

Triangulation and Development

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[The lead up is relatively fundamental. Advanced players can skip to the last half.]

Introduction and Background

Axis and Allies has things in common with all strategy games: openings, development, mid-game, endgame. The Axis starts with the initiative. Axis decides what style of game will be played initially. Some misdirection and camouflage can be used but inevitably the bid tells the allied player what type of game you want. There are conservative, multiple option, and wide-open attack strategies. The allied player will try to strip Axis of the initiative and force them into a different type of game. Once the Axis loses control of the direction of the game, they will be hard pressed to regain it.

Almost every competent strategy has an underlying theme. This is accompanied by the style of the player. Themes may change but the fundamental style is usually consistent.

Let's look at standard themes going from conservative to aggressive:

Overwhelming Buildup

Tech

IPC

Quick Kill

Now some styles from hit conservative to aggressive:

Economic

Position

Swarm

Overpower

These styles may look like synonyms of the themes but that is not the case in this context. Example: Two players use a 6 infantry in Ukraine bid. This is a quick kill theme. However, if you are playing someone who has a "Position" based style, his or her opening decisions will be much different than that of an "Overpower" player. An overpower player will hit want to hit Karelia on G1. The position player would much rather run Stalingrad '43 and move to Caucus with the Ukraine force on G1. (See the Megabid GOA corner for details of this strategy.) A Russian position player might take Finland against this placement in an effort to keep the armor alive to threaten Caucus. A German overpower player would instantly attack Karelia. However, a German position player would still move to Caucus using Stalingrad '43 (Fournier variation). -Attacking the Finish armor with planes. If you know the type of player you are facing, you can force him into a style of play that he dislikes. Or, even better, you know what he'll try to do.

Let's look at styles. Everyone has one they are most comfortable with.

Economic All players should look at situations where they can trade units at a gain. - Fifteen IPCs worth for twenty, one unit for two, etc. Economic players are focused on it. They want to know the value of units traded. They also want to make sure they are making more than their opponents after infrastructure costs are removed. The allies may make more initially but their infrastructure costs are higher.

(Infrastructure: Units that doing nothing themselves but are necessary to field units that do; ICs/transport/carriers/AA guns for new ICs.) These players will try to whittle down an opponent and overcome him or her with sheer economic superiority. Economic players often like to run openings like "Rock of Gibraltar".

Position Position players are board watchers. They are looking to control key positions. They are the players most likely to go for an IPC victory as Axis and the toughest to pull one off against. They are also very difficult to get a conventional win against. They may not be making as many IPCs as their opponents but they will guard the key spots tenaciously. They will slowly expand into other key spots always looking at opportunities to lock down another critical position and limit their opponent's choices. Most of the top twenty are position players. Often it looks like these players are losing a game only to turn it around. They will often give up IPCs or units to establish a strong core position. They will work from there to finish off their opponent. They risk being teched, swarmed or overpowered early.

Swarming

Any player who buys a Japan IC on J1 has a swarming style. The allied equivalent is a player buys about 25% armor and tries to retake Africa and Asia quickly with armor. Personally, I think this style is tough to win with consistently. But, there are top ten players who are successful swarmers. We've even had a swarming GOA, Sirchauce. These players will buy large amounts of armor take over territory quickly. They'll have the opportunity to get a quick IPC or possibly take Russia if the allies have bad early dice. Germany will buy armor shift to EE and Japan will take Novo. Swarmers have no depth. They have difficulty holding gains. Example: They can't step up to Novo without being in a position to be counter-attacked and trade armor for infantry. The steep cost of the infrastructure buys (IC/trans/AA) keeps them from having many ground units. (Plus armor is so expensive.) I don't like this style but some people use it effectively. Its effectiveness is that it allows three different themes to be explored all in one game. First, a quick IPC, then a quick kill, then tech because they have gobbled up enough IPCs to roll for it early. By round five, such a game will almost always be decided. If you are going to use this style, one point is key; Germany must maintain a large threat on Karelia to keep USSR from overpowering the depthless Japan. See Triangulation/Pressuring Karelia below.

Overpowering These players make things really clear from the get go. They are going to try to win fast and early. They are generally also swarmers with Japan. They'll still units in EE and go for Karelia early. The trickier ones will counter-attack Ukraine and setup "Karelia Killer". As allies, they'll try to take EE or WE early. They'll take one or the other early and hard and try to beat Germany down quickly in a series of large trade off battles. They'll be losing from a unit value standpoint but they don't care. They want Germany or USSR crippled early. You don't need to worry about twelve hour games or continuations with these players. This is a low percentage style. Sometimes situations arise where you can overpower an opponent early but these players go into the game expecting and aiming for early victory. I don't know a single top twenty player that could be described as a power player. Generally, these players (even the ones with good fundamental skills) fail to rise above about 1800. This style relies just too much on dice. Even if you have 60% odds to plant 6 units in Karelia, that isn't great. You'll lose 30-40% due to a bad dice in Karelia and never have a great record.

Strategy The ideal strategy would be one that incorporates all four themes. 1) Quick kill 2) IPC victory 3) Buildup 4) Tech Such a strategy would off a shot at a quick kill. If that opportunity didn't pan out, the strategy would allow you to position yourself for an IPC victory. If the allied player positioned himself to prevent it, you could build up until you could overwhelm the other player with sheer numbers. Finally, if that failed the strategy would leave you with enough ground units and time that you could roll for tech for several rounds. Needless to say, most strategies are a compromise. For instance, you can't go for the quick kill and a long term build up in most cases. I play for a long term buildup and look for the other three opportunities if they arise. That seems to give me the most chances at victory. Still, I recommend

players break up their themes to keep things from getting boring. (It will also allow you to see the weaknesses in other styles if you learn to use methods that you are uncomfortable with.)

Skies Over Siberia

Stalingrad 43'

Karelia Killer

Kwang Surprise

Spanish Harlem

Rock of Gibraltar

Syrian Gambit

Khomeini's Revenge

Mountbattan's Gambit

These are all common strategies you should become familiar with. Each one has several variations and it would be too much to list them all here. There are strategy web sites that cover them. About half are discussed somewhere in the GOA corners. (That's something I wish Spring had, a site to put up strategies.) Not all are good but they each have underlying principles that can be used in special situations. I've revised the #2 GOA corner to reflect the most up to date Axis opening and common allied counter. I strongly recommend new players read it. It is the basis for the last section of this corner: Development and Mid-Game for Axis

Let's assume that the axis have run the classic 3/2 Lybia/Manch opening. Dice have been even and results normal for both sides. Egypt will have 5-7 units. UK will run some variation of Mountbattan's gambit since they can't hit Egypt. UK will put significant pressure on Japan and thin out the Hawaii attack. Japan will carefully respond and guard against the numerous attack possibilities in Asia. USA will buy 3trans/4 inf. Destroying the remnants at Hawaii or possibly taking Finland for a future IC. USSR will take EE soft and possibly Finland. They may also hit Manch to soften it, or even take it if USSR used a split fighter defense. (1 Karelia/1 USSR) Since Asia has been well defended, Germany will retake EE. (I recommend they retake it with every available unit and never give it up again. Instead trading WE until they are prepared to defend WE permanently.)

UK will hit the Germany BB/trans in Egypt. Retreating after destroying the trans. They will also land a force in Algeria with USA following suit. Germany will have 9 units in Africa at this time, so the UK/USA units will not be enough to clear Egypt. Germany will take SA and return all of its units but one or two to Egypt by G4. UK will be able to hit Egypt on UK however, the attack force will be minimal, even if they send a second boat load. Japan should have the non-USSR forces in Asia liquidated by J3-4. They should be able to land ftrs and eventual infantry in Egypt to help Germany maintain control. Once this Japan to Egypt link has been established it will force the UK/USA expend much larger number of units to position itself to retake Africa. This will take the pressure off Germany.

That leads us to Triangulation. That occurs when Europe, Africa and Asia are working together to limit the allied options. If Germany can keep a legitimate threat on Karelia because the allies are shipping units to Africa, Japan can expand against limited pressure from Russia. This allows them to ship units to Africa and keep the triangle intact. By J4, Japan should have completed the Island Circuit: Hawaii, Australia, New Zealand and possibly Madagascar. They should also be in a position to send two units to Egypt and a ftr or two. Japan will be thin in Asia but they will be facing minimal soviet resistance if the Axis can triangulate. Japan should motivate the soviet to withdraw from Yakut by J4 even if Russia is running Skies over Siberia. By properly pressuring Karelia, You will back the USSR out of Asia slowly.

Developmentally Japan and Germany should be working to triangulate the board. Once this occurs, Axis has a positional advantage. Germany is still making a

reasonable amount. UK is making a very limited amount. Japan is thin in Asia but making enough to offset this in the long term.

This is why trans are better for Japan than ICs early. You've got to triangulate the board quickly as Axis. Buy an IC on round 3 or 4 if you want to pressure the USSR with Japan. That forms the last step in the mid-game board control. By G4 or G5, Germany won't be much of a threat to Karelia any more. Even if the Germans have numerous units in EE, most will be infantry and the UK/USA would be in a powerful position to counter-attack even if Germany took Karelia with many units left over. This means the triangle is broken. To regain it, Japan must begin to threaten USSR. This will create pressure on USSR and take allied resources away from Germany. Once again, the allies are prevented from advancing their board position according to their own will.

By this time, if things have gone well or even average, Japan has completed its early development and can build an IC to begin to pressure USSR. [Special defensive note: At this stage, around J4, one or two Japanese fighters will be in Egypt. These provide a service more important than just guarding Egypt. They can move to EE, Germany or WE if UK/USA tries a dual attack. This frees up several troops from Germany, further empowering them.] Very few major battles have been fought using this strategy, so nothing too drastic should have happened. Unless a series of small battles went badly or the allies forced the action with Germany and did well, things should be under control. If things have gone badly, you'll need to re-evaluate. Since Germany has a strong Africa presence, its income should be good and it should have significant units on the board. Still, if Japan is behind schedule on development. This will allow the allies take the game initiative. They can make a play for Africa, create triple-threat on Germany, or begin to pressure a thin Japan. (Further slowing development.) Any of the above conditions make the game an unlikely conventional win. If you are against an inexperienced player, you can just keep developing until you make up for the lost ground.

Against an experienced player, it's time to start rolling for tech. Germany should be strong defensively and can shell up while waiting but not for long. Tech hard when you realize that you need it. A major tech (IT/HB) is more than just a tool to use against the allies. It psychologically regains the initiative. Even if you don't hit a major tech, the fact that you are rolling for it and reducing the number of tech remaining has an effect. You can re-triangulate the board philosophically if not conventionally. It forces the allies hand. They must roll for tech themselves, go for Germany hard, or put so much pressure on Japan they can't afford to continue teching. Regardless, you can control the initiative and the game. That's why you should roll for tech hard when you go for it. So what if you got super subs? That's one less tech to go. Plus, the allies know they need to move soon. If things have gone less than horribly, you'll have 4 rounds to tech. That's 120 IPC and most likely 4 techs. You may not get anything, but tech was your last option. It's not a theme any normal strategy has. You have a good chance to win every game even with bad dice if you keep all your options open. You go for the IPC, then move onto the buildup, then resort to tech. This strategy doesn't leave many opportunities for a quick kill. (There are a few though.) You'll have a percentage chance to win using each theme. They add up to a reasonable chance of winning every game. Once you master this style of play, you'll give yourself a chance in every game.

You'll also have a clear understanding of what position players are trying to do when you face them.

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General of the Army,

Spring 1942