

Russian horror

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An attempt to create an initial turn defence strategy for Russia.

Background:

In July 1941, sorry, 2012, I travelled to Uppsala to have a game against Jan-Erik Wahlund and Johnny Burlin. Since I haven't played AWAW in a few years I settled in as Papa Stalin with Johnny as WA and obviously then Jan-Erik as Axis. Jan-Erik is definitely competent as the Axis so what we present below isn't just possible because of incompetent Axis play. The WA was also handled well enough not to affect anything really. It was messy but nothing crucial happened (i.e. France fell on time and there was a series of back and forth events in the Med but nothing big enough happened to even make the Allies revise the plans they made in 1939). Since I didn't have too much to do I spent several hours trying to create a defence in Russia that would drive Jan-Erik crazy. And I obviously succeeded since he has been cursing the Russian 5-6 ever since ;). It might be worth to mention I had a fever of 38-39C so it is possible all this is the product of a delusional mind. Then again, those that know (or remember me) probably know that even after 15h and a few six-packs of beers the Finns, sorry I mean Russians, proved that it is possible to get from Moscow to Warsaw in two turns in 1942 (A3R, flip-flop with an additional partisans twist).

In any case, after the game we decided to write down the setup used (with minor improvements as I had the south even stronger initially). A few rounds of comments later we present you with this. Hopefully you can see this as some well thought commentary to a warplanner file we attached (designed to give Bruce a headache).

In addition, there was of course something published that could have wreaked havoc with this setup. The December rule change (42.337, Russian Prewar Force Pool Additions) :(, which prohibits a Russian 5-6 armor to be built in spring-41. The armor can now only arrive in the turn of the DoW or RGT reaches 40.

Well, since we kind of spent **some time** after our game in July to optimize this setup it's our own fault. Not much actually but everyone were busy with other projects. But, it looks like you can make the setup solid enough even with the new rules. But we don't see it necessary to revise the setup and are leaving that exercise to the reader. At best removing the 5-6 is all that needs to be done. I would be possible to bring in some infantry factors instead of the 5-6 armour but right now it feels better to bring in the 5-6 as soon as possible anyway.

The general idea of the presented setup is to keep the Russian losses small by making it hard for the German infantry to reach something to hit, thus forcing expensive German attacks, while keeping the south under ordered retreat and ultimately protect the oil fields. Russia does not demand the boarder hexes with this defence! Further details are discussed in the hex comments (points of interest) below.

Points of interest:

Kiev. Theoretically Kiev is overrun proof using only two factors and is likely the spot to weaken in case people prefer to strengthen another area. Our initial setup had only 3 factors in Kiev, which is

sufficient to limit the attack on the two units behind the river. We will return to the Kiev issue every now and then when discussing other points of interest.

N40/O40. It's debatable whether it's better with a slightly stronger setup behind the river and a weaker Kiev or having it roughly as it is now. It's a matter of taste whether you wish to force the Axis to make possible 2:1 attacks instead of 3:1 attacks. In any case, we see a double BH behind the river created from one breakthrough hex as the main goal to avoid. Kiev as an airbase and even Kiev as a diplomatic resource for Ukraine purposes can be handled using other means.

R40 (Q40). Initially there was an armour and 3-3 in this hex. This hex does not necessarily need as much defence as Q40, which is why we took it down to 5 factors and made Kiev 4 factors. Both hexes have a great retreat path via the fort in Dnepropetrovsk and can even SR via Kharkov for "better" movement.

Eskimo: I initially preferred having the 3-3 in R40 as it gives a great retreat for two 3-3's into Dnepropetrovsk with its fort and IC. I consider Kiev of less importance.

Forts. Leningrad is given. Smolensk is just there to give the Axis some sort of headache instead of letting them collapse the northern front too fast. In almost all circumstances it's a key location so getting it back into supply or forcing the Axis to take an expensive attack on it is worth the effort. Moscow is pretty much required because of the expected northern collapse but can be done in Summer 1941. Then it's a bit of a tossup between Kharkov or Dnepropetrovsk (especially as both contain IC's). In the end Dnepropetrovsk seems to be more optimal (and a more of a pain in the a\$\$) but only if the southern front is played properly and not collapsed too fast via T39 or S40. The final straw is probably that Dnepropetrovsk is a too valuable target for a BT hex which then can use it's overstack to get across the river. A third option would be Kiev, which would be a major obstacle for the Axis in Summer but for one turn only. No one expects to hold Kiev and an IC is always a better location for a fort.

M39 (M40). Obvious INF attack hex. Cheap BT. Cheap BH m40. As this one is impossible to hold and the M40/L41 area is impossible to protect anyway given the setup restrictions and Axis air cover... there's little reason to fight a losing battle here. The Axis can throw in as much armours as needed and that armour can at best take empty hexes in the north so not much of an option for the Axis if they have to choose. There is a risk with airborne suicide attacks and attacking L40 giving a walkthrough area but it is rather low and at worst another 1-3 will fix it (from Finland or even from Sevastopol).

L40. L40 should be able to suicide itself as there should be some ground unit next to that hex (partially because of the above).

L41. One piece of sh*t hex. Probably the single worst hex on the front. Setup restrictions deny you any 3-3 or 2-3 in this hex (as the free 3-3's are needed elsewhere like in Leningrad :). If you figure out a way to keep armours here you still have a problem with the two adjacent hexes becoming BH's. This one just has to go and if so, cheaper is better.

S39(S40). One of the few hexes where you actually have a choice. Since this area is prone to collapse you might even weaken Kiev and use something better here. But basically 3 factors is plenty. But there is opportunity to play around turning 3:1 into 2:1 attacks here especially against a non-competent Axis setup. In fact, a less than optimal Axis setup in Rumania can destroy a lot of options for him. S40 is a quite crucial hex that should be kept to make sure the south does not collapse next turn.

T38/T39. This area is hard to keep against an airborne drop so making T39 overrun proof takes care of what needs to be taken care of. As long as S40 is intact this area is secure enough. We don't intend to keep Sevastopol and will retreat/build a front near Maikop and the beach instead anyway. That is also the reason U40 is unprotected since it's hard to keep anyway and U41 is the supposed front in a few turns.

O40/P40. Requires 4 to 5 Axis armours to take. Good enough. Technically some optimization could free up a few 1-3's but that still would mean your 18 in defence become 20 which isn't enough against 5 armours so why bother. At best the Axis can get O40 OOS and that requires a fairly major push.

K42. Works even against 4 Axis armours because of the air factors.

Eskimo: With the December rules you don't have a 5-6. But this hex is still overrun proof and this only weakens Smolensk. In our game the Axis had a BH here and a fort adjacent to a BH just should be outlawed. What a terrible mess. In any case, it might be possible to bring up an armour from around Dnepropetrovsk to make this place stronger but then it's still subject to a good 1:1. Might be easier to just let it go and be content with possibly building the 5-6 armour into Moscow in Summer.

J43. Smolensk can hold even against 4 Axis armours as long as you have 2 RAF available. K42/J43/H45 all require airs to become 2:1 or 1:1 proof but the Axis would have to commit an excessive amount of armours (8 under the Summer rules) to challenge the 3 RAF available.

H45. Another piece of sh*t. The setup restrictions basically only leave you with 1-3 infantry for this spot so an airborne is required. Since the Axis only can get two armours attacking this hex that's 8 vs 5 which should make any Axis player a bit uneasy. The reason we want to keep this hex is that an Axis armour here would ZoC H46. Granted, it's not a hex you wish to keep units in as it's becomes an easy BT hex into Moscow. But, if you keep I45/G46 (and H45) you can afford to keep troops in H46.

Finland. Do we care? Unless there is an Axis armour there, not really? As the north will collapse quite fast anything moving in from Finland will reach the marsh area and that's not overly important. This is again a matter of taste. If the plan is to keep Vologda only if it can be afforded, then Finland is not so important. Some sort of diplomatic safeguard can be enough to get a hint that Finland is not a problem. BUT, we placed two infantry units there as we know people will disagree. In our game Finland did not activate properly (as the Allies fat-stacked Finland preferring to have the option to strengthen m40 and alike).

L43. Initially I had all air factors here but moving a few more south seems more optimal (or required :). But the airs are considered last anyway (in case the reader wants to make some other subtle changes).

U41. Should not be something we need to consider. U40 was discussed earlier.

Moscow. Although this isn't a real problem until Fall it's certainly worth mentioning. With a 5-6 + 3-3 and one or two airborne the fort built in Summer will make it quite harsh to take for the Axis. Gorki is easy to keep and the south is protected with something behind Orel and Tula. So we are talking about at best 30 in defence with as much air as needed up there. Depending on the RAF losses in Summer it might even be possible to deny the Axis a 1:1 attack. In our game I think the

Axis had a possible expensive all armour attack at 32 vs 30 (with counterair of DAS). Needless to say, Jan-Erik didn't feel lucky enough :D.

Summary

Benefits:

- Lots of hexes protected against 1:1 attacks (makes the Axis rather frustrated).
- Not a lot of (good) Axis infantry can reach the front making the attack more costly.
- Very low losses (except the mandatory RAF losses).
- A tactical withdrawal in Summer is possible and the Fall front is as impregnable (in the South) as this one. It is also possible to get a protected front up in the north below Moscow which hinders the Axis from swinging around and going south.
- Russia can at best be in (real) fighting shape again in Winter/Spring.
- The initial Axis attack will only take a few meagre hexes and generate a few BH's during exploitation. Air losses can't be avoided and hex loss in the north is probably the main thing people will discuss.

Drawbacks:

- The north will collapse immediately. But the Axis will not get close enough to Moscow in Summer (H45 is key).
- Leningrad will fall to any competent Axis play anyway.
- Vologda is a necessary setback but can possibly be held during Fall depending on the initial Axis setup. Winter and Spring could have the Axis suffering enough to regain control of it (albeit not for long).
- Since you are giving up so much for free in the north the south really must hold, at least for oil purposes (which requires careful planning in 1942 with strategies like possibly a fort in Maikop).

Since Vologda only generates BRPs part of the year it is preferable to use Alaska or Turkey as cash cows for Russia. With this setup Russia suffers so much less in losses she can afford to get slightly less in grants (and especially the construction limit). The Murmansk route also gives rather little BRPs in the beginning, increasing with only 5 BRPs/turn.

Johnny: I prefer to keep the Murmansk route open as long as possible, not at any cost, but as long as possible. Keeping it open tends to tie up Axis resources (naval/air in Bergen, possibly subs as well).

Everyone: The importance of Vologda was obviously one of the things we debated at great length. The two paragraphs above only depict parts of that conversation.

Requirements:

The necessary Breakthroughs in research categories (can be guaranteed at 90% with a minimum of RP's).

2 RP in forts in 1940 (Leningrad/Smolensk or Dnepropetrovsk).

2 RP in forts in 1941 (Moscow/up to you if you wish to tip your hand with Smolensk in 1940).

Full RP's into Military and air production.

1st mobilization, 1st part = infantry (only 10 Brps make it in time for Spring 1941 so you have to go with infantry).

Leaving Bessarabia alone (since the Russian player does not need the Brps and the hex range setup restrictions versus the river work better this way)

Leave Finland alone (less of a requirement but obviously keeping Finland more peaceful by diplomatic means or bad rolls suits the defence strategy better with the excess infantry freed up and less pressure up north)

Final comment by Jan-Erik: Yes I lost against Peter again, again in Russia. Naval battles are better for me! 😊