

OBJECTIVE: MOSCOW

The Iranian Dilemma

A FURTHER EXAMINATION BY ROB GIBSON

1. The Game As It Was

Issue 23 of Phoenix reviewed Objective Moscow and commented upon the considerable scope within the game. In this article I hope to comment on one of the better ways to get "stuck in" to the game and to discuss how current events affected my introduction to the game.

Because of the comparatively greater complexity of the 1998 scenarios, the real **Objective Moscow** of the full-page advertisements in Strategy and Tactics, one is advised to start with the contemporary scenarios to absorb the game mechanics before making the big all-out push towards Big M Only it's not as easy as that. There are three contemporary scenarios plus a contemporary campaign game and a mini-game based on a possible re-run of the Korean War. Discounting the last two, the three scenarios cover European, Middle Eastern and Chinese Front confrontations. The European scenario is more complex than the other two, so we are down to China or the Middle East. So far, it's been elimination by logic — but the final choice for me had to be personal choice; after three recent playthroughs of "The East Is Red" — not to mention the **Russo-Japanese War of 1904-5** — the Middle East had a great appeal.

So here we are in late 1977, planning (and I quote) "an Iranian campaign of expansion in the Mideast". As the U.S. Alliance Player preparing to confront my long-suffering 'Russian' opponent, I soon found that the Iranians were the only forces capable of initiating any action (the Russians were expressly banned from doing this by implication in the rules). But where?

With the maximum movement factor of 5 for ground units, and given the initial deployment of the Iranian Army (see Diagram), any move you are going to make with surface forces telegraphs your intentions on the very first turn. So, fellow Iranians, where are we going to strike with our three armoured divisions and four mechanised divisions? Westwards against our militant Iraqi brothers, or North and East against the godless infidel Russians? Let us consider the possibilities open to us.....

(i) The Iraqi Option

On its own this must be a non-starter. Assuming we invade Iraq and wipe out sufficient units of the larger Iraqi Army to hold the three cities, we only gain 22 victory points. Unfortunately we need a margin of 28 victory points over the Russians to win at all — anything else is a Russian victory.

(ii) The Caucasus Strike

A much better choice from the victory point angle — up to 100 victory points are available within reach of the frontier. But the going is rough and mountainous and the terrain is well defended albeit by peacetime strength Soviet units. As the Soviet forces have a monopoly on rail movement in this scenario, they can reinforce rapidly from their uncommitted Asian-based units.

(iii) The Road to Samarkand

Better pickings here than in Iraq but a long way to go for them. Apart from 11 victory points within 3 hexes of the frontier the rest are ten to twenty hexes to the east, or twenty-plus hexes to the north-east in the steppes of central Asia. The low density and occasional low quality of the Russian troops in this region could be tempting but the rail-

(iv) The Old One-Two

This ploy involves action on two fronts, but not both at once — a feint on one front to draw off the Russians in one direction, then the real strike going in on the other front. Probably the best of these is to hit the Russians on the eastern frontier hard enough to draw a reaction and then to hit the Caucasus frontier with all speed.

Having worked out all these great and not-so-great ploys in playtesting, the whole thing became unreal because reality changed — internal problems, the flight of the Shah, the coming of the Ayatollah, the declaration of the Islamic Republic. No way could I see the Iranians going forth to war with all this going on — there simply was no good reason to do so. This very article became redundant by force of real events. However, the situation stabilised late in 1979, when the Ayatollah's men became outwardly militant again. I returned to the gaming board anew.

All options were re-examined and found to be still valid. In practice, the feint-and-strike move has proved the best ploy but the victory conditions still make it hard, very hard, to succeed. However, at this point the Russians themselves have come to our aid

2. Russian Intervention

The Russian invasion of Afghanistan has changed the whole balance of this scenario. Now active Russian units sit in 'neutral' Afghanistan, tied down by the problems of keeping the peace; units which must be subtracted from the armies formerly on the frontier.

To simulate this I have made the following amendments to the rules:

19.31 Initial Order of Battle (Soviet Alliance)

Add: 4 Class-III-T-W
6 Class-III-M-W
2 Artillery

—placed in Afghanistan

Subtract: 4 Class III-T-P
6 Class III-M-P
2 Artillery

—from existing deployment within Soviet Russia.

19.33 Initial Order of Battle (Neutral)

Afghan:

Armor x 3
Infantry x 10
Fighter-Bomber 5-3(4), 2-1(15)

Deployment:

The Russian player, before commencing play, must throw one dice for each Afghan army counter (Air Force counters remain under Russian control). A 5 or 6 causes the piece to oppose the Russian presence; any other, and they are pro-Russian.

No pieces are placed yet but are set aside in pro-Russian and anti-Russian piles. When all throws have been made, the Russian player places Russian and pro-Russian units within Afghanistan, then the American player places the anti-Russian units.

Special Rules

1. If any Russian unit 'based' in Afghanistan leaves the country, any two pro-Russian Afghan army units become anti-Russian at the choice of the American player.

2. If all Russian units leave Afghanistan, whether voluntarily, involuntarily (as a result of combat) or by elimination, Rule 16.21 — National Policy Chart — is void in the case of Afghanistan, and Afghan units may invade Russia.

3. If Afghan units invade Russia, Russian units attack at one column less on the CRT i.e. 3 to 1 becomes 2 to 1, and defend at one column less i.e. 1 to 1 becomes 1 to 2.

This attempts to simulate the potential discontent amongst the Soviet peoples nearest Iran and Afghanistan which the Russians invaded Afghanistan to nip in the bud — i.e. the rising tide of Islamic republicanism on their borders and its effect on ethnically similar Soviet peoples. It in no way is fatal to the Soviet cause but means that more troops must be concentrated at a given point to cope, tipping the balance more in favour of the American player, and making the Iranian Scenario more playable — less of a suicide mission. It works well.

