

MOST WANTED



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**

PLAYTEST COMPONENTS



FITNA

by Pierre Razoux (designer)

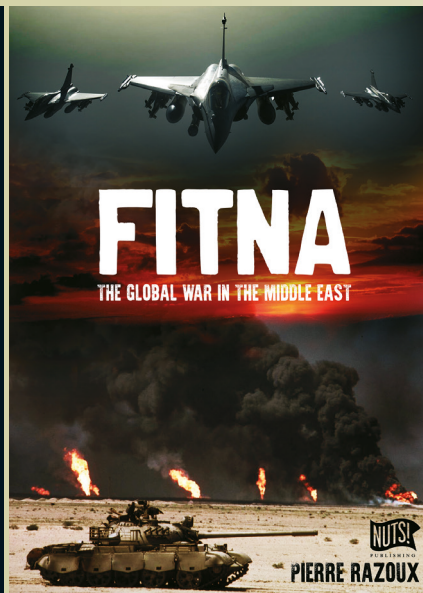
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NUTS! PUBLISHING

Strategic Wargaming is a useful tool to understand geopolitics in the Middle East. The hundred of players who tested

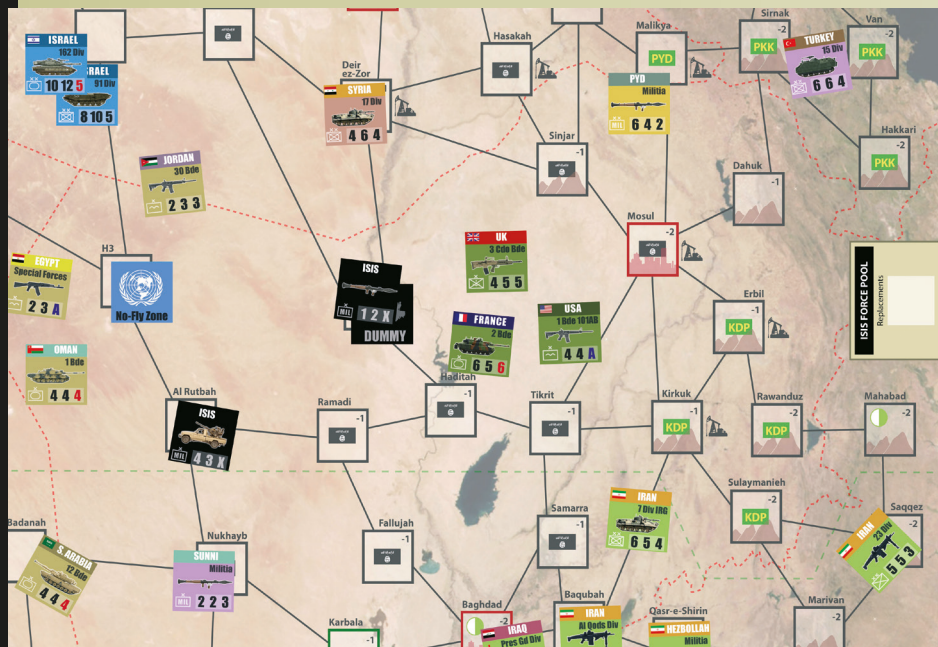
FITNA – The Global War in the Middle East since eighteen months will tell you: after four hours of play on one of the scenarios, everyone had perfectly grasped the balance of power of today's Middle East. Players understood that mainstream media and some Western and Middle Eastern leaders' convictions was not in tune with the reality they met on the field. In *FITNA*, players step in the shoes of one of 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 Benjamin 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-



Air Strikes

The active player commits his fighter bomber squadrons to strike the enemy.



The active player selects 1 box and rolls 1 die for every unit present in that box:

- 1-2: No effect.
- 3-4: The unit is reduced.
- 5-6: The unit is eliminated.

The die roll is modified by the box's defense value.

#36

Cyber War

The active player launches a massive cyber offensive to disorganize an adversary's Command, Control and Communication (C3) network.



The active player discards 3 cards at random from an opposing player's hand.

His opponent then rolls a die: on a 5, he discards 1 card at random from the active player's hand (2 cards on a 6).

#37

Israel Strikes Syria

Following the transfer of Syrian smart weapons to Hezbollah, Israel launches strikes to punish the Baathist regime.



The active player selects 2 boxes in Syria and rolls 1 die for every Syrian & Hezbollah unit present in that box:

- 1-2: No effect.
- 3-4: The unit is reduced.
- 5-6: The unit is eliminated.

The die roll is modified by the box's defense value.

#42

cisely determine the victory conditions in order to make the game realistic, balanced and fun to play.

FITNA is not just a tool used to better understand Middle Eastern politics, but also a wargame that grasp the strengths and weaknesses of every army and militias with great detail. The Turkish player quickly realises that if he stays in the mountains, he has a very powerful army. But as soon as he goes down occupying the Kurdish zones in Iraq and Syrian, he becomes much more vulnerable, especially if he pushes his luck by keeping his attacks towards Aleppo in Syria and Mosul in Iraq. Most of the time, he holds his grounds for a couple of turns before he is forced to retreat. On the same terms, the Israeli player is extremely powerful in early game; he can easily occupy South Lebanon (like in 1982 and 2006) and South Syria (like the actual Israeli government is dreaming about), but he quickly realise that, as soon as his enemies start a war of attrition, he cannot hold those lands in the long term. By playing *FITNA*, you realise the even if Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States' armies are over-equipped in high-tech weapons and fighters, they are weak and cannot hold on their conquest if they do not mobilize support from their Arabian allies and do not manage to keep Western support.

The Syrian player faces a simpler but harder situation: he has to survive by controlling the key Syrian cities before game ends. But he soon sees he will not succeed if he does not maintain a strong alliance with both Iran and Russia; if he loses one of them, he is as good as dead! Especially if another player plays the "Coup in Syria" card! This is where *FITNA* shines as a wargame of subtle alliances because the Syrian player takes notes that Iranian and Russian victory conditions are not necessarily compatible. As for the Iraqi player, he needs to eliminate ISIS units, to avoid Kurdish peshmergas expansion and to retake most of its territory; he will succeed only with Iranian and Western help. So, my wargame *FITNA* allows learning by showing that the Middle East is not as simple and black

and white as some wants us to believe!

For ethical reasons (It was difficult to propose a wargame where ISIS would be a full player.) but also for geopolitical reasons (every regional power manipulated ISIS at some point.), I decided to activate the ISIS units through card play. It generates uncertainty and allow every player to secretly use them against their enemies, just like reality. Speaking of Kurdish peshmergas, players who tested *FITNA* quickly understood that they had little chance, militarily, to establish control over an economically viable Kurdish state that would contain enough oil revenue to ensure the survival of the 35 million of Kurds that live there.

What is really fun and instructive with *FITNA* is, of course, the 90 Event and Asset cards which simulate most events that occurred or may occur in the next years. My analyst, historian and geopolitical expertise proved essential to determine what was important from what was less important all in inserting fun but realistic cards. I leave the surprise to the players once they buy the game. What is certain is that card driven games force us to make difficult choices, again just like real life! Do I use my four cards to trigger events, generate operation points that will allow me to move units and attack, to reinforce units or to influence combat outcomes? As for the five "Strategic Jokers", they form one the innovative aspect of the game by integrating the "conventional dissuasion" dimension between players. Will I launch my Israeli fighters against Iranian units in Syria and in Lebanon, or better, against Iran's nuclear facilities if I know that Iran will retaliate with their ballistic missiles and Hizballah's missiles? In that case, what will the Americans and Russians do? Will they launch massive air strikes or will they opt for a cyber offensive?

One of the *FITNA* strengths as a strategic level wargame is that it leaves space for military operations, the art of war and for new asymmetrical combat trends like armed drones, booby trapped vehicles, IEDs, terror attacks, Special Forces and even fake news! All of those actions are at the player's disposal to allow them to create their

own efficient multifaceted strategies that stick to reality. In the mean time, players can rely on leadership and a vast array of heavier weapons: fighters, artillery, ballistic missiles.

To win, you need to see the big picture and know its details, to define a strategy and to be able to conduct it. You need to step into your enemies shoes. This is what it takes to explore a maximum of "what if" scenarios without ideologic boundaries that some would want to impose. And for those who wish to design their own scenario, no problems, *FITNA* is also designed to allow this.

In conclusion, I would want to tell you designing a wargame and military history book writing often go hand by hand for me. It is all about a win-win process. In both cases, it is necessary to thoroughly, meticulously and precisely research the subject. You cannot leave anything to chance, even if you have to quantify chance. For my part, I wrote my most important book (*The Iran-Iraq War*, Harvard University Press/Belknap, 2015, 640 pages, which won the 2016 Distinguished Book Awards from the Society for Military History) dreaming to transform it into a wargame. I did it two years later with *Bloody Dawns: The Iran-Iraq War* (High Flying Dice Game Cie, 2017) from which *FITNA*'s main mechanism are based upon. It forced me to write my book in a vivid and precise manner in order to transfer the exact elements (battle orders, maps, operational plans, materials...) needed for a wargame. From feedbacks I received from the players, the game system works well, stays very fluid and realistic. The same goes for *FITNA*. **B**

