

A war among nations erupted at precisely 4 pm, South Africa time, today, June 11th. This war will last exactly 31 days, ending on July 11th.

As experts in global geopolitics and security, STRATFOR knows it's normally difficult to so definitively predict the duration of a global struggle. In this instance, however, we're talking about the FIFA World Cup. The climactic battle in this world war – the final match - will be witnessed by an estimated one billion people watching on TV, computers and mobile devices.

While the world's best football (soccer) players kick around the ball for a month, the citizens of their respective countries may be distracted from their geopolitical concerns. It should be noted, however, that the highs and lows of football passions have sent countries into fits of bliss as well as occasionally exacerbating geopolitical conflicts – from the dissolution of Yugoslavia and ethnic tensions in Spain to a war between Honduras and El Salvador. STRATFOR isn't predicting that the World Cup will cause any conflicts this year. But we'll be watching geopolitics play out at the same time that we're keeping an eye on the football matches.

So, over the next four weeks, we thought we would share with you STRATFOR's geopolitical perspective on many of the nations participating in the 2010 World Cup.

England vs. USA, Saturday 20:30 [South Africa time]

England comes to the World Cup as one of the favorites, which is a position it has gotten used to over the years. After all, it is the birthplace of football. However, it has also gotten used to World Cup disappointments, with its last (and only) title earned in 1966 when it hosted the tournament. Since then, it has been in the top four only once.

Just as its aura as a perennial football power obfuscates its World Cup disappointments, the United Kingdom is often assumed to carry more weight in world affairs than it actually does. The UK does have a lot of things going for it - permanent membership in the Security Council, nuclear power with global military reach and ranking as the sixth largest economy in the world. However, it finds itself having to consistently balance its economic interests – which tie it to the European continent – with its geopolitical "special relationship" with the United States. The two are not naturally complimentary. In fact, the UK's membership in the European Union is often perceived by Paris and Berlin as a thorn in Franco-German attempts to build an "ever closer union" precisely because of the UK's balancing act.

Furthermore, the UK today faces a budget deficit of 12 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) and a general government debt of nearly 80 percent of GDP (and steadily climbing) – numbers that at least quantitatively put it on the same level as the Club Med countries facing severe sovereign debt crises. The challenges of these economic problems will preoccupy the new government for the foreseeable future, potentially giving Germany free reign over European politics. London's inward focus comes at a time when Germany is acting again as a

"normal" country and has found its own voice.

With Germany and UK having diametrically opposed views of what the EU should be, we could see sparks flying on more than just the football pitch this summer.

Greece vs. Republic of Korea, Saturday 13:30 [South Africa time]

The World Cup will come as a welcome distraction for Greece. Facing a severe sovereign debt crisis, Athens has been forced to implement draconian austerity measures in order to secure bailout funds from the European Union and the International Monetary Fund.

Greece's fiscal problems are a symptom of a major shift in the country's geopolitical landscape that took place in 1990. Since independence in the early 18th Century, Athens has parlayed its strategic position in the Mediterranean to gain patronage from the U.K. and the U.S, allowing Greece to compete with neighboring Turkey. Since the end of the Cold War however, Greece's inability to cope with its relegation to minor league geopolitical status has contributed to the debt crisis it faces today. Greece overspent not only to keep up with Turkey militarily, but also to maintain higher than realistic living standards adopted in the early 1980s..

Now the European Union and Germany have told Greece to learn to live within its means - a lesson already embraced by the national football team. Greece earned a surprising win at the 2004 European Football Championships because it followed the advice of its German coach to play "austere" football, which in that case meant playing within its limited offensive means. Berlin and other EU capitals are hoping that Greece's fiscal policy will reflect the lesson learned on the field in 2004.