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.

Here's part 2 of our special series on the geopolitics of the 2010 World Cup:

South Africa
vs. Uruguay, Wednesday 20:30 [South Africa time]

Apartheid ended 16 years ago, and it is fair to say that South Africa has officially moved on from its transitional period. The African National Congress (ANC) party is still in power and faces no serious challengers to its rule; there currently exists no conventional military threat in the region; and South Africa's economic power is without rival in southern Africa. For all its domestic problems -- endemic crime, widespread HIV/AIDS rates and ongoing racial tensions leftover from the era of white rule -- South Africa is on the rise geopolitically.

The FIFA World Cup, then, is a symbol of that rise. The government of President Jacob Zuma sees the honor of being selected as the host nation in 2010 as recognition of South Africa's trajectory, just as Beijing viewed the 2008 Summer Olympics in a similar fashion. Zuma, in fact, recently said that 2010 would be the most important year for the country since 1994, the year Nelson Mandela was voted into office and South Africa took its first steps towards transformation into a true Rainbow Nation.

Its national team, known as "Bafana Bafana" (Zulu for "the boys"), may be the best team in the southern African cone, but is an extreme longshot to win the tournament. This makes South Africa's football program analogous to the country's geopolitical status: the best in its neighborhood, but relatively weak in comparison to the rest of the world.

USA
vs. Slovenia, Friday 16:00 [South Africa time]

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