

OBJECTIVE: MOSCOW

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Objective: Moscow is a divisional-level simulation dealing with a hypothetical invasion of the Soviet Union either in the contemporary period or twenty years hence. There are two campaign games to choose from — the contemporary game and the 1998 game — and three one-map present-day scenarios.

The Map and Counters:

The four 22" x 35" mapsheets join up to portray the whole of the Soviet Union and much of China. The area covered extends from Belgium in the West to Alaska in the East. Due to the map projection used, each hex is equal in size and represents sixty kilometres. Unlike many other SPI games, all the charts and tables used in the game are printed in both the rules booklet and on the map; this helps play considerably. My only complaint with the maps is that the North-East map section only has units deployed on it in the 1998 game, and even then the number in use on the map rarely exceeds thirty. I believe that the designers might have made this section slightly more important or omitted it and reduced the cost of the game.

COMBAT UNIT (with step-reduction)

Front (full strength) *Back (reduced strength)*

Unit Designation: US 84
Unit Type: [Symbol]
Personnel Value: 3
Movement Allowance: 3-3-4
Attack Strength: 3
Defense Strength: 4

Back (reduced strength)
Unit Designation: US 84
Unit Type: [Symbol]
Personnel Value: 1
Movement Allowance: 1-1-4

COMBAT UNIT (with readiness class)

Front (untried) *Back (tried)*

Nationality: SU
Unit Type: IIIw-5
Readiness Class: III
Movement Allowance: 5
Attack Strength: 3
Defense Strength: 5

Back (tried)
Unit Designation: SU 37G
Unit Type: [Symbol]
Personnel Value: 2
Movement Allowance: 3-3-5

AIR UNIT

Front (contemporary) *Back (1998)*

Unit Designation: US 12
Nationality: US
Aircraft Class: F4
Aircraft Name: FB
Range: 15-9-11
Air-to-Air Strength: 15
Ground Attack Strength: 9-11

Back (1998)
Unit Designation: US
Aircraft Class: FB
Aircraft Name: FB
Range: 10-8-20

The counters come in three sheets with four hundred counters each. Among the units represented are headquarters, air units, armoured, mechanised infantry and leg infantry (the backbone of the Chinese Army) divisions, marines and airborne and airmobile units. Many of the countries and units (e.g. Japan and Israel, cruise missile brigades and hovercraft) are, however, used only in the 1998 scenario, and thus many countries have other countries' units on their "flip" side; e.g. many Pan-Scandinavian units are on the back of South Korean units. Other examples of economy are the Soviet and Chinese 1998 air units printed on the rear of their headquarters' counters, and this can make it very difficult to find many units.

In this game SPI has run amok with their latest invention; untried units. Except for headquarters and air units, the entire contemporary Soviet and Chinese armies are untried, while NATO has units printed with reduced strengths on their "flip" sides. This is one of NATO's many advantages in the game. The Soviet land units come in four states of readiness; class I units are always at full wartime strength, class II units are at 70% strength, class III are cadres at 30% strength and class IV (1998 only) are mid-war reinforcements. Classes II and III may be mobilised to wartime strength, but this has its disadvantages (e.g. vulnerability to attack).

The Rules and Game Mechanics:

Though the rules booklet is 24 pages long, the actual rules only take up nine pages and are composed of eighteen sections (including the introduction etc). The rest of the "rules booklet" is made up by the scenarios, a play-by-mail module, developer's and designer's notes, historical rationale and the game tables. I found the "historical" rationale and notes very useful in explaining some of the stranger rules, e.g. no nuclear weapons in 1998.

There are two types of movement in OM: strategic and land. The former encompasses rail, sea and air transport and air ferry, and in the strategic movement phase the U.S. player may conduct off-map movement. Land movement and supply may be influenced by communication zones; these represent regions densely filled with roads and railroads, and hence movement in such an area ignores other terrain. After all land units have moved, air units can then move to attack hexes containing enemy units.

In the interception phase the non-phasing player may attack any enemy air units in hexes containing friendly units. An air unit can only be attacked at odds of at least one to one, so it is unlikely that the whole stack will be intercepted at once. Instead, the topmost unit of the stack must be attacked first, followed by the second etc., in sequence. Thus fighters should be placed above fighter-bombers above bombers. An attack at 1 to 1 can be suicidal, as there is only a one in six chance of the defending unit retreating (returning to its air base) and this equals the probability of an attacker-eliminated result. Any phasing-player air units that survive may then attack the land units in the hex. One omission that I particularly disliked was the lack of any rules concerning flak as this makes air supremacy far too important, and in my opinion air combat is one of OM's weak points.

As already mentioned, combat is by an odds ratio and the possible results are a retreat or elimination of either the attacker or defender, or an exchange. In the case of an exchange result, it is not attack or defense points that are exchanged but personnel points; these represent the manpower and "staying-power" of a unit. Since Soviet units have fewer personnel points than NATO or the Chinese, the CRT is slightly biased against them. In addition, as many NATO units can "flip-over" to their reverse sides to absorb personnel losses less NATO units need be lost in an exchange than otherwise.

After the combat phase comes the reaction phase. All headquarters units at army level have a reaction rating which determines how many mechanised units it may move in a certain area around it during this phase. This phase is particularly important as it allows the non-phasing player to block any gaps in his front line created by adverse combat results before the enemy can exploit them in his mechanised movement phase. Only the non-phasing player can move during the reaction phase.

The structure of the game-turn in OM necessitates a great deal of planning to exploit gaps that it is hoped will be created; thus, although the rules are fairly simple, it is not an easy game to play.

Special Unit Types:

Front
US Bxxxx
HQ 0
2-2-5

Back
US 1xxx
HQ 0
0-0-5

Headquarters (contemporary game only; no HQs in 1998).

The most important uses for HQs are for tracing supply and for movement in the reaction phase. In addition, U.S. and West German headquarters may carry infantry divisions, and a Soviet unit must be adjacent to a Soviet HQ to launch a nuclear attack. All HQ units increase the stacking limit from three to four units in its hex. These abilities make headquarters one of the most important unit types.

C43

US 1
3-3-7

US x 0
S1-0-5

US x 1
1-9-1

Naval Units.

The naval side of this game is the weakest point of the entire simulation: it would have been preferable if this sub-section had been left out completely. Their only use is as floating air bases and only the U.S. player has them.

Hovercraft (1998).

These are the fastest land units in the game, having a movement allowance of seven. Their movement is also unaffected by terrain except that they may not enter certain hexes. However, they have no zone of control.

Cruise Missile Brigades (1998).

Despite their powerful sounding name, the only effect of these units is to shift an attack one column to the right.

U.S. Space Marines (1998).

These units are the anti-climax to OM, for if the U.S. player opts to use them he is almost certain to lose the game. The reasons for this are: he receives no air replacements between game-turns two and six and this gives the Soviet player almost complete air superiority; secondly, he only receives two 1-9-1 units and they may not be used until after the half-way point of the game.

Miscellaneous Rules:

Supply

In Europe it is difficult to be out of supply because of the communication zone, and even in China there are so many HQs that it is rare for such a situation to occur. Being out of supply has the usual SPI effects (halve Attack and Defense Strengths and movement allowance).

Nuclear Combat

The damage done as a result of a nuclear strike depends upon the personnel points of the target units. The disadvantage of using this attack form is that there is a one in six chance of provoking a strategic nuclear war, and the player who initiated it automatically loses.

Camouflage

To prevent a player from examining the enemy's stacks, certain terrain types provide camouflage from spy satellite reconnaissance and hence prevent this from happening. This rule is, in my experience, one of the most frequently broken, whether by accident or design.

SW Sb
FB Vggn
1-1(4)

AREA
2

Weather

The weather rules are one of OM's strongpoints, for by a simple system of modifications to the weather table dice rolls the probability of certain weather occurring alters as the game proceeds. However, due to the Soviet's greater use of limited weather aircraft they are more vulnerable to adverse weather conditions, and so suffer in this section too.

Summary:

Objective: Moscow is not a game for the inexperienced wargamer as it is the ability to plan one's moves ahead that will win the game. Thus, despite NATO's advantages in this simulation it is not too difficult for the Soviet player to win if he is a better tactician. Its rules are fairly simple but lacking in places; if better naval and air rules are wanted, SPI's **The Next War** is probably a better buy. Nevertheless, OM is worth buying for those who collect big games and can afford its price. For those who prefer small games, the one-map scenarios are almost as enjoyable to play as the campaign games.