstructed certain events, occasionally preventing players from competing on the opposite side and making some international chess event venues unfeasible. This feature also puts focus on yet another theme that will be lifted, namely the way the great powers, on the one hand, attempted to use FIDE for their own purposes and, on the other, how they had to negotiate and collaborate in order to achieve the shared aim of advancing international chess.

Sports exchanges, particularly in the Soviet Union, could also serve as a means of spreading ideological propaganda. Sports contacts with Western and other non-Communist nations could help to project the image of a friendly superpower on par with or superior to the West. Exchanges with neutral, or allegedly neutral, nations, such as Sweden, may develop positive attitudes toward the Soviet Union while also projecting an image of the Soviet Union as a contemporary world power with an advanced economic and social system, i.e., something attractive and something to strive for.

Andrew Johns' reflection highlights the complexities of sports, particularly chess, during the Cold War. He writes: "...sport is at once parochial and universal, unifying and dividing, and has the potential to fundamentally affect the relations between individuals and nations".¹² This was undoubtedly a trait that Rogard possessed when he presided over world chess. Chess had the capacity to unite individuals and governments, and he consistently stressed the universal nature of the game, sensing the possibility to foster cooperation and support reconciliation while at the same time knowing perfectly well the other side of the coin.

These two themes, "organizing modern chess" and "in the shadow of the Cold War" essentially give the framework for the book but also set some kind of demarcation for what themes will dominate. Given the volume of material to investigate and the topics that are interesting, there is room for many books and studies.

For a variety of reasons, Cold War political history has largely overlooked chess. Earlier attempts to discuss this topic relied heavily on secondary sources, as well as the fact that Soviet sources were inaccessible.¹³ Some efforts have been made to cover a portion of the Cold War period with more archival material, but so far, the FIDE archive during the Rogard reign has not been used in historical research. The re-discovery of this unique material has, and will, shed more light on the organization and the context in which it worked.

12 Johns, Andrew (2014) Introduction, *Competing in the Global Arena: Sport and Foreign Relations since 1945*. in Andrew Johns and Heather Dichter (eds), Lexington Kentucky, University Press of Kentucky.

13 See, e.g., Johnson, D. (2007) *White King and Red Queen. How the Cold War was fought on the chess board.*; Soltis A. (2000) *Soviet Chess 1917–1919*; Richards, D. J. (1965) *Soviet Chess: Chess and Communism in the USSR*.