MOST WANTED

Stalingrad Roads

by Nicolas Rident (designer)

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After *Liberty Roads* **and** *Victory Roads* **(Hexasim) and a long absence of 3 years caused by professional obligations,** I've started working on a new wargame based on the same system, that you could call the 'Roads' series for simplicity's sake, even if the game's eventual name will certainly not contain that word.

This time the game is on a completely classic theme, and that is the campaign I have gamed most as a wargamer: Operation Uranus, from its opening to Manstein's counterattack at Kharkov. There is no shortage of good games on the subject, my own reference being the memorable Enemy at the Gates (OCS series – MMP); but because the campaign is so gripping for both sides the idea of adapting the 'Roads' system to it has been running through my head for years now.

For those who don't know either *Victory* or *Liberty Roads,* the 'philosophy' of the system can be summarised as follows: a fluid game, with simple, classic mechanisms, that tries to replicate as much as possible the particular characteristics of a campaign through the use of 'supports'; and a game that puts the player in the position of an army group commander.

The basic rules are hopelessly classic: movement-combat-exploitation, in IGO-UGO mode. Nonetheless there are two distinctive characteristics: the absence of ZOCs, making the game extremely fluid, and a combat results table with a double result: a standard attrition result, but also a tactical result (retreat, exploitation, movement of reserves etc. etc.) which gives each combat its own particularity.

The supports are the heart of the game. They allow the simulation not only of resources that allow the player to manage his campaign (combat bonuses, replacements, etc.) but also all the events that took place during these confrontations. Each turn the players receive a certain number of supports at random, and they have to manage them as best they can in order to conduct their operations. The random nature in which they are obtained, along with the different ways of using them, gives the games in the series great replayability. In addition, the way that the distinctive features of the campaign (the chrome) are depicted by the supports allows the core of the rules to be considerably lightened thus making the game more accessible.

Finally, the concept of 'placing' the player, even if it isn't explicit in the rules, takes on a huge importance in the overall equilibrium of the system in my eyes. The player is responsible for his theatre of operations. To illustrate this, lets say he's in Zhukov's or Zeitzler's shoes. As such, he is in command of his troops but without being in total control of the results of his orders, (the random nature of supports, combat results dependant on die rolls). On top of that he also has to account to his superior (Stalin or Hitler), this being also represented by certain mechanisms, notably the famous Führer Satisfaction track. I think that this clearly defined positioning of the player helps him, even if only subconsciously, to cast himself in his particular role, thus contributing to the pleasure that wargamers have in playing this series.

These are the foundations on which the rules of Liberty Roads were based and the result was truly satisfying in terms of the system's coherence and the cursor, so it seems to me, was well placed between complexity, historical accuracy and enjoyment of the game. The challenge with Victory roads was to simulate the entire campaign of 1944 on the Eastern Front in this scale, and the rules were pushed to the limits in order to include all the particularities of the campaign. The result was a game that was undoubtedly more complex, in its size not least of all, but one that succeeded in simulating in a very satisfying manner the power and the tempo of the Soviet offensives.

Stalingrad roads will be in some ways a return to the system's roots with a game that is simpler, but that one that attempts to reproduce as much as is possible the characteristics of the campaign.

On the Soviet side the game will focus above all on the planning of offensives. The player will have one major offensive marker and two minor offensive markers. These latter markers can be used without any particular constraints, but will

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generate only a few supports. The major offensive marker can only be moved with the agreement of the STAVKA to an objective that the Soviet player has to capture and will only supply its supports on the turn of its arrival in the game. If the objective has not been captured after three turns are over, the player is penalised.

Several other rules will relate to the Soviet player: managing the Stavka, the development of Operation Mars, penalties in attack and defence against the German troops (and yes, we're no longer in the campaigns of 1944/45; the German troops are of a different quality…)

On the German side three features of the campaign will be highlighted:

• First of all supplying the Stalingrad pocket, which a little like the invasion rules in Liberty Roads, will be a game within the game. Each turn the German player will try to supply the pocket and the number of Ju 52s that succeed in their mission will determine the supply levels of the surrounded units as well as various bonuses and penalties.

• There will be a 'Manstein effect' on how the campaign unfolds. The German leader will have great influence on the Führer Satisfaction Track, but this influence can be jeopardised depending on the successes obtained by the German player.

• Finally, throughout the game the German player will be able to prepare his February counter

MAXIMAL	SATISFACTION	DISMISSAL

offensive, the famous Backhand Blow. To achieve that he will have to defend and counterattack as best he can each turn, in order to accumulate offensive points that he will have to use wisely when the time comes.

At the moment I am writing these lines the playtests have just started. (In the space-time zone that *Battles magazine* occupies, there is every chance that at the moment you read these very lines, the game is already on sale; but leaving that aside ...). The aim of the game's development will be to ensure game balance by working on those key points outlined above, while trying to avoid adding complexity. At the end of the day, I hope that players will rediscover what it was they liked in the two previous games, with the unquestionable advantage for this particular opus, that this time the German player has a real offensive potential.

On the production side, the game will have a standard size map, but with large hexes to make it easier to handle the counters, two counter sheets and several player aids. The entire graphic design element has been entrusted to Olivier's magic touch. At the present moment, three scenarios are on offer: the full campaign, Operation Uranus and the Backhand Blow. If we can meet our schedules, pre-orders should be available towards the end of summer. **B**

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FITNA
by Pierre Razoux (designer)
Associated Professor at Science Po Paris and Research Director at the French Institute for Strategic Research (IRSEM).

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Strategic Wargaming is a useful tool to understand geopolitics in the Middle East. The hundred of players who tested *FITNA – The Global War in the Middle East* since eighteen months will tell you: after four hours of play on one of the scenarios, everyone had perfectly grasped the balance of power of today's Middle East. Players understood that mainstream media and some Western and Middle Eastern leaders' convictions was not in tune with the reality they met on the field. In *FITNA*, players step in the shoes of one the major regional powers (Saudi Arabia, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Syria, Turkey, but also the USA and Russia) whose victory conditions are copy-pasted on each power real geopolitical interests and not on abstract, unrealistic or disconnected victory conditions. You do not win by destroying enemy units, but by controlling key objectives and by denying your enemies control over theirs. Just like real life. There are not one winner and many losers, especially if you play in teams; teams can win, but teams can also lose together! For example, when the Russian player intervenes in Syria, he does not do it to annoy the West, but to secure control of the Syrian seashore for energetic and military means, to establish a land corridor between Tartus and Damascus in order to help Syria's Ba'athist regime and to contain the jihadist, Turkish and Iranian pushes into Syria.

On his side, the Iranians aim at all cost to establish a land corridor towards the Mediterranean through Iraq, Syria and Lebanon, not to destroy
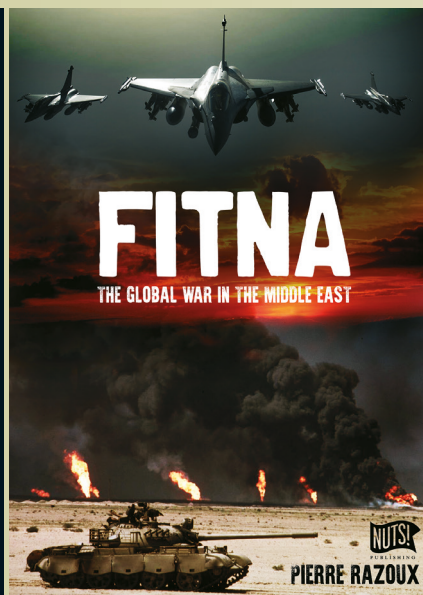
Israel – this is Israel's Prime Minister Benyamin Netanyahu and his new friend the Saudi crown prince Mohammed Ben Salman's propaganda – but to enable gas and oil exportation into the Mediterranean and into Europe via pipelines in order to free himself from the naval locks that are Ormuz and Bab el-Mandeb straits as well as the Suez Canal, which are all under Western control. Tehran also seeks to create new markets in order to free itself from Russian and Chinese grasp, and to reinforce its control over Iraqi, Syrian and Lebanese Shia communities and militias. Are not the West seeking to protect the Christian minorities in the Middle East, as well as Saudis seeking to enforce their dominance over Sunni communities in the region?

Through every victory condition and every scenario, *FITNA* allows understanding of the real battles each major power faces in the Middle East. I spent much time with the testers, to pre-