

OPERATIONAL ANALYSIS: OCTOBER WAR

by Tony Merridy

I said to myself, wouldn't it be nice to have an article on the latest S&T game in the immediately ensuing issue of MOVES? Pretty tough to do what with deadlines and lead time and what-all. Anyway I came up behind playtester Tony Merridy [now on our staff] and said in a hard voice: "Don't make any false moves, Tony, just hand over the Operational Analysis on October War!" Of course, he said, "What Operational Analysis?" and I said, "This one:" —RAS

In October of 1973 the fourth round of war between Egypt, Syria, and Israel began with simultaneous attacks on the Golan Heights (by Syria) and the Bar Lev line on the Suez Canal (by Egypt). Though initially outnumbered heavily at all points, the Israelis held on until their reserves could be mobilized and then went on the offensive. In the most intensive armor campaign since the Second World War, the Israelis so thoroughly demolished the two Arab armies that only the threat of Russian intervention stopped them from overrunning half of Egypt. It was evident that while the Arab forces were of a much higher caliber than they had been in '67, they were still no match for the Israelis.

This clash has been a natural favorite among gamers for some time now, as attested to by the popularity of such games as *Sinai* and *Bar Lev*. Also, just about all modern tactical games have at least one scenario dealing with the Middle East. The problem is that there has been no simulation dealing specifically with this war on the tactical level—until SPI's latest addition to its line of platoon-level games: *October War*.

This game uses much the same format as SPI's other tactical games (*Mech War '77*, *Panzer '44*, etc.) with several much-needed improvements. To start, all plotting has been eliminated except for artillery and close-air support. The pieces are handled sequentially on a unit-by-unit basis (as in *FireFight*), which means no more plot sheets. Movement and combat still occur more or less simultaneously. Owners of any game using the si-move system will readily appreciate the drastic cuts in playing time.

A major complaint about the previous tactical games was that hits on targets were taken as "disruptions" instead of out-and-out kills. *October War* eliminates this. Basically, this change was made possible by recourse to the actual TO&E's (tables of organization and equipment) of the forces involved. Both sides used three-vehicle platoons instead of the five vehicles common in most western-style armies. A D-1 result on the CRT now means one knocked-out vehicle. The reduction in firing strength is handled by having the now depleted unit fire on a different CRT after each loss. Naturally, a D-3 means the entire platoon is dead.

Another change: depleted platoons may combine with others in the same condition to form a full-strength unit. This can become very important, not only because it brings such units back to full firing strength, but also because of the effect it has on such a unit's panic probability. A prime concern of any tactical game player is the relative state of the morale and training of the forces being depicted in the simulation. Panic is handled in this game much differently than in any of the others. No more picking chits to match with hex numbers or any other such nonsense as wandering platoons. Both sides now roll two dice every time they attempt to move or fire a unit. The number rolled must be greater than that given on the panic table for that side or the unit panics until the panic is removed.

As in real life, the probability of panic increases as a unit takes further casualties; the higher the losses within the platoon, the less likely that the rest of the platoon will perform as ordered. Of course, the Israeli panic level is somewhat lower than that of the Arabs. This is why it is so important to get depleted units back up to full strength. One full-strength unit will have a much better chance of doing what you want it to do than will a flock of D-1 and D-2 units. This can be vital for the Arabs as their panic level is high to start with. At least their combat effectiveness can be made tolerable again.

Artillery in this game is not much different from others, though there have been a few changes made. The usual scatter diagram is there. An attempt has also been made to satisfy those not happy with the accuracy of these weapons. All hard targets are attacked on the D-2 CRT. These units are given the option of taking the attack "buttoned up" (the crews close their hatches, reducing their ability to select and fire on targets) or with their crews exposed. In the actual campaign, the Israeli tank commanders and small-unit leaders always fought from open hatches. This made for very good tactical control and flexibility but contributed greatly to the casualty rate for such personnel.

Loose or tight patterned indirect fire may be used; if used against a buttoned up target, tight pattern fire can suppress or double-suppress a unit.

Air power, as in most other tactical games, is given only in terms of close-air support points, and this only in certain scenarios. Consequently, there is no anti-aircraft ability given to either side.

The map is a terrain-composite type using different color shades to show contour elevation. It can represent either the Sinai or the Golan fronts. The Jordanian border, the anti-tank ditch and the Suez Canal are

represented by the "Canal/Ditch" in the southeast corner of the map. There are wadis, groves, and even a small "village". Sand ridges and several prominent hills make up the rest of the major terrain features. The scale is the same as the other platoon-level games in SPI's line: 200 meters per hex.

Line-of-sight rules are simple enough, with the use of a range-of-observation chart (a la *Firefight*) that practically eliminates any question as to whether or not a particular unit can be seen in a given hex. Use of defilade positions and elevation are of the utmost importance. Terrain is about the only true protection left to the modern armored vehicle. Anti-armor weaponry has advanced much faster than tank improvements. Besides having a cost-effective advantage (missiles and their launchers are much cheaper than any tank, and their crews are much easier to train and/or replace in combat), missiles have become so deadly that it hardly matters any more where a tank gets hit in most instances. In this game, one strike and you are out. These weapons are also extremely accurate, and in the hands of competent crews can give any mechanized force a pretty rough handling in the field. Armored vehicles must have infantry and artillery support or they are dead meat for almost any well-trained and well-equipped infantry unit. No vehicle in service today (and none projected for the foreseeable future) can withstand a direct hit from most of the new missile systems so popular in both eastern and western armies, and such weapons will usually be the cornerstone of the Arab defense. In this respect, the basics of mechanized warfare have not changed. For the optimum chance of success in either attack or defense the force involved must be composed of a balance of all three combat arms: infantry, artillery and armored vehicles.

Overall, the game tries to give the players a feel for the particular problems facing each side. For instance, the Arabs will often be forced (despite their usually greater numbers of weapons) to concentrate their fire on selected targets for optimum results. This was the case in the actual campaign. The Arabs fought in formations with their crews "buttoned up" inside their vehicles, with a corresponding loss of tactical efficiency. The level of Arab training, while much higher than in '67, was still not as high as that given the average Israeli soldier and was definitely not up to dealing with the Israeli's style of fighting. Also the effectiveness of the Arab weaponry was called into question as the Israelis were still using some rather old equipment such as upgunned M4 Shermans (which date back to WWII) and M48's. These so-called obsolete tanks in Israeli hands were

the equal of the newest Arab vehicles and were almost as effective as the more modern Centurions and M60's in the Israeli inventory. The Israelis could invariably out-range, out-shoot and out-maneuver the Arabs, although it was a lot more costly this time around. The superiority (at all levels) was rather obvious, nonetheless, and was a reflection of the Israelis' better training, leadership and, in many cases, equipment as well as their much higher motivation.

It will be noticed almost immediately that there are no provisions for creating scenarios based on the '67 war as was talked about in *S&T* magazine. This was not an oversight on anyone's part. Several changes took place in all three armies between '67 and '73. It was felt that these changes were so drastic that they could not be introduced into the game without either a major change in the game system or an increase in the size of the counter mix. As this was to be a magazine game, both the designer and the developer rejected these alternatives in favor of simply sticking to the more recent war.

An examination of the counter mix is in order at this point. There are great differences between the units on each side as well as between the sides themselves. The number of direct-fire weapons is exactly even at 43 each, not counting regular infantry. There is, however, a marked difference in the types of weapons deployed by either side. The Israeli's force consists of tanks, infantry and APC's, three mortar carriers and four S-11 anti-tank missile units (thrown in almost as an after-thought, though I really don't know why). This force ranges from the modern to the obsolete.

M113 221 6 A 8 (5) 6	M3 218 6 A 8 (3) 7	BMP 233 11 D 5 (6) 7
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Infantry is mounted in either M113's or M3's (the old WWII halftrack). Neither of these vehicles is very well protected and both are vulnerable to almost any Arab weapon. Their sole purpose in the game is to carry the Israeli infantry from point A to point B without getting shot to pieces by enemy infantry and artillery fire. For this purpose they are more than adequate, though of course, they are nowhere near as effective as the Arab BMP's. The M3's are especially vulnerable, having a Defense Strength of only 3, lowest of any armored vehicle in the game.

S11 412 15 G 10 4 3 8	ATP 133 12 D 5 2 1
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The four anti-tank missile units (the first-generation French S-11) do not compare at all that favorably with the Arab missiles for many reasons, not the least of which is that there are not enough of them. Also, they are jeep-mounted which means they are attacked on the anti-personnel table. They are, as a result, easily destroyed by direct or indirect fire (what else, with a Defense Strength of 4?). To add insult to injury, they also have a 5-hex shorter

range than the Arab Sagger missiles and their range is actually shorter than all tanks except the T55. At least their fire strength is as good as the Sagger's.

CNT 552 15 S 12 [13] 6	M48 521 15 S 12 [12] 6	M60 539 15 S 12 [12] 6	M48 525 15 S 12 [12] 6
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The Israelis have (for game purposes) three types of tanks: the Centurion, the M48/60 and the M51 SuperSherman. The Centurion is the best tank in the game in terms of overall effectiveness. It's firepower is the equal of the Arab's and it has the highest Defensive Strength of any unit on the map (13) with mobility equal to any other tank. The M48/60 counters represent two tanks: the M48A5 and the M60A1. They have the same unit values in all cases. The M48 counter represents the Mark 5 version which was up-gunned and given better fire-control equipment to put it on a par with the M60A1. The M60 was in short supply at the time of the October War due to combat losses and low inventories, as well as a rather low production rate. To all intents and purposes, the two vehicles are one and the same. The M51 rounds out the Israeli tanks. While having the lowest Defense Strength of any tank (7), it has a gun almost the equal of any other. The M51 was given the same 105mm gun as the rest of the Israeli tanks as well as improved fire-control systems. It is slower than other tanks, however, and this, combined with its low Defense Strength, makes it easy pickings for a Sagger.

BRDM 411 16 G 15 (5) 8	INF 112 10 R 6 5 1
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As in the Israeli force, Arab tanks also predominate. This force is much more varied, though. There are three sections of 100mm anti-tank guns as well as 6 anti-tank platoons (missile units with Sagger, SPG9's, and RPG7's). These units are carried in APC's and must dismount before using their weapons. There are also 6 platoons of BMP's (the turreted Russian APC with the 73mm low-pressure gun and a Sagger missile mounted ready to fire from a rail over the gun barrel) which make excellent tank destroyers as well as troop carriers. A platoon of BRDM recon vehicles also mounts Sagger missiles (get the feeling the Arabs like missiles?) for anti-tank work.

T55 526 13 S 8 [11] 6	T62 544 15 S 12 [12] 6
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To round things out the Arabs have 2 types of tanks: the T55 and T62. The T55 is an outdated vehicle with the shortest range of any tank in the game. It is also not very well armored (11 Defense Strength) and its firepower leaves much to be desired. The T62 is somewhat better (12 Defense, 15 Attack Strength and equal mobility); but without a doubt, the T62 is still not as potent as the anti-

tank missiles that are in such profusion in the Arab force mix. (The inclusion of these latter weapons is a good device to balance the game, since the Arab tanks are no match for the Israelis' in a firefight.)

GENERAL PLAYERS NOTES

One of the most common player mistakes made in playtesting this game was forgetting the scenario victory conditions. Players had a maddening tendency to concentrate on killing units instead of reaching their given objectives. It must be remembered at all times that the main operational and strategic objectives in the game are *geographical*. Unfortunately, a lot of players seem to become infatuated with some sort of blood lust and end up attacking the wrong units and/or positions. Players have also neglected the defense of objectives (of all things)—and this in a game where a mere one-tank platoon can deny you a victory. Fire must be concentrated on objectives and their avenues of approach; anything else is just so much wasted effort.

The Arab player often has almost a two-to-one superiority in direct-fire weapons over the Israeli (depending on the scenario, of course). He should therefore attack each Israeli target with at least two units, if possible, going for total first round kills. Such unit allocations will also help to offset the Arab's higher panic probability. This fire should be concentrated mainly on units that stand between him and his objectives.

The Israeli player will usually get best results by wearing down and suppressing the Arabs instead of concentrating on total kills which require a concurrent concentration of fire. It must be remembered that several D-1's against an Arab force will hurt him far more than the loss of complete platoons will hurt the Israelis (as long as the casualties don't get out of hand), because the Arab's chances of panicking—greater than the Israelis' to begin with—go higher with each loss.

The Arab has a great advantage in his large number of Sagger AT missiles. These weapons are fairly accurate at all ranges and can out-range anything else on the map. Also, they do not suffer from range attenuation as do all other direct-fire weapons. These units, whether man-pack or BMP mounted, should be positioned where they have maximum fields of fire at the longest possible ranges. Their main disadvantage is that they may run out of missiles at any time due to the ammo-depletion rule. This must be kept in mind when the Arab player decides how he wishes to use these potent units. Of course, the Israeli S-11 units are subject to the same set of restrictions, but a wise Israeli player will not base his game plan on these units since he doesn't get that many of them to start with, and, in any case, they are not as potent as the Israeli tanks for anti-armor work.

The Israeli's tanks are obviously his most important units. He does not have enough of the S-11 units to rely on them too heavily at any time, and the same problem holds true for the tanks: not enough. The Israeli tanks are, however, better armed and armored than the

Arabs', particularly the Centurion. The best a T62 can do against a Centurion is a plus-2, unmodified only after four hex's range. At that range, the Centurion (or the M48/60's for that matter) can fire on a T62 at an unmodified plus-3. On a die roll over 3, this gives at least a D-1 result (50% chance of a result) as opposed to the 5 or 6 needed by the T62 (33% chance of a result). Essentially, this means that the Israelis can out-range any Arab tank unit. The only Arab counter-balance to this is the Sagger which will get an unmodified plus-3 against any Israeli tank out to its full 15 hex range. The only effective Israeli counter to the Sagger is the proper use of terrain, infantry, and artillery to protect his vehicles and suppress enemy units, especially when closing on an objective of any kind.

Artillery is one of the cornerstones of Israeli tactical doctrine. Israeli and Egyptian indirect fire can be shifted to cover different targets as often as necessary; the Syrian player must plot his fire at the beginning of a scenario and may not re-adjust that fire for the balance of the game. This difference in flexibility cannot be overemphasized. It means that the Syrians can plot only for his objectives, when on the offensive, and on a limited number of approaches to the Israeli's objectives. The Israeli can screen himself or the enemy with smoke or suppress tank and missile fire at almost any time. A normal Israeli tactic is to expose one unit in the hopes of getting the Arab to fire one or more of his missile units and show himself. Once the firing unit(s) is seen, the Israeli will hit it with smoke, if the target is a vehicle, or with tight-

pattern HE if it is an infantry team. This tactic is, of course, subject to how much indirect-fire support the Israeli has on tap in a particular scenario. Such fire usually means death for any Arab infantry dismounted in the line-of-sight of any Israeli unit. The Israeli can also protect the flanks of his forces with suppressive fire while his direct-fire weapons deal with the Arab forces blocking his advances.

As a rule, the Israeli player cannot take any unjustified risks while on the defensive; he has too few units to spend any of them needlessly. He should be a lot less cautious when on the offensive, however. While he will usually have plenty of time to reach his objectives, swift movement toward these points is still vitally important. Again, proper use of terrain and all combat arms is needed to keep casualties down. Smoke is the easiest way to get one's forces across the inevitable large stretch of open ground in any reasonably intact condition; running across these open spaces without the benefit of such cover is most definitely suicide if the defender is prepared.

The same general rule applies to the Arab player when on the offensive. He must cover his main advance (when possible) with smoke or the Israeli will cut him to pieces in short order. The Arab player can afford to take a few chances most of the time as he will almost always have enough units in any scenario to gain his objectives while taking fairly heavy casualties (which he will, against any reasonably competent Israeli player). The Arab player has almost a two-to-one advantage in several scenarios, and even the victory

conditions, while basically geographical in outlook, militate against the Israelis taking too many combat losses. Israel's manpower, after all, is at a premium, and some of their battle tactics are a direct cause of their casualty rates. These may be considered low compared to the Arabs', but when seen in the light of the overall reserves available to each side, it is pretty obvious that the Israelis must inflict casualties of at least three-to-one in order to gain more than a tactical victory. This assumes that the Israelis satisfy the scenario victory conditions to begin with; otherwise it is a moot point.

The nine scenarios give a pretty accurate account of the major clashes between the two opponents. They run from the opening battles of the war in the Golan and on the Suez Canal to the final Israeli counteroffensives in the same areas against the more-or-less prepared Arabs. Very rarely is a side given a disadvantage from which it cannot recover. What matters in this game is finesse, not sheer brute force. The Israelis need it due to the smaller number of units they are given in most scenarios. The Arabs need it because their higher panic level and lower weapons effectiveness offset their superior numbers. The campaign scenarios should generate a lot of interest among players for these reasons, and also, in the Egyptian campaign, neither side has any idea of what the opposing player is going to deploy in any of the three scenarios. In games like this, conservation of force—in reality one of the most important rules of warfare—finally becomes the rule rather than the exception.