

# **Pan Inspector**

**A Chess Biography of Yuri Sakharov**

Mykola Fuzik

in close cooperation with Vladimir Sergeev

**Pan Inspector: A Chess Biography of Yuri Sakharov**

**Author: Mykola Fuzik in close cooperation with Vladimir Sergeev**

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Front cover: Yuri Sakharov with Leonid Stein and Viktor Korchnoi, Kiev, during the 32<sup>nd</sup> Soviet Championship, 1964/65. From Efim Lazarev's archive

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“You’re pretending everything’s just as it was before.”

J.B. Priestley, *An Inspector Calls*

## Author’s Preface

One of my favorite pastimes for many years was devouring “tasty” chess history books. I wasn’t even thinking about creating anything in this genre myself, even after I started regularly writing about chess and other topics. After all, there’s a huge difference between an article (of which I’ve written quite a lot in the last twenty-plus years) and a book (unless you’re simply publishing a collection of your old articles). The huge effort required to publish my book on Isaak Lipnitsky in Ukraine in the Russian language in 2018 was more of a “disappointing exception” (its eventual publication was the result of a long chain of random events, though its publication in 2024 in English as *Critical Theory: A Chess Biography of Isaak Lipnitsky* with Elk and Ruby was naturally a far smoother experience), and I thought back then that repeating such a feat would be impossible. I didn’t see any possible “exceptions”... unless I got interested in the fate of another half-forgotten chess hero whose biography had lots of “blank spaces” and unless I was gifted an unexpected opportunity to fill those blanks.

Still, a vague exception gradually took concrete shape. Kiev chess player Yuri Sakharov (1922–1981) was known in his time as a strong master, multiple-time Soviet Championship participant, winner and prizewinner of Ukrainian Championships and other tournaments, and as a unique coach warmly remembered by his pupils even today<sup>1</sup>. However, the tragic pages of his biography could only be uncovered after the dissolution of the USSR – in publications by E. Lazarev, A. Mikhhalchishin, M. Trosman and others. But this information was fragmented and even contradictory. And so, when I sent an inquiry to the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) archive, and they found Sakharov’s declassified case file in two huge volumes, I decided that this was a sign from above.

There was also another factor at play: several of my voluntary helpers promised to share their information about Yuri Nikolaevich were I to decide to write his biography. The first of them was Tatiana Lazareva, who kept the extensive archive of her husband Efim Lazarev, who left us in 2013. The Lazarev couple had close friendly and professional ties with Sakharov – Efim Markovich

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<sup>1</sup> In this book we follow the convention of using the ‘old’ city spelling for pre-1991 events, i.e. “Kiev” in this case, and the ‘new’ city spelling for events since 1991, i.e. “Kyiv” here

played against him quite a few times in tournaments, while Tatiana Fyodorovna worked as a coach in the same club as Yuri Nikolaevich. So she shared a lot of additional information in our face-to-face interviews.

Grandmaster Vladimir Sergeev, who attended many of Sakharov's lectures at the beginning of his chess career and knew him relatively well as a coach (as well as possessing a PhD in history), started to help me actively when he learned that I was writing this book. Moreover, Vladimir, together with Efim Lazarev, once published an article about Yuri Nikolaevich in a Czech chess magazine and even planned to write his biography himself.

When we started to collaborate, Vladimir, thanks to his "grandmaster" memory, often advised me where to search for certain bits of information, and which of the older-generation players could share interesting stories. Moreover, he annotated more than fifteen games for this book and even managed to convince a number of grandmasters and masters to annotate two or three games each. I also successfully negotiated with several well-known players. At the same time, I took up the challenge to annotate several games myself. Where no source of annotations is given, they were made specially for this book.

When the work on this book was closer to the finishing line, a number of interesting materials on chess events in Ukraine were unexpectedly found in the Central State Archive of Highest Government Bodies (CSAHGB) in Kyiv by Chernihiv researcher Sergey Gorobets. Of course, I couldn't leave such a "lead" unchecked – I looked through them and used some materials for the book.

I should also mention Sakharov's family members here. When the work was in full swing, this writer was contacted by Yuri Nikolaevich's granddaughters – Natalia and Anna Savchenko – who had come across my ChessPro.ru article about their brilliant grandfather. Of course, I had a lot of questions to ask them, but their father Igor Savchenko, Sakharov's son-in-law, gradually took over the conversation.

With time, literally dozens of people helped me with this book. Therefore, I simply included everyone who made a contribution, no matter how small, in the list below. I contacted some of them through intermediaries. Many of these names are also mentioned later in the book. Contributions were wildly different – from long reminiscences or game annotations to a shared photo or some phrase said in passing and later cited here. Nevertheless, all the contributions have graced my work, and I thank my voluntary helpers from the bottom of my heart.

Alburt L., Bangiev A., Burakovsky M., Burtseva N., Chiburdanidze M., Dudkova A., Dukhovny E., Faibisovich V., Foigel I., Gasanov E., Gluzman D., Golubev M., Golubka P., Gorobets S., Grinev V., Gubnitsky S., Ivanov

# Part I

## The Life of Yuri Sakharov

### Chapter 1

### ZAKHARIY'S DESCENDANT

#### The Early Years

Information about Yuri Sakharov's early years is quite fragmentary. Even data on his birth is uncertain. The *Shakhmaty* dictionary (1990) stated that he was born on 18<sup>th</sup> September 1922 in Yuzovka (later called Stalino, and now Donetsk). This information was repeated in many subsequent publications, including Russian, Ukrainian and English Wikipedia. However, while the birth date seems to be correct (a questionnaire survived in the Central State Archive of Highest Government Bodies, with this date written by Yuri Nikolaevich himself), the case file kept in the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) archive stated numerous times that Sakharov's actual birth place was Vlasovka village of Shakhty district, Rostov Oblast. Yuri was the only child in the family.

The above details, like many others, were gleaned from the archived case file. This circumstance leads one to a gloomy conclusion: if you want to help your



*Sakharov's unclassified case file in the SBU archive.*

future biographers, you need to attract the attention of the law enforcement agencies...

But let's tap into another source – the account of our protagonist himself. In the *Ukraina* magazine (No. 37, 1968), Efim Lazarev published an article “Zakhariy's Descendant”, based on an interview with Sakharov and approved by Yuri Nikolaevich.

*“There's an oil portrait on the wall, in a blackened frame. A man in a uniform with aiguillettes, like from the Hussar Ballad movie. But what an uncanny resemblance to the owner of the apartment!.. (I can't help but hear Dr. Watson's voice from *The Hound of the Baskervilles* by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle: ‘Good heavens!’ Seriously though, when I asked Yuri Nikolaevich's family members about the fate of that portrait more than half a century later, I, unfortunately, couldn't learn anything. – M. F.)*

*‘The portrait,’ the host says, ‘is more than a hundred years old. It's our family relic, passed from one generation to the next. It portrays my distant ancestor, my great- or great-great-grandfather whose surname was Zakhariy. A common Ukrainian peasant, he became a Wachtmeister in the Tsarist army and captured some high-ranking Pasha during the Russo-Turkish War of 1829. He was rewarded for that with an officer's rank and a ‘gentrified’ surname. That's how Zakhariy became Sakharov. Since that time, there have been quite a few military servicemen in our family. Some of them returned to the land though: my grandfather worked as a land surveyor, and my father was a mining engineer. I also hear the ‘call of my distant ancestors’ and tend my own garden. Do you see?’*

*Yuri Nikolaevich shows me his palms, graced by numerous calluses. And then he offers me some strawberries grown in that garden.*

*‘Is chess also a family tradition?’ I ask.*

*‘I don't know about my grandfather, but my father liked the game. By the way, he told me that he had been good friends with the children of Nikolai Vitalyevich Lysenko since his youth and often played chess with the great composer, who shared the passion.’*

*‘So, your father probably taught you to play?’*

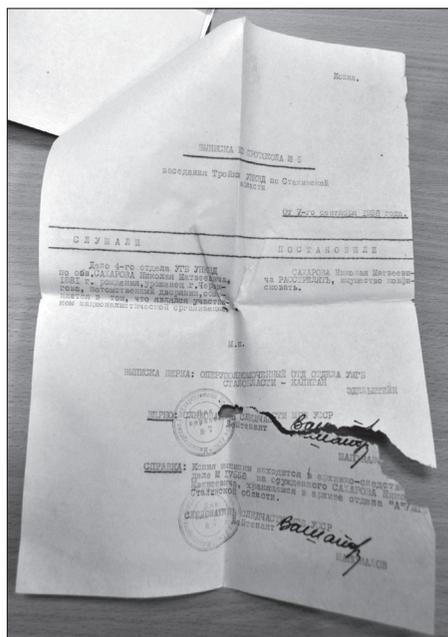
*‘Oh, it was a comical story. When I was eleven, our family was on a vacation in Kislovodsk. My father took me one day to a park where chess master Sozin was giving a simultaneous display. My old man decided to prank him: had me sit at the board, stood behind my back and suggested the moves I had to make. And I, barely knowing the moves, ‘defeated’ the master... At first I laughed together with my father, but the next day, when I saw an article about the simul in a local newspaper, where they praised me, I was embarrassed. I decided to learn to play well enough to win without outside help...’”*

Unfortunately, many things that the protagonist of the article shared with the author couldn't be published back then. For instance, information about

the subsequent fate of the chess player's father — Nikolai Sakharov. Lazarev tried to fill in that blank in post-Soviet times. But you can learn even more from the unclassified case file.

Nikolai Matveevich Sakharov was born in 1881 in Chernigov, in the family of a Tsarist army colonel, landowner and hereditary nobleman (yes, the social lift in those times could be remarkable). He gained an education that was appropriate for his social status: cadet corps, then the Mining Institute in St. Petersburg. After the October revolution in 1917, even though Nikolai Matveevich joined the ranks of the Communist Party and found a job in his trade (in 1935, he was a deputy director of the Makeevka State Research Institute for Mining Operation Safety and Mining Rescue Operations), his “untrustworthy” ancestry ultimately played a fatal role. In the mid-1930s, the Cheka started to investigate him in earnest. Soon, they “discovered” that the “target” had been engaged in espionage, sabotage, sedition and other “counter-revolutionary activities” for years. The results came quickly: in 1935, Sakharov Sr. was expelled from the party. On 20<sup>th</sup> April 1938, Nikolai Matveevich was arrested as a “member of a counter-revolutionary organization of Ukrainian nationalists,” and on 7<sup>th</sup> September, the session of the “Stalino Oblast NKVD Troika” sentenced him to execution with confiscation of property. His family members were given a standard notice, “ten years without the right to correspond,” and they only learned the truth much later.

Less is known about his mother; most of the information was gleaned from the same archival case file. Alexandra Afanasyevna Sakharova (*nee* Yumasheva), born in Podnovoloki village, Skopino uyezd, Ryazan Governorship, was 18 years younger than her husband. After the Soviet powers executed him, the widow, who was a stay-at-home mother before that, got a job as a cutter at a garment factory and additionally found enough time and strength to work privately as a tailor. She had regular customers in that role, which helped her earn enough to raise her son.



*An extract of the Stalino Oblast NKVD Troika session on Nikolai Sakharov's case stating his sentence of execution by firing squad with confiscation of property, dated 7<sup>th</sup> September 1938*

It's unknown exactly how and when the Sakharovs moved to Stalino. The details of his life before 1940 are rather obscure. Nevertheless, the well-known Donetsk chess player Apollinary Gaevsky (1897–1990) said at an interrogation dated 28<sup>th</sup> September 1951 that he'd known Sakharov since 1938–1939 and that they met at a tournament in Stalino. Vladimir Pak wrote in his book *Chess in the Miners' Land* (2001) that Sakharov referred to Gaevsky as his first chess teacher.

In 1940, Yuri Sakharov graduated from 10<sup>th</sup> grade in Stalino, but did not enroll at a university. According to his mother Alexandra Afanasyevna, at an interrogation dated 4<sup>th</sup> May 1950, the local military enlistment office intended to send Yuri to a flight school, but when they learned that he was a son of an “enemy of the people,” he was turned down. He got a job as a handyman at a bread factory and then transferred to the local chess section, presumably as a coach, although his mother's testimony does not say so explicitly; Yuri worked there until the beginning of the war.

In the same year 1940, he was first mentioned in tournament results in newspapers.

*“Stalino. Nine first-category players and five second-category players took part in the city championship. The champion's title was won by Gaevsky, a math teacher from School 67. The winner scored 10.5 points. Knyshenko, an industrial institute student, took second place with 10 points. Third place was taken by city schoolboy champion Sakharov – 9.”* (64 newspaper, No. 39 (363), 13<sup>th</sup> July 1940.)

In autumn that year, after winning the city championship, he earned the right to play in the final of the republic's championship:

*“Ukrainian SSR chess and checkers championship semi-finals were played in late October in Stalino.*

*The chess tournament was won by the young first-category player Sakharov (Stalino), who scored 8/11 without loss. Gostischev (Zaporozhye Oblast) finished second with 7.5 points. Third and fourth places were shared by Gaevsky (Stalino Oblast) and Korsakov (Voroshilovgrad Oblast), Druzhko (from Stalino) took fifth place.”* (64, No. 56 (380), 7<sup>th</sup> November 1940.)

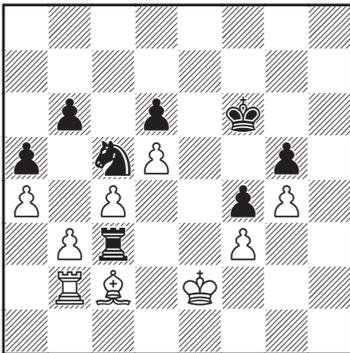
### Across Ukraine

The young player tested his strength in the final of the Ukrainian Championship for the first time; it took place in Kiev from 20<sup>th</sup> November – 11<sup>th</sup> December 1940. Isaak Boleslavsky won his third championship in a row in brilliant style, with 13/17. *“Boleslavsky lost only one game in the tournament – to Sakharov – when he tried to win no matter what in a roughly equal position,”* Konstantinopolsky and Ratner wrote in the review (*Shakhmaty v SSSR*, No. 3, 1941). Sakharov did not give a miraculous performance, though: he shared

structure, sacrificing an exchange and seizing all central squares with his pieces.” (V. Lyavdansky.)

42...♖xe3 43.♚f2 ♚f6 44.♙c2 ♜c3 45.♚e2 g5 46.hxg5+ hxg5. The Kiev player’s domination of the dark squares leaves no doubt about the position’s evaluation. Another thing is surprising: why did white prolong pointless resistance?

Sakharov’s method of winning in such positions was described to this writer by Kiev master Alexei Kosikov in Zhitomir in 1976 (Alexei Ivanovich was the head of the Avangard delegation at the Ukrainian youth championship). If his opponent did not resign in a completely hopeless position, moving the pieces as though nothing happened, Yuri Nikolaevich recommended to order a cup of tea or coffee and then, without hurrying, stir the sugar in it. If the opponent still persists, order a second cup. Interestingly enough, Master Vladimir Makogonov, the famous coach from Baku, gave similar advice to his pupils – he used the term “a couple of cakes.”



47.♙d1 ♘d3 48.♜d2 ♞c1+ 49.♚f2 ♚e5 50.♙c2 ♜e3 51.♙d1 ♞d3+ 52.♚f1 ♚d4 53.♙e2 ♚c3 54.♜d1 ♞c5 55.♚f2 ♞xb3 56.♜h1 ♞d4. White resigned.

### No. 63. Sicilian Defense B91

**Bronstein – Sakharov**

33<sup>rd</sup> Soviet Championship, Tallinn,  
1965

Annotated by M. Oleksienko

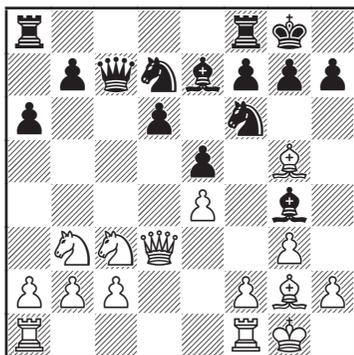
1.e4 c5. Sakharov plays his beloved Sicilian Defense – a combative opening that suited his playing style especially well.

2.♞f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♞xd4 ♞f6 5.♞c3 a6. A useful prophylactic move that defines the Najdorf Variation. Black prepares the e7-e5 push, which doesn’t work immediately because of an unpleasant check ♙b5+ that causes black a lot of trouble.

6.g3 e5. Mission complete – black has put the pawn in the center. Now the bishops can be placed behind it, on e6 and e7.

7.♞b3 ♙g4!? An interesting continuation. Black usually puts his bishop on e7 here. Now, white has to either weaken his position with f2-f3, or place his own bishop on e2 (even though he planned to develop it to g2), or, like in the game, push the queen forward, where it can be attacked by his opponent’s pieces.

8.♚d3 ♙e7 9.♙g2 0-0 10.0-0 ♚c7 11.♙g5 ♞bd7. Both sides have finished their development.



**12.f4?!** It was better to play the quiet 12.a4!?, preventing black's thematic advance b7-b5.

**12...♗e6!** Black exploits white's early queen development. He threatens to win an exchange with ♗c4.

**13.♖f3 b5.** Black executes a typical Najdorf plan. Sakharov seizes space on the queenside, where black usually has an advantage.

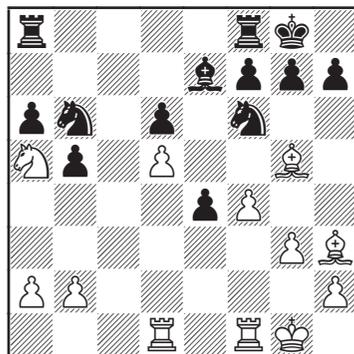
**14.♘d5.** White tries to change the nature of the position with a pawn sacrifice. Black accepts the challenge.

**14...♗xd5! 15.exd5 ♖xc2! 16.♙h3 e4.** A logical approach. Yuri Nikolaevich trades queens and gets a better endgame. Nevertheless, the white king is much more exposed, so the queen trade benefits white more. It was better to develop the rook with 16...♖fe8! or transfer the bishop to the beautiful a7-g1 diagonal with 16...♙d8!?

**17.♖d1 ♖xd1 18.♖axd1 ♘b6.** I do like this concrete approach. Black simply attacks another pawn.

**19.♘a5.** White should have strengthened the rook, not the bishop,

with 19.♖fe1. It's a stronger piece, no matter how you look at it.



**19...♘bxd5.** Again, a concrete solution! There was the more cunning 19...♖fe8! 20.♘c6 ♘fxd5! available. Now black captures the pawn with the other knight compared with the game. 21.♘xe7+ ♘xe7 22.♖xd6 ♘c4. The rook is under attack. With his next move f7-f6, black neutralizes his opponent's dark-squared bishop, obtaining a near-won position. After 19...♘fxd5 20.♙xe7 ♘xe7 21.♖xd6, on the other hand, white has good compensation thanks to his active rook.

**20.♘c6 ♖fe8 21.♘xe7+ ♖xe7 22.♙xf6 ♘xf6 23.♖xd6.** Black retains his extra pawn after trading several pieces. But his next move is an inaccuracy.

**23...h5.** In the endgame, you have to improve the position of your strongest pieces, rooks in this case. The correct move was 23...♖c7!, seizing an open file. Perhaps Yuri Nikolaevich didn't like 24.g4 (which is prevented by 23...h5). But if we

continue the line with the logical 24... ♖c2! 25.g5 ♘e8!, it turns out that white is in big trouble.

**24.♖c1!** After this precise move, white controls both open lines. Black's advantage is minimal, because it's hard for him to activate at least one rook.

**24...e3.** Endgame advice: if you have a passed pawn, push it forward!

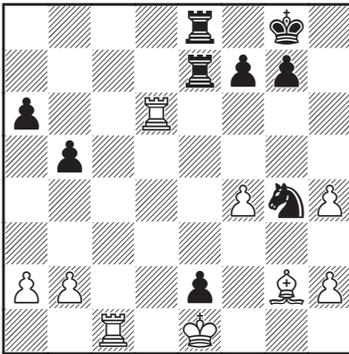
**25.♙f1.** White activates the last piece. The position is almost equal.

**25...h4.** Black tries to provoke the creation of weaknesses.

**26.♖g2.** Not 26.gxh4? ♖e4!, activating the rook and immediately regaining the material.

**26...e2+ 27.♙e1 ♖ae8 28.gxh4.** It was better to capture a different pawn – 28.♖xa6. To achieve progress, black needs to drive the king away from the e1 square, but how to do that?

**28...♞g4.** The knight's direction is unclear. I suspect that both opponents were already in time trouble.

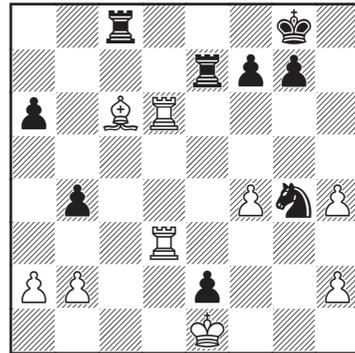


**29.♖c6??** A gross blunder! White voluntarily pins himself. After 29.♖xa6! ♘e3, any bishop retreat

is good. It's usually better to retreat with a tempo, so 30.♖c6! ♖c8. The pin is not dangerous, because white immediately gets out of it with 31.♖a8! And 29...♞xh2 loses to the same 30.♖a8.

**29...♖c8! 30.♖c3 b4. 30...♞e3!** also won. Black creates a strong threat: to capture the bishop with the rook and then give the decisive check ♞g2+. But he will need to play b5-b4 first. For instance, 31.a3 a5!, with a win in a few moves. After 31...♖xc6, however, white saves the game with 32.♖xe3!! ♖xe3 (or 32...♖xd6 33.♖xe7, 32...♖c1+ 33.♙xe2) 33.♖xc6 with a draw.

**31.♖cd3.**



**31...♞xh2?** The only winning move was 31...♙h7! It's important to avoid the rook trade! White cannot move his bishop due to the immediate ♖c1+. The d6 rook is busy defending the bishop, and the king can't go anywhere for obvious reasons. Black, on the other hand, plans to improve the knight's position with ♞e3 or ♞xh2.

32.♖d8+! ♜xd8 33.♖xd8+ ♔h7.

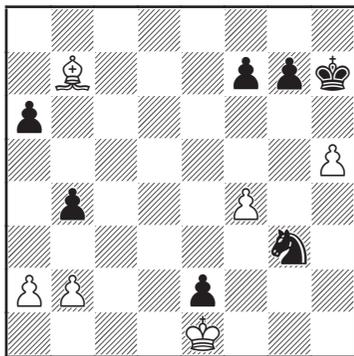
Now the position is again close to equality. What a roller-coaster!

34.h5. A cunning move, hoping for “activation” of the king: 34...♔h6?? 35.♖h8#!

34...♗f1 35.♖e8 ♜xe8 36.♙xe8 ♔g8 37.♙c6?? And again, the bishop’s move to this square turns out to be a blunder! It was critical to eliminate the strong passer: 37.♔xe2! ♗g3+ 38.♔d3 ♗xh5 39.f5. In such positions, the bishop is much stronger than the knight because it can attack from long range.

37...♗g3! Now the white king is stuck, and the bishop will be powerless if black pawns are put on dark squares.

38.♙f3 ♔h7 39.♙b7. White cannot go into the pawn endgame – he is one tempo behind: 39.♙xe2 ♗xe2 40.♔xe2 ♔h6.



39...a5! After this move, the bishop is attacking empty space.

40.♙f3 ♔h6 41.a3 bxa3 42.bxa3 f5 43.♔f2 ♗xh5 44.♔xe2 ♗xf4+ 45.♔e3, and white resigned without waiting for black’s move because the black pawns easily promote.

No. 64. Ruy Lopez C73

Sakharov – Keres

33<sup>rd</sup> Soviet Championship, Tallinn, 1965

Annotated by M. Oleksienko

1.e4 e5 2.♗f3 ♗c6 3.♙b5 a6 4.♙a4 ♗f6 5.0-0 d6. Keres, who

employed this continuation on many occasions, assessed it as follows: “*The so-called ‘Improved Steinitz Defence’.* It leads to a somewhat cramped, but quite solid position for black, without weaknesses. For white, achieving an opening advantage involves considerable difficulties. But the main drawback of the system is its passivity.” (P. Keres, *One Hundred Games*, 1966, p. 174.)

Today’s main line is 5...♙e7.

6.♙xc6+ bxc6 7.d4 exd4 8.♖xd4.

Black has the bishop pair advantage, but white controls the center and is ahead in development. We also shouldn’t forget the doubled pawns on the c-file.

8...♙e7 9.e5. A concrete approach. This move is not considered the best, but it’s definitely principled. Black has only one good move, but it solves all of his problems.

