

FITNA

THE GLOBAL WAR IN THE MIDDLE EAST

(2012-?)

© Pierre RAZOUX – 2018

[1.0] INTRODUCTION

Fitna – The Global War in the Middle-East (2012-?) is a two to six-player grand strategic level card driven wargame depicting the various military confrontations in the Middle-East since 2013 and the emergence of ISIS (Islamic State in Iraq and Syria). The game includes a potential global confrontation in the future between Sunni and Shia regional players backed by their respective allies, involving militias, Kurdish Peshmerga and worldwide main players such as Russia and the USA. This terrible confrontation will drastically change the geopolitical balance of power in the Middle East and in the World. Now, you can decide to play any camp (except ISIS which is activated through event cards) and test your own strategy.

The number of players (from 2 to 6) depends on the scenario selected. Optional rules always allow 2 players to play multiplayer scenarios.

Each turn represents two months of real time and is divided into as many phases as the number of players; one for each player according to the instructions given in the scenario selected (see the Sequence of Play). Each phase is further subdivided into 7 Segments. The 90 cards constitute the driving mechanism of the game, allowing for the movement of units and offensives, taking replacements or reinforcements, generating specific events, and influencing combat resolution.

For all who play *Fitna*, learn and enjoy!

[2.0] GAME EQUIPMENT

EACH COPY OF *FITNA* IS COMPOSED OF THE FOLLOWING:

- TWO 11 BY 17 MAP SHEETS AND GAME TRACKS
- ONE SHEET OF 270 DOUBLE-SIDED COUNTERS
- ONE DECK OF 90 REGULAR GAME CARDS
- ONE DECK OF 4 SPECIAL JOKER CARDS
- ONE PLAYERS' AID SHEET
- THIS SET OF RULES INCLUDING A SCENARIO BOOKLET

NOT PROVIDED, BUT REQUIRED FOR GAMEPLAY, IS ONE SIX-SIDED DIE (D6).

2.1 The Maps

The two maps (North & South) represent the Fertile Crescent (Kuwait, Iraq, Syria and Lebanon) and parts of Iran, Israel, Turkey, Jordan and Saudi Arabia affected by the confrontation. It contains 113 boxes linked via black lines representing the main axes of communication. Each box depicts one of three different types of terrain (clear, mountainous or swamp) which can contain cities, oilfields

and objectives (as, for example, religious holy sites). Certain boxes get a defense bonus representing the particular defense value of the topographical environment.

2.2 The Aid sheet

The Aid sheet includes the detailed Sequence of Play, charts and information summarizing the main rules, and the Combat Results Table with relevant explanations.

2.3 Scenario Booklet

The scenario booklet includes 10 scenarios allowing the players to simulate:

- 1) The civil war in Syria: 2012-2013 (tutorial scenario for 2 players; 6 turns);
- 2) The fight against ISIS: 2014-2015 (the maximum extension of ISIS; 3-4 players; 6 turns);
- 3) Russian intervention in Syria and the PKK rebellion in Turkey: 2015-2016 (3-4 players; 6 turns);
- 4) The fight against ISIS: 2017-2018 (ISIS' collapse; 3 players; 9 turns);
- 5) Iraq invades Kuwait again (2 players; 6 turns);
- 6) Turkish military intervention in Iraq and Syria (3 players; 9 turns);
- 7) The struggle for Kurdish independence (4 players; 9 turns);
- 8) Limited war between Iran and Saudi Arabia (2 players; 9 turns);
- 9) Regional war in Syria involving Israel, Russia, Turkey and Iran (5 players; 6 turns);
- 10) Fitna: The Global War in the Middle East (the full campaign: 6 players; 12 turns).

2.4 Playing Pieces

The playing pieces are divided between 270 counters (including 31 markers) and 90 cards divided between Asset cards and Event cards, as well as 4 Special Joker cards.

2.5 Die

Players use a standard six sided die (D6) to resolve combat and random events.

[3.0] THE COUNTERS

The counters represent all the eligible military units able to play an effective role in the various scenarios, and markers used on the map, on various tracks, or to indicate the status of isolated units. Combat units – Corps (XXX), divisions (XX), brigades (X), regiments (III) or groups of Kurdish guerrillas or ISIS troops – can move and fight on the map subject to the game's rules. Entrenchments cannot move and do not count for stacking.

Turkish corps-level units represent infantry, motorized infantry and mechanized units of 15,000 to 20,000 men and their vehicles and equipment (including artillery and helicopters). Divisions represent units of 8,000 to 12,000 men and their full equipment. Brigades and regiments represent units of 2,000 to 3,500 men and their full equipment. Armored divisions and brigades are represented by tank silhouettes; they have special capabilities to exploit breakthroughs during the Offensives segment. A unit's designation is the historical name of that formation and is used to identify it.

3.1 Unit Color code

Saudi Army

Gulf Cooperation Council Armies

Turkish Army

Arab Allied Armies / Free Syrian Army & Free Iraqi Army

US Forces

Russian Forces

Iranian Army

Iraqi Army

Syrian Army

Lebanese Army & Hezbollah

Shia Militias

Sunni Militias

ISIS troops

Kurdish guerrillas

Israeli Army

French Army

British Forces

3.2 Combat Unit Values

5-6-4 = [Attack Strength] – [Defense Strength] – [Movement Allowance](in terms of boxes)

A single value in brackets means that the unit (usually local Kurdish garrisons) can only defend and is not allowed to attack.

Entrenchment (cannot attack)



[-1] = Defensive bonus

∞: Airmobile movement capability (see rule 17.2).

3.3 Unit and Game Abbreviations

AB = Airborne

Air Asslt = Air Assault (UK)

BAH = Bahrain

BB = Brigade blindée (FR)

Bde = Brigade

Cdo = Commando (UK)

EGY = Egypt

FR = France

Gd = Guard

GOL = Golani

Hezb = Hezbollah

IRG = Islamic Revolutionary Guard

IRQ = Iraq

JOR = Jordan

KDP =Kurdish guerrillas in Iraq

KUW = Kuwait

LEB = Lebanon

Mar = Marine

MD = Mechanized Division

MEB = Marine Expeditionary Brigade

MEU = Marine Expeditionary Unit
Mil = Militia
NG = National Guard
OMN = Oman
Para = Paratroopers
PKK =Kurdish guerrillas in Turkey
Pr. Gd = Presidential Guard
PYD = Kurdish guerrillas in Syria

QAT = Qatar
RDP = Régiment Dragon Parachutistes (FR)
SF = Special Forces
SYR = Syria
UAE = United Arab Emirates
UK = United Kingdom
VP = Victory Point(s)
YEM = Yemen

Military units have information printed on them as shown above, representing their capabilities (attack, defense and movement) and their nationality (small flag). They must always be located in a box or in a player's pool. All the combat units have two "steps" and are full strength on their front side and reduced strength on their reverse side. A pale strip indicates the reduced strength side of a combat unit.

Attack or defense strength measures a unit's value in battle as expressed in strength points. Entrenchment counters have no combat strength and do not count for stacking. Units stacked on an entrenchment benefit from an extra defensive bonus of 1 column to the left (in addition to all other bonuses).

A unit's movement allowance determines how far (in term of contiguous boxes) it can move each turn. Entrenchment counters do not have a movement allowance and cannot move. Once set up in a box, an entrenchment counter remains there up to the end of the scenario unless it is destroyed as a result of an offensive. Any player can build entrenchments through *Combat Engineer* Asset cards.

[4.0] STACKING

When more than one friendly unit is present in a box, this is called stacking. Each player can stack up to **3 military units in a single box**, including a maximum of 1 Corps (the Turkish player is the only one to have corps-level units in the game). There is a single exception to this rule: **4 ISIS units can stack together** on a single box because they have 1 step only (NB - The 2 step Al Baghdadi counter does not affect stacking). Entrenchment counters or other markers do not count towards the stacking limit. Opposing units cannot stack together.

[5.0] CONTROLLED/FRIENDLY BOXES

Except when it is disputed during a combat segment, a box is controlled by a single player only. A box without any units is controlled by the player who was the last one to move units through it or to place a unit on it. By definition, at the beginning of a scenario, every player controls the zones located in his own country, or controlled area, which are free of enemy units.

Iran, Iraq, Israel, Russia, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, the Kurds and ISIS get Force Pools on the map to set up their replacements and reinforcements. The Iranian, Turkish and Saudi Force Pools also function as an off-map box for the Iranian, Turkish or Saudi player, allowing them to move troops in or out as a function of regular movement.

[6.0] SETTING UP THE GAME

Lay out the map(s) between the players. The Asset and Event cards are placed on two separate piles next to the map. When the International Tension rule is played, High Tension cards are placed by the map to be added to the draw piles when necessary. Then refer to the scenario chosen in the Scenario Booklet and follow the setup instructions. Every player gets a Joker and some players will get a Special Joker card in certain scenarios.

[7.0] INITIATIVE

Each scenario indicates which player plays first, second, third, fourth, fifth and sixth during each turn of the game. The Initiative player chooses his 4 cards first at the beginning of a scenario, followed by the second player, the third one and so on.

[8.0] THE CARDS

The 90 cards indicate a specific action/event – or a combat asset – and a number of allowed operational points (OPPs). The cards are used either to play specific events, to move a limited number of units and launch offensives, or to influence combat resolution. Every player chooses 4 cards at the beginning of a scenario (beginning with the player who has the initiative) and may then draw or discard cards according to the events described on certain cards. At the end of his phase, a player draws the necessary cards to regain 4 cards in his hand.

Every card is sufficiently self-explanatory for its function to be understood.

8.1 Red Cards

Red cards correspond to Assets influencing combats, or canceling certain other Assets' or Events' effects. Most of them produce effects during a single battle; cards producing effects during the entire turn are placed in front of the relevant player. ISIS troops can only use Asset cards marked with the ● symbol; Kurdish troops can only use Asset cards marked with the **K** symbol. However, all other nationalities or factions are allowed to play cards marked with ● or **K** symbols, unless the card itself or the scenario exclude it (*Chemical Weapons* for example).

8.2 Blue Cards

Blue cards correspond to Events. Note that several cards can only be played as an Event after another specific Event has occurred, or after a particular turn, in order to reflect geopolitical developments. Note also that certain cards are removed in each scenario, because the Asset, action or Event described does not fit with the context. Note as well that certain cards are permanently removed from the game once played as an event.

Once play has begun, players are free to choose cards from one pile or another, or both. After being played, cards are placed face-down in a discard pile next to the corresponding draw pile (Assets or Events). They can also be placed face-up near the map or next to a player to indicate their effect. At the beginning of turns 4, 7 and 10, the Initiative player combines and re-shuffles all cards (discarded or not) for each of the Assets and Events piles. This increases the fog of war and allows players to redraw recently played cards.

8.3 High Tension Cards

15 cards (6 Assets and 9 Events) are considered to be High International Tension Cards and are marked with a **HT** symbol. These cards are more powerful than the others and are usually connected to the direct involvement of the USA or Russia in the game. When the International Tension rule is played, these cards are added to the respective draw piles as soon as the International Tension marker reaches Level 5 on the International Tension Track printed on the

map. These High Tension Cards are immediately reshuffled with the discarded cards to form two new draw piles. The HT cards remain in the game even if the International Tension marker drops below Level 5 again.

[9.0] JOKERS

Jokers represent hidden financial reserves, unexpected diplomatic support & undercover transfer of logistic and smart weapons. Every player gets a Joker marker at the beginning of a scenario showing his main country flag. When someone plays his Joker, he immediately draws 2 cards from any or both draw piles and removes his Joker marker from the game.

Jokers can be played at any moment during the game (even during an adversary's phase) except on Turn 1. There are only two exceptions to this rule:

- Certain scenarios allow the Initiative player to play his Joker during Turn 1; in this particular case, the Initiative player can choose 6 cards instead of the regular 4.
- When a player loses all his cards on Turn 1 before playing due to an opponent's/opponents' Event attacks, he is allowed to play his Joker to permit him to play that turn.

[10.0] SPECIAL JOKERS

Special Joker Cards allow Israel, Iran, Russia and the USA to launch extra strikes during certain scenarios. Every Special Joker Card is sufficiently self-explanatory for its function and potentially devastating effects to be understood. The Special Jokers reflect the conventional striking capabilities (including stealth and ballistic) of these four players and contribute to create mutual deterrence, thus impacting strategies and introducing more uncertainty into the game. Once played, a Special Joker is permanently removed from the game. Special Joker Cards effects cannot be cancelled by any other card (including SAM, Air Superiority, Area Denial, Raptors...).

[11.0] STRATEGIC DEPOTS

A player can always move one unit and launch a single offensive in a turn without spending a card by using gas and ammunition stocked in strategic depots for this purpose. However, if he wants to move more than a single unit or to launch more than one offensive during the turn, he must spend a card (or two) and cannot use the Strategic Depots option.

[12.0] SEQUENCE OF PLAY

PLAYERS ADHERE TO THE FOLLOWING SEQUENCE OF PLAY FOR EACH TURN OF THE GAME.

12.1 Initiative Player (depends on the scenario)

1. **Event** – The active player plays a card(s) as an Event(s) and applies the effects (placing any possible reinforcements on the map). He can exchange 1 card with another player without revealing it (getting 1 card in return from that player).
2. **Supply** – Check lines of communication for every unit (for all players). Place an Isolated marker on every unit out of supply.
3. **Planning (spending OPPs)** – The active player decides how many cards (1 or 2) he will select to acquire OPPs; he then decides how many OPPs he will spend on movement and how many OPPs he will spend on launching offensives, placing the *Moves* and *Offensives* markers on the Record Track accordingly.

4. **Movement** – Move twice as many units on the map as you spent OPPs on movement (i.e. 2 units per OPP spent for movement).
5. **Offensives** – Launch as many offensives as OPPs left; each OPP allows the launching of one offensive with a full stack of units (3 units maximum); play card(s) to influence combat resolution; remove Isolated markers if you reestablish a valid supply line.
6. **Strategic movement** – Move a single unit (friendly, controlled and non-isolated) to any controlled box through a path of controlled and supplied boxes.
7. **Adjust cards** – The active player draws cards to regain **4 cards** in his hand.

12.2 Second Player

Repeat the same sequence above.

12.3 Third Player (depending on the scenario selected)

Repeat the same sequence above.

12.4 Fourth Player (depending on the scenario selected)

Repeat the same sequence above.

12.5 Fifth Player (depending on the scenario selected)

Repeat the same sequence above.

12.6 Sixth Player (depending on the scenario selected)

Repeat the same sequence above.

When the last player has finished his phase, all players remove any asset card(s) placed in front of them for that turn; the Turn marker is advanced one space on the Turn Record Track and Section 12 is repeated up to the end of the scenario.

[13.0] TURN 1

During the first turn of the game, certain events may occur during the set up phase as mentioned in the scenario (Coup for example); certain cards cannot be played as Events or Assets (refer to cards) and Jokers cannot be played (unless the scenario instructions say otherwise). The Initiative Player may get free OPPs according to the scenario. Be aware that the first turn is usually the longest one; the others are often shorter.

[14.0] SUPPLY

(NB – the terms ‘isolated/unsupplied’ and ‘non-isolated/supplied’ are used interchangeably throughout the rules.)

During his Supply segment, a player checks the supply status of every unit on the map, marking those which are unsupplied with an “Isolated” marker. (Therefore, supply for all units is checked anew during each supply segment.) A unit is in supply if it is able to trace a valid supply path of any length to a friendly controlled box marked with a friendly supply symbol (red for Syria; green for Iraq and Iran; brown for Turkey; blue for Israel; sand for Saudi Arabia and its allies).

14.1: Unsupplied Effects

Isolated units have a movement allowance of 2 and they fight with a 2 column shift penalty (attack and defense). They cannot take any replacements. Reinforcements cannot arrive in isolated boxes.

14.2: Arab Allies and the Free Iraqi Army must trace a valid supply line to any Saudi supply source on the map. Alternatively:

- Jordan, Egyptian and the Free Iraqi Army units can trace a supply line to H4 or H5 in Jordan.
- Kuwaiti units are always supplied when deployed in Kuwait.

14.3: Sunni & Al Sham militias in Iraq must trace a valid supply line to any Saudi supply source on the map.

14.4: The Free Syrian Army as well as Sunni & Al Sham militias in Syria must trace a valid supply line to any Turkish supply source on the map or H4, or to Daraa (close to the Jordanian border), as long as that box remains controlled by Sunni militias.

14.5: Shia militias and Iranian Hezbollah units must trace a valid supply line to any Iranian or Syrian supply source on the map. Alternatively, those engaged in Syria can trace a supply line to Damascus or Aleppo.

14.6: Lebanese Army and Lebanese Hezbollah units are always supplied in Lebanon. Alternatively, they can trace a supply line to Damascus.

14.7: Kurdish units (Peshmerga) can find supply, weapons and ammunition in any village of the Kurdish area; as a consequence, Kurdish units are always in supply and are never isolated as long as they remain in a Kurdish area box (pale green) of their own organization (KDP, PYD or PKK). If they move out of a Kurdish area, they must trace a valid supply line to any friendly Kurdish box of the same organization (KDP, PKK or PYD).

14.8: ISIS jihadist units are always in supply as long as they remain located in an area marked with an ISIS symbol (ISIS units can find supply, weapons and ammunition in these Sunni tribal areas). If they move out of one of these areas, they must trace a valid supply line to any friendly controlled box marked with an ISIS symbol.

14.9: Russian troops must trace supply to Tartus or Latakia.

14.10: US and Western units (French and British) must trace a valid supply line to either Incirlik in Turkey, Haifa in Israel, Baghdad in Iraq, Mina Saud in Kuwait or to any Saudi supply symbol according to the scenario and depending on the cause of their intervention.

[15.0] REINFORCEMENTS& REPLACEMENTS

At the beginning of the game, reinforcements for each scenario are placed in the relevant force pools. Reinforcement units arrive in various batches as a result of cards played during the course of the game. Every time the active player plays a reinforcement card during his "Event" segment, he replaces the card from a draw pile and has the choice between:

- Receiving a batch of reinforcements, beginning with the first one, then the second and so on...
- Taking replacements to rebuild one previously destroyed unit in his force pool or to upgrade two reduced-strength units to their full-strength status.

Reinforcement units, when available, are placed on the map on any friendly controlled and non-isolated box of their own country, in compliance with the stacking limits. In any case, the following rules apply:

- Arab Allied reinforcements arrive in Saudi Arabia. Jordanian and Egyptian reinforcements arrive in Jordan (H4 or H5);
- The Egyptian and UAE Para brigades can arrive on any controlled supplied box on the map;
- The French and British reinforcements arrive on any controlled supplied box on the map;
- The three Iranian Paratroop brigades as well as Iranian Hezbollah units can arrive on any controlled supplied box on the map;
- Russian reinforcements arrive in Tartus or Latakia;
- Shia militias arrive in Iraq;
- Sunni and Al Sham militias arrive in Syria or Iraq.

Non-isolated units selected for replacements are flipped where they stand to their full-strength side. A newly rebuilt unit is placed on any controlled and non-isolated box of the map, in compliance with the stacking limits and the rules of arrival of reinforcements. The active player can only take one batch of reinforcements per turn, but he may still play other Reinforcements cards in order to take replacements.

[16.0] PLANNING (SPENDING OPERATIONAL POINTS – OPPs)

The active player decides how many cards he will play to get Operational Points (OPPs; 4, 6 or 8 depending on the card selected). A player cannot play more than 2 cards for OPPs purpose. He then decides how to split his OPPs between movement and combat and he places the *Moves* and *Offensives* markers accordingly on the relevant track. The OPPs assigned to movement will be used to move units (2 units per OPP spent). The OPPs assigned to combat will be used to launch offensives (one offensive per OPP spent). Note that certain scenarios allow 4 free OPPs to the Initiative player.

[17.0] MOVEMENT

During his Movement segment, **a player may move twice as many combat units as he has allocated OPPs for this purpose**. For example, if a player allocates 3 OPPs for movement purpose, he can move 6 (3x2) units (not stacks).

17.1 Regular Movement

Units move from one box along a contiguous path of boxes free of enemy units, according to their movement allowance. For example, an Armored Division with a movement allowance of 4 can move up to 4 contiguous boxes. All movement must be completed before turning to the “Offensives” segment.

The type of terrain does not affect the movement. The stacking limits apply only at the end of the move. Isolated units have a movement allowance of 2.

17.2 Airmobile Capacity

Several units present in the game (usually airmobile, Special Forces or paratroops) have an airmobile movement capacity (∞) allowing them to move by helicopter. These units can conduct Friendly Airmobile movement or Air Assault movement. Alternatively, they can move as ground units with a capacity of 3 movement points (MPs).

17.2.1 Airmobile Movement

Units using Airmobile Capability may move to any controlled box on the map linked to a friendly side supply source during the Movement segment.

17.2.2 Air Assault Movement

Units using Air Assault Capability may move to any box in opposition territory free of enemy units or entrenchment markers located to up to 6 contiguous boxes from the departure box. When conducting an Air Assault, an airmobile unit can pass over enemy occupied boxes with no penalty. The unit is automatically supplied up to the end of the current phase. If at the end of the active player’s phase, this unit cannot establish a valid supply line, it becomes “isolated” instead. Due to the heavy concentration of anti-aircraft weapons and interceptors, Air Assaults can never occur against boxes located in Turkey, Israel, Iran or Saudi Arabia (helicopters are vulnerable!).

17.3 Strategic Movement

During the relevant segment of his phase, the active player can move a single unit (friendly, controlled and supplied) to any controlled and supplied box through a path of controlled and supplied boxes. That unit may have moved and fought during the turn. Strategic movement allows a player to fill a gap on the ground!

[18.0] OFFENSIVES & COMBAT

A player may launch as many offensives (involving a single stack of units) during his “Offensives” segment **as he has spent OPPs for this purpose**. For each offensive, he moves combat units stacked in a single box to a contiguous box occupied by enemy units (he cannot attack a box which does not contain at least one enemy unit). As a consequence, up to 3 units can participate in an offensive (or 4 when a player launches an ISIS offensive). Unlike many games, a single stack of units can attack more than once per turn and a targeted box can be attacked more than once per turn. As long as a player has allocated a sufficient number of offensives, he can activate a stack of combat units that has already fought previously, in order to attack the same box again, or another contiguous box. This rule reflects the repeated offensives launched by both belligerents during a 2-month turn.

18.1 Combat Resolution

The active player adds the combat strength of all his attacking units and compares the result with the total combat strength of the defending unit(s) present in the box. The difference (positive or negative) indicates the basic column of resolution for that offensive on the Combat Resolution Table (CRT), which can be affected and shifted by various factors.

Combat Resolution Table

Die	-8 or less	-5/7	-2/4	-1/+1	+2/4	+5/7	+8/10	+11/13	+14/17	+18 or more
1	AR*	AR*	AR*	AR	AR	AR	AR	EX	EX	DR
2	AR*	AR*	AR	AR	AR	EX	EX	DR	DR	DR*
3	AR*	AR	AR	EX	EX	EX*	DR	DR	DR*	DS
4	AR	AR	EX	EX*	EX*	DR	DR	DR*	DS	DS
5	AR	EX	EX*	EX*	DR	DR	DR*	DS	DS	DS
6	EX	EX*	DR	DR	DR	DR*	DS	DS	DS	DS

18.2 Column Shifts

Players adjust the column to be used to resolve a combat for each of the following that applies:

- **Box's defense value:** 1 or 2 shifts to the left.
- **Entrenchment:** 1 shift to the left (in addition to the Box's possible defense value).
- **Asset cards:** 1 to 5 shifts according to the card. 2 identical cards cannot be played simultaneously by the same player.
- **Isolation:** Isolated units are penalized by a 2 columns shift.

Note: All column shifts are cumulative. Most of the cards produce their effect only for a single battle.

18.3 Assets

During an offensive, both players concerned can play cards to influence the result of the combat. The defender announces first which card(s) he is playing; then the attacker announces his own card(s). Cards are sufficiently self-explanatory to understand their impact on the battle. Most of the cards produce effects for a single battle only; a few others produce effects during the full turn (place such card in front of the player and a marker, if needed, on the map). A player cannot play two identical cards (*Close Air Support* for example) during the same battle.

18.4 Combat Results

When the attacking player has determined the exact column on the CRT, he rolls a die and cross indexes its result on the relevant column of the CRT.

- **AR*** (Attacker repulsed with severe losses): All units of the attacking force lose 1 step and withdraw to the original box.
- **AR** (Attacker repulsed): The attacking force loses 1 step and withdraws to the original box.
- **EX** (Exchange): Both the attacker and the defender lose 1 step each. If the defender is eliminated, the attacker gains control of the disputed box and must occupy it with all his engaged units; if not, the attacker withdraws to his original box.
- **EX*** (Exchange with severe losses): All the attacking and defending units lose 1 step. If the defender is eliminated, the attacker gains control of the disputed box and must occupy it with all his engaged units; if not, the attacker withdraws to his original box.
- **DR** (Defender retreats): The defending force loses 1 step and withdraws to a friendly contiguous box. The attacker gains control of the disputed box and must occupy it with all his engaged units; his armored (tank silhouette) units can move on to a contiguous box free of enemy units (if applicable).
- **DR*** (Defender retreats with severe losses): The defending force loses 2 steps and withdraws to a friendly contiguous box. The attacker loses 1 step and gains control of the disputed box and occupies it with all his engaged units; his armored (tank silhouette) units can move on to a contiguous box free of enemy units (if applicable).
- **DS** (Defender surrenders): All defending units are eliminated and put in the relevant force pool. The attacker gains control of the disputed box and must occupy it with all his engaged units; his armored units (tank silhouette) can move on to a contiguous box free of enemy units (if applicable).

Entrenchments are automatically destroyed with a DR, DR* or DS result.

18.5 Losses

Players take a 1 step loss by flipping a two-step unit of their choice from its full-strength to its reduced-strength side or by eliminating a reduced-strength unit and putting it in his/her Force Pool. ISIS units are destroyed after the first loss. (Except of course the 2 step Al Baghdadi counter.)

18.6 Retreats

Attacking units suffering a withdrawal result must leave the disputed box to return to the original box they came from. Defending units retreating must leave the disputed box and move into a controlled contiguous box. They cannot retreat into an uncontrolled box, even if this box is free of enemy units. Retreating units must conform to the stacking limits. To respect this rule, retreating units retreat as many boxes as necessary up to the closest controlled box able to host them. If a unit is unable to retreat because all the contiguous boxes are occupied by enemy units, it surrenders and is placed in the relevant force pool.

18.7 Advance after combat

All attacking units involved in an offensive must occupy a vacant box following a victorious result. So, the active player has to think carefully about the troops he decides to commit to an offensive, to avoid leaving a vacant box behind him. It is sometimes better to commit only two units instead of three to keep control of key boxes. Surviving armored (tank silhouette) units which participate in the offensive can then move onwards to a contiguous box free of enemy units (breakthrough).

[19.0] ENTRENCHMENTS

An entrenchment does not count for stacking. During his “Event” segment, the active player can build new entrenchments on any non-isolated controlled boxes by playing the *Combat Engineer* card, instead of using it to support an offensive. Only one entrenchment can defend a single box. Once a player loses control of a box containing an entrenchment marker, the marker is removed.

[20.0] COMMAND AND CONTROL

Depending on the scenario, certain players may get control, but not command of certain allied units. The Iranian player commands the Hezbollah (both Iranian and Lebanese) units and the Shia militias sent by Tehran to Syria. If the Syrian player wants to move and fight with them, he needs to ask for permission from the Iranian player. If the Iranian player refuses, these units stay where they were at the beginning of the turn. The following rules apply for other situations:

- The Iranian player always commands and controls the Lebanese Army;
- The Syrian player always commands and controls the Russian units deployed in Syria (except in scenarios 9 & 10 where there is a separate Russian player);
- The Iraqi player commands and controls the Iranian Hezbollah and the Shia militias deployed in Iraq when there is no Iranian player in the game;
- The Turkish player always commands and controls the Free Syrian Army as well as the Sunni and Al Sham militias deployed in Syria;
- The Turkish player controls the US & Western units intervening in his favor;
- The Saudi player always commands and controls the Free Iraqi Army as well as the Sunni and Al Sham militias deployed in Iraq;
- The Saudi player controls the Arab Allied, US & Western units intervening in his favor;
- The Israeli player controls the Jordanian units in scenario 9 and the US units intervening in his favor in scenarios 9 & 10.

[21.0] CAVEATS

To avoid a global war (due for example to the activation of Article 5 of the NATO Treaty) and to respect real life political constraints, players must follow the following restrictions:

- Russian units cannot attack (or strike) Turkish units in Turkey (or penetrate into Turkey);
- Russian units cannot attack (or strike) US & Israeli units and vice versa;
- Turkish units cannot attack (or strike) Russian units as long as no Turkish unit has yet been attacked by Russian units (in Syria or Iraq);
- Turkish and US units cannot attack (or strike) each other;
- No one can never stack or fight alongside ISIS units;
- No one can stack or fight with Kurdish units, unless allowed by the scenario;
- Kurdish units from different factions cannot stack (or fight) together;
- Syrian and Iraqi forces cannot stack (or fight) together;
- Iranian and Russian forces cannot stack (or fight) together;
- Israeli, Turkish and Jordanian forces cannot stack (or fight) together;
- The Free Syrian Army, as well as Sunni & Al Sham militias in Syria, can only stack and fight together with Turkish forces;
- The Free Iraqi Army, as well as Sunni & Al Sham militias in Iraq, can only stack and fight together with Saudi forces;
- The Free Syrian and Free Iraqi Armies cannot stack and fight together;
- Hezbollah (Iranian & Lebanese) and Shia militias can stack and fight together with Syrian and Russian forces or with Iraqi and Iranian forces;
- Lebanese regular units can only stack and fight with Syrian and Iranian forces.

[22.0] INTERNATIONAL TENSION

The International Tension Track reflects the growing tension potentially leading to a direct full scale US and Russian military intervention in the Middle East. When used, this rule allows the players to add High Tension Cards (see Rule 8.3) to the game as soon as the International Tension marker reaches Level 5 on the International Tension Track. Each scenario indicates the level of that marker on the track at the beginning of the game. When the International Tension marker reaches Level 10, the USA and Russia launch a full scale military intervention in the Middle East. Free reinforcements (or replacements) are taken on Levels 6 & 10.

Players can influence the International Tension level by playing cards as events (see red notices on certain cards) or the *Chemical Weapons* card, or certain Special Joker cards. The International Tension level is also influenced by the following events:

- First time Russian units attack Turkish units in Syria or Iraq: +2
- First time Russian and Iranian units fight against each other on the ground: +2
- First time Israeli and Iranian units fight against each other on the ground: +2
- First time Iranian and Saudi (or Arab Allied) units fight against each other on the ground: +1
- First time Iranian and Turkish units fight against each other on the ground: +1
- Each time ISIS takes control of one of the following cities: Baghdad, Karbala, Aleppo, Damascus: +1

22.1 International Tension Effects:

- **Level 5:** Insert High Tension cards in the two decks (Assets & Events)

- **Level 6:** All players immediately receive their next batch of Reinforcements; if no Reinforcements are available, they receive a batch of Replacements instead (See Rule 15 for replacements).
- **Level 10:** Direct US military intervention; Russia receives all remaining Reinforcements and rebuilds all its units on the map to full strength; Russia regains its Special Joker card if already played. All players immediately receive their next batch of Reinforcements (or Replacements); US forces follow the specific rule for their intervention.

[23.0] MILITARY COUPS

Military Coups may occur in Iraq and Syria as the result of a scenario or by playing certain Event cards.

23.1 Loyal Forces

When a Military Coup occurs in Syria or Iraq, Syrian or Iraqi units with combat and movement values framed in purple remain loyal to the regime and do not have to test their allegiance with a die roll (see Cards #67 & 68). Other units failing the test (and not removed from the game) rebel and join the Free Syrian Army or the Free Iraqi Army. Such units are replaced by an equivalent unit marked with the SYR or IRQ symbol taken from the Arab Allied Pool and are now controlled by the Turkish or the Saudi player as appropriate.

23.2 Coup in Syria

If a player plays card #67 during scenarios 1, 2, 4, 6, 7, 9 & 10, a military coup occurs in Syria (read the card for the political context). The Syrian player rolls a die for each of his regular units deployed on the map (except loyal units). He then applies the result:

- 1-2:** The unit joins the rebellion (Free Syrian Army; replace with a corresponding counter colored "Arab Allied");
- 3-4:** The unit is permanently removed from the game;
- 5-6:** The unit remains loyal.

When several units join different camps in the same box, the one(s) with the highest defense value keep control of the box and the other(s) withdraw to the closest box controlled by an allied unit. Hezbollah and Shia militia are not affected by the coup. Units placed in the Force Pool during the coup are not affected and can be reactivated by the Syrian player.

Playing this card (not allowed before Turn 3) increases International Tension by +1.

23.3 Coup in Iraq

Scenario 8 or 10 begins with a coup in Iraq (read card #68 for the political context). The Iranian player rolls a die for each Iraqi unit deployed on the map (except loyal units). He then applies the result:

- 1-2:** The unit joins the rebellion (Free Iraqi Army; replace with a corresponding counter colored "Arab Allied");
- 3-4:** The unit is permanently removed from the game;
- 5-6:** The unit remains loyal.

When several units join different camps in the same box, the one(s) with the highest defense value keep control of the box and the other(s) withdraw to the closest box controlled by an allied unit.

Units placed on the Force Pool during the coup are not affected and can be reactivated by the Iraqi player. Hezbollah and Shia militia are not affected by the coup.

If someone plays card #68 during scenarios 2, 6 & 7, a military coup occurs in Iraq and the same effects apply. Playing this card (not allowed before Turn 3) increases the International Tension level by +1.

[24.0] WAR IN LEBANON

If a player plays the Event card #41 during scenarios 1, 2, 3, 4, 6 & 7, an Israeli-Lebanese War occurs. Israeli and Lebanese units are not deployed on the map. Instead, the active player rolls a die for each of the Lebanese Hezbollah units already deployed on the map when that Event card is played. He then applies the result:

1-2: No effect;

3: The unit is downgraded;

4-6: The unit is eliminated and permanently removed from the game.

Playing this card (not allowed on Turn 1) increases the International Tension level by +2.

[25.0] ISIS TROOPS (DAESH)

For ethical reasons, ISIS is not represented by a player. Instead, ISIS troops are activated through Event cards, reflecting the fact that in real life ISIS troops have been manipulated by all the regional actors (this is geopolitics, dear reader!). Each scenario depicts the presence, or not, of ISIS troops in the game and their initial deployment.

25.1 ISIS counters

ISIS units cannot stack or fight together with a non-ISIS unit. There are 25 ISIS counters in the game representing katibas (groups of jihadists and foreign fighters equivalent to a small brigade). Except the Al Baghdadi counter (representing ISIS' staff and Elite Guard) which gets 2 steps, all other ISIS units get only 1 step to describe their poor resilience. ISIS counters are always put on the map on their reverse side, displaying the ISIS symbol, to maintain the fog of war and to show their ability to hide in the population. Even when ISIS troops are activated by a player, this player is not allowed to check ISIS units' strength until he resolves the offensives he has decided to launch. The only visible unit is the Al Baghdadi counter. As soon as an offensive involving ISIS troops has ended, the surviving units are flipped back to their reverse side.

ISIS troops include units of various strength (ranging from 6-4 to 1-2) reflecting the diverse quality of jihadists and weaponry. Three units are Dummies (Decoy), which are removed from play when turned over by the active player. The Al Baghdadi counter can move as a normal unit within the limit of 4 contiguous boxes. All other ISIS units do not have a normal movement allowance; instead, they get an "A" symbol ("A" for Assault) showing that they can only move by launching offensives into contiguous boxes occupied by non-ISIS troops. If their offensive is victorious, they occupy this new box. If not, they stay in their initial box. This rule depicts the local and tribal organization of ISIS.

ISIS units (except Al Baghdadi) are eliminated as soon as they suffer a single step loss. ISIS troops can however retreat to a contiguous box as normal units when suffering a DR result; such retreating units are placed on the closest contiguous box controlled by ISIS or free of any other units. Eliminated units are placed in the ISIS Replacements Pool; they can return to play via Event cards.

25.2 ISIS activation

Activation of ISIS occurs by playing one of the *Daesh* Event cards (#50 to 53). Any player can activate ISIS by playing one of these cards during his Event segment (but not during the Event segment of another player). He then picks three previously eliminated ISIS units at random from the ISIS Replacements Pool, placing them on any box or boxes controlled by ISIS, or on any box or boxes showing an ISIS symbol and free of any unit (Sunni tribal areas hostile to the central government and sympathetic to ISIS' agenda). If the Al Baghdadi counter is on its reduced face, the active player can upgrade it to full strength at the cost of 1 unit, therefore only picking 2 previously eliminated ISIS units. If the Al-Baghdadi counter has been eliminated, the active player can always choose it first at the cost of 2 units.

The active player gets then twice as many OPPs as there are oilfields controlled by ISIS; for example, if ISIS controls 3 oilfields on the map, he gets 6 OPPs (3x2). He can use these OPPs to move the Al Baghdadi counter (1 full OPP) and to launch offensives with the remaining OPPs (if he wishes to do so) by designating a stack of ISIS units and choosing a contiguous target box. He then flips the ISIS units involved – discovering their combat value – and follows the normal combat rules. **If ISIS does not control any oilfields, the active player gets 1 OPP to move Al-Baghdadi (if he is in play) and to launch a single offensive.**

25.3 ISIS assets restriction

Due to their specificity and the lack of international support, ISIS troops are limited in their combat assets. ISIS troops can only use Asset cards marked with the ● symbol.

25.4 ISIS supply (see Rule 14.8)

25.5 Counter-Insurgency

When the active player activates ISIS by playing a *Daesh* Event card, any other player can immediately play the *Counter-Insurgency* card (#27) to cancel the effect of this activation. As a consequence, no other player can activate ISIS during this turn.

25.6 Back to normal life

After having activated ISIS and resolved all ISIS offensives, the active player can continue his own turn and activate his own units.

[26.0] KURDISH TROOPS (PESHMERGA)

Kurdish troops (Peshmerga) are not represented by a player. Instead, they are activated through Event cards, reflecting the fact that in real life, the Kurds are manipulated by all the regional actors (this is geopolitics again, dear reader!). Each scenario depicts the presence, or not, of Kurdish troops and their initial deployment. The pale green boxes on the map represent the Kurdish inhabited region. This Kurdish wide region is split into an Iraqi zone (under KDP influence), a Syrian zone (under PYD influence) and a Turkish zone (under PKK influence) where different guerrilla movements are active according to the scenarios. Players are not allowed to move their own forces through Kurdish boxes occupied by Kurdish units of another faction unless specified by the scenario.

26.1 Kurdish counters

Kurdish units cannot stack or fight together with non-Kurdish units, unless the scenario states otherwise. There are 20 Kurdish counters in the game representing groups of Peshmerga equivalent to small divisions. All Kurdish counters have 2 steps: some of them are mobile combat units; others are garrisons and just have a defense factor in brackets.

Garrisons cannot move and cannot attack. They can only defend. If they suffer a retreat result, they move to the closest contiguous controlled box within their own influence area (KDP, PYD or PKK); if such a box cannot be reached, the retreating garrison is eliminated. Eliminated Kurdish units are placed in the Kurdish Replacements Pool; they can return to play via Event cards.

26.2 Kurdish activation

Activation of the Kurds occurs by playing one of the *Peshmerga* Event cards (#43 to 46). A player can activate the Kurds by playing one of these cards during his Event segment (but not during the Event segment of another player). He then picks one eliminated Kurdish unit from the Kurdish Replacements Pool, placing it on any controlled box of the same faction (KDP, PYD or PKK); or he can instead upgrade two reduced Kurdish units of his choice to full strength.

The active player gets then 4 OPPs that he can use to move and launch offensives with mobile guerrilla units, following the normal combat rules. Kurdish units of different affiliations cannot stack and attack together, due to permanent rivalries between their leaders.

26.3 Kurdish Assets restriction

Due to their specificity, Kurdish troops do not have access to most of the combat assets. As a consequence, they can only use Asset cards marked with a **K** symbol. They can nevertheless receive *Close Air Support* if a supporting player agrees to provide it.

26.4 Kurdish supply (see Rule 14.7)

26.5 Kurdish rivalry

When the active player activates the Kurds by playing a *Peshmerga* Event card, any other player can immediately play the *Kurdish Rivalry* card (#24) to cancel the effect of this activation. As a consequence, no other player can activate the Kurds or play the *PKK Rebellion* card (#75) during this turn.

26.6 Back to normal life

After having activated the Kurds and resolved all offensives, the active player can continue his own turn and activate his own units.

26.7 PKK Rebellion

At the beginning of scenario 7 (Struggle for Kurdish Independence), or if someone plays card #75 as an Event, a general PKK rebellion occurs in Turkey. In both cases, a player hostile to Turkey immediately places a single PKK garrison unit [4] on every PKK box (colored pale green) free of Turkish units; the other PKK garrisons are placed in the Kurdish Replacements Pool. The same player then places the two mobile PKK guerrilla units (5-4-2 & 4-3-2) on any PKK box, or boxes, free of Turkish units. Except in scenario 7, when Kurdish units are controlled by the Kurdish player, these PKK units are then activated via the *Peshmerga* Event cards as with all the other Kurdish units (PYD & KDP). As long as PKK units are on the map, the PKK rebellion is on-going. As soon as the last PKK unit is eliminated and all PKK boxes are under Turkish control, the PKK rebellion is over and the PKK units are permanently removed from play.

26.8 PYD & KDP constituencies

Due to their strong institutional footprint in Syria (PYD) and Iraq (KDP), PYD and KDP Kurdish units can always reappear in their respective country (Syria and Iraq) even after the last PYD or KDP unit has been eliminated, as long as someone plays a *Peshmerga* Event card and as long as there are PYD or KDP boxes free of non-Kurdish units on the map.

[27.0] US INVOLVEMENT IN THE GAME

27.1 US Military Intervention

US military forces intervene in the game only if:

- 1) **Kuwait is attacked** (scenario 5) – US forces come under the International Coalition player's control;
- 2) **Jordan is attacked** – US forces come under the Saudi player's control (scenario 8 & 10) or the Israeli player's control (scenario 9);
- 3) **The Upper Galilea Box in Israel is occupied** by non-Israeli unit(s) – US forces come under the Israeli player's control;
- 4) **The Incirlik Box (US Base) in Turkey is attacked** – US forces come under the Turkish player's control;
- 5) **The IT marker on the International Tension Track reaches Level 10**; in this case, US forces come under the Iraqi player's control (scenarios 2, 3 & 4), the Turkish player's control (scenarios 6 & 9) or the Saudi player's control (scenarios 8 & 10).

The player controlling US forces immediately draws 2 cards (as a bonus) from any draw pile and gets the US Joker and the US Special Joker Card, with which he immediately launches air strikes against 4 enemy boxes. He then places the 6 following units as immediate reinforcements (no Reinforcements card required) on any supplied controlled box on the map: 75th Para Regiment (3-3∞), MEU Regiment (3-4-6), 1st/82 Para Brigade (4-4∞), 1st & 2nd Para Brigades [101st AB] (2x 4-4∞), 3rd Armored Regiment (6-5-6). The following turn the same player receives (as immediate reinforcements) the 5 following units: 1st & 2nd Marine Expeditionary Brigades [MEB] (2x 6-6-6), 1st Armored Brigade [3rd MD] (8-6-6), 2nd & 3rd Mechanized Brigades [3rd MD] (5-6-6). US supply is explained in Rule 14.10.

27.2 US approval to play certain cards

To play the *Mother of All Bombs* (#33) and *Carpet Bombing* (#82) cards as an Asset/Event respectively, the active player needs to get the formal approval of the United States (unless he himself is the US player, or controls the US). To get this approval, the player rolls a die and checks the result according to his nationality:

- Anyone attacking ISIS: passes on 1-5;
- Israeli player: passes on 1-4;
- Turkish player: passes on 1-3;
- Saudi player: passes on 1-2.

The test fails automatically for any other situation or player. If the active player does not succeed in getting US approval, he loses the card.

[28.0] RUSSIAN INTERVENTION

Russia launched a direct military intervention in Syria in September 2015, to avoid the collapse of the Syrian Regime. As a consequence, Russian troops are deployed in scenarios 3, 4, 6, 9 & 10. Certain scenarios allow the arrival of Russian Reinforcements (see the scenario booklet). Unless the scenario states otherwise, Russian units are controlled by the Syrian player; they must trace a valid supply line to Tartus or Latakia.

When the International Tension rule is played and the relevant marker reaches Level 10 on the International Tension Track, Russia launches a full scale intervention in the Middle East (if the Kremlin has not yet intervened). If Russia is already a belligerent (depending on the scenario being played), the player controlling Russian forces immediately places all the available Russian reinforcements and replacements on Tartus, Latakia, Damascus or any controlled box contiguous to Tartus. If the player has already played the Russian Special Joker Card, he may play it one more time.

If Russia has not yet intervened, the Syrian player (or the Iranian player in scenario 8) immediately draws 1 card from either draw pile and takes the Russian Joker and the Russian Special Joker cards; he then places the 3 following units as immediate reinforcements on any supplied controlled box on the map: 22nd Para Regiment (3-3∞), 56th Para Bde (4-4∞), 810th Marine Bde (4-4-5). On the following turn, the player receives as reinforcements the 3 following units on any supplied controlled box on the map: 205th Mech Bde (4-4-5), 6th Armored Bde (6-5-5) and 7th Airborne Mech Div (8-10-5). Russian supply is explained in Rule 14.9.

[29.0] ALLIANCES

The game is mainly designed for multiplayer scenarios. In such scenarios, the best way to win is to conclude informal and limited alliances with other players, just as in real life in the Middle East. In most of the scenarios, two players can achieve a minor or even a major victory at the expense of the other player(s). However, due to the victory conditions (which reproduce local geopolitics), two or more players cannot win a decisive victory at the same time. Players can exchange cards during their own Event segment. One player can exchange 1 card with another player of his choice, without revealing it, (getting 1 card in return from that player, to ensure that both of them have the same number of cards at the start of the next Segment).

[30.0] FOG OF WAR

To reproduce the Fog of War, players are not allowed to check the composition of opponents' stacks. They can only see the counter on the top of opponents' stacks.

[31.0] HOW TO WIN

A player wins the game by achieving the victory condition(s) described in each scenario. Victory conditions have been defined to match as closely as possible the geopolitical realities on the ground. As a consequence, like real life in the Middle East, several players (not all of them) can win a marginal or even a major victory if they ally, play smartly and co-ordinate their strategies. On the other hand, all the players can lose the game. It can be win-win, win-lose, or lose-lose!

In the Multi-Player scenarios played by two players (as the optional rule allows), a player needs to achieve the same level of victory for each of the countries he controls to get the credit of that level of victory. In other words, his level of victory depends on the lowest level of victory of the countries or factions he controls. This rule prevents a player from favoring one country more than another (Israel to the detriment of Turkey; or Iraq to the detriment of Syria, for example).

Alternatively, players can agree to determine victory in simpler way (even if it is less fun and less realistic) by collecting Victory points (VPs). The player who gets more VPs than his opponent(s) at the end of the last turn wins the game.

31.1 Calculating Victory Points (VPs)

When mutually agreed, players calculate their VPs by adding the victory value of every controlled box on the map within the country(ies) where the main action takes place (usually, Syria and/or Iraq) instead of applying the normal victory conditions. Boxes controlled by Kurdish or ISIS units do not count for any player:

- **Religious city** (Karbala & Najaf): **4 VPs**
- **Objective** (white star on black box): **3 VPs**
- **Oilfield: 2 VPs** (Mosul, as an objective and an oilfield, counts for 3 VPs only).
- All other boxes: **1 VP**
- **Iranian Bonus:** Establish a valid line of communication (succession of non-isolated boxes) between Iranian territory and a coastal box on the Mediterranean: **+10 extra VPs**
- **Saudi Bonus:** Establish a valid line of communication (succession of non-isolated boxes) between the Saudi and Turkish territories: **+10 extra VPs**

Players then compare their respective VPs. The level of victory depends on the difference between them:

- **Strategic victory: 15 more VPs** than your opponent(s);
- **Operational victory: 10 more VPs** than your opponent(s);
- **Marginal victory: 5 more VPs** than your opponent(s).

Any other result is considered as a stalemate.

[32.0] SCENARIOS

The players can select scenarios running from 6 to 12 turns each (See the Scenario Booklet). A 6 Turn scenario can be played in 2-3 hours. The 12 Turn campaign lasts about 4-5hours. Each scenario describes special rules, deployment (including Reinforcement batches) and victory conditions. Certain scenarios allow a different number of players as an optional rule, but every scenario can always be played by two players. It is highly recommended that the tutorial Scenario 1 be played first to become familiar with and learn the game's mechanisms.

[33.0] DO IT YOURSELF! DESIGN YOUR OWN CAMPAIGN

For those who are keen to explore other scenarios, adapt them to the current situation or reproduce historical ones, you can easily "do it yourself" by using the rules, cards and counters provided with Fitna (you already have all the region's armies and militias!). You just have to choose the countries and factions that you want to play and to determine who plays first, second, etc... Players can take inspiration from other scenarios to determine the special rules, required cards, victory conditions and relevant orders of battle for each camp. Players can research a lot of relevant information on the Internet to update scenarios or design their own.

[34.0] DESIGNER'S NOTES

I was greatly helped in the design of this card-driven game by my long-term experience as a player, the publication of my wargame *Bloody Dawns: The Iran-Iraq War* by the High Flying Dices Game company in 2017, and by my job of Middle Eastern expert for various research centers. My deep knowledge of the military, political, diplomatic and economic context was essential in identifying the key events and assets which are represented by the cards, but also to ensure that the scenarios are well balanced, fun to play, and at the same time very close to what could happen in reality.

The key difficulty was finding the best game system to reproduce the war against ISIS and various hypothetical conflicts in such a wide area, running from the Persian Gulf to the Levant. Quite a challenge! After several attempts, I opted for a grand strategic card driven game with boxes, instead of hexagons, and for 2 month turns. The card driven system maintains suspense and forces the players to co-ordinate their actions carefully.

Cards

Cards introduce fun, surprise and a strong pedagogical dimension, forcing the players to take tough decisions, ensuring, at the bottom line, that no two games will ever be similar. With 4 cards in the player's hand, a prudent policy is to draw 2 Asset cards and 2 Evens cards; then play one as an Event, one to gain OPPs, and two as Assets to influence a battle or cancel any cards your opponent may play. Do not forget that if you spend your cards during your opponent's turn, you will have fewer cards left for your own turn. Playing your Joker at the right moment can make the difference between victory and defeat. It can be a prudent strategy to keep your Joker for the last turn, because many key events generally occur at the end of the game. Card #37 *Cyber War*, is a really powerful card, in many ways representing a contemporary version of the WWII Blitzkrieg; but do not forget that if you use it, you may in return have to suffer the potentially ruinous effects of the hackers mobilized by your opponent, and you may lose cards as a consequence. Read each card carefully before playing it, because some of them can have really devastating effects if played at a crucial moment. Special Joker Cards bring a real deterrent dimension to the game. Be very careful as to when you play them, because they can prompt an unexpected boomerang effect if your adversary plays his own Special Joker Card in response!

A good balanced hand to begin the game (for novice players) would ideally consist of 1 *Air Strike* (if available) to harass one of your adversary's boxes, 2 *Reinforcements* cards to take a first batch of reinforcements immediately and also acquire 8 OPPs for moving and attacking, and 1 *Mobile Artillery* to support combat (because its effects cannot be cancelled by another card).

Strategies

Read the victory conditions carefully. You will see that you can develop different strategies to reach them. There are indeed many ways of winning the game. Focusing on military offensives to conquer enemy territories is one of them, but not the only one. Focusing on economic or asymmetric warfare (by playing relevant cards at the right moment, forcing your adversary to discard precious cards of his own) can be also rewarding and easier. Be aware that if you do not garrison boxes containing an ISIS symbol, you risk seeing ISIS troops appearing in them at the worst possible moment. The same comment applies to the Turkish player and his need to garrison PKK boxes. Do not forget that when your opponent does not have sufficient cards in his hand, he is like a lame duck! Play the International Tension rule carefully to get the High Tension cards in the game, but be aware that bringing both Russia and the USA into the game can be devastating, spoiling your own strategy...

In any case, remember that winning battles and destroying enemy units does not bring VPs; gaining objectives (as described by the scenario), oilfields and religious cities does. A coherent military strategy aims to conquer key boxes, not to destroy enemy units for the simple pleasure of eliminating an opponent's forces. Offensives are always costly, especially in terms of losses. Launching offensives to harass the enemy is a valid strategy only when you have sufficient militias to absorb losses – and sufficient cards – to sustain it. Keep in mind that a powerful stack remains the best option to conquer territories, because this stack can launch as many offensives as you spend OPPs. As a consequence, be prepared to defend key boxes with sufficient units able to resist

a powerful attacking stack. Remember that the *UN Security Council* card can end the game early; adapt your strategy accordingly.

Last but not least, maintain uncertainty around your intentions! Be aware that every player can win every scenario. Chance plays a role but strategy, experience and smart alliances will prove to be the best means to beat your adversaries. Finally, make alliances! Making a deal with one of your adversaries at the right moment can bring you (or both of you) victory.

Credits

Game Design: Pierre Razoux.

Game Development and Editing: Florent Coupeau, Thomas Pouchin (NUTS! Publishing).

Graphics: Thomas Pouchin.

Playtesting: Pierre Razoux, Florent Coupeau, Thomas Pouchin, Patrick Ruestchmann, Guillaume Levasseur, Sébastien de Peyret, Rémi Chabaud, Dominique Guillemin, Ronan Hill, Enguerrand Ducourtil, Christophe Maresca, Mathieu Catalan, Frank Stora, Bastien Vandendyck, Etienne Dignat, Jean-Michel Millet, Emma Soubrier, Frédéric Campos, Christophe de Lajudie, Damien Wallaert, Antoine Pietri, Nicolas Mazzucchi, Nicolas Bronard, Pierre Haroche, Olivier Passot.