

Rebirth of the Axis

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[A quick key for this article: G1, R3, UK5, etc... refer to nations and the turn. Hence R1 is Russia's first turn. WE, EE, FIC are abbreviations for game board provinces. Look on a map and they'll become clear. FIC is French-Indo China, WE is Western Europe, etc...]

Axis strategy has made numerous improvements in the last few months. There was a brief period where the Allies were dominating, even with large Axis bids. Fortunately, the overall level of Axis play has become much more sophisticated. Seven out of the top ten would be considered axis players. Against a conservative Allied player, you'll still need tech to win in the majority of games. It is simply too inexpensive to defend Karelia and Russia. You may be making as much as the allies but you won't be able to finish off Russia. (It's much cheaper to defend than attack.) Remember this mantra.

However, when you are in a position to roll 120 IPCs worth of tech without fear, you have the advantage. The allies don't have that liberty if you are in a strong position. The key is getting the axis established.

Here are the two most common placements at 17: (Substitute an inf for the armor at 15.)

1) Standard Placement. Three inf Lybia, armor and inf in Manch. This is the most conservative placement you can use. Take Egypt and China hard. Kill the med BB. Pull out of EE (Eastern Europe) for a turn... We've all seen it many times. You are almost certain of taking Egypt with enough force to hold it against a counter attack. The bad news is that Japan will get off to a conservative to slow start. The good news is that mid-to-late game Germany will be making enough to form a strong defensive position. Also, Japan will eventually be able to reinforce Egypt using a Japanese trans strategy. This strategy is for the defensive, IPC/Tech victory. You'd need significant opponent mistakes or dice to kill USSR conventionally with this method. -The exception being a late game move where you are making enough IPC's to over-power the allies. -Highly unlikely since it is less expensive to defend than attack.

2) Germany First. Two EE, Two Lybia, armor Kwang. This is a becoming popular. The good news: It prevents players from running the "Kwang Surprise" (taking Manch and Kwang) in most cases. There are a few daring souls that will run it anyway. a) If USSR takes Finland, you have enough troops to hold EE and generally have the NE Atlantic sub to hit the North Sea or Med BB. b) If USSR does a hit and retreat on Ukraine, you'll have an extra ftr and possibly enough to hold EE. c) If USSR takes Ukraine, you may well be in a position to cripple Russia with a devastating counter attack. Regardless, at the end of G1, Germany will have Africa and probably 5 planes. The bad news: It doesn't prevent the Kwang Surprise for certain. In some cases, this placement doesn't take Egypt hard enough to prevent a counter attack. Finally, Russia may do a softening attack on Manch and not take it. Even if you take Egypt with sufficient force, UK can move into Sink, send the trans to W. Australia and make life rough for Japan. Japan will get off to a slow start with this one. That isn't a bad trade-off against most players. Still, Japan dallying for an extra round in Asia can be disastrous later in the game. They may not be in position to reinforce Africa soon enough.

I'm going to go over the classic standard placement to ensure that you can always get off to a safe start as Axis. After that it comes down to fundamental play, which we'll go into. You start off with 3/2 in Lybia/Manch.

90% of the games will start like this: USSR will go sub vs sub in the NE Atlantic. They will hit the Baltic with 1 or 2 ftr and Ukraine with 8 inf, 3 arm, and possibly a ftr. At the end of R1 the board will look almost identical to this: The German sub in NE Atlantic retreats west. The Baltic sub submerges and is trapped by the USSR trans. Russia has 12 inf, 2 ftr in Karelia. Also, 4 inf, 3 arm in Ukraine. You've seen it many times.

Buy 9 inf 1 arm. Hit the med sub and E. Canada transport. Use every plane on the BB if the sub survived to attack the E. Canada trans. Attack Egypt with the trans and everything in Lybia (6 inf, 1 arm). Non-com to setup for a German counter-attack on EE. When you pull out of EE, put one inf and all armor in WE with the ftrs and bomber. The rest of the infantry needs to be in position to counter EE hard if Russia moves in with many units. This is especially likely if they plant 9-11 units in Ukraine. Ok, most players know this. Those are the ground rules. Buy infantry with Germany and an occasional armor. It's ok to trade WE. For a round or two until you can secure both WE and EE. Eventually you'll need to give up EE or WE permanently. It is far easier for the allies to lock down EE then WE. They will need to take Spain to get a lock on WE early. Since all of your armor will be in EE, they'll need to move into WE with a large number of units to prevent you from crushing what they move in with. Once they fill up Spain with a large number of troops, you'll need to give up EE. They may not have enough to attack 25 units in WE if you move in first but they certainly have enough to move in enough to leave you with only armor if you attack. (Thus sacrificing your precious German armor.)

The good news is that the build up in Spain will be trapped there and it will be Russians moving into EE. That will allow Japan to secure Africa and move into Novo. If you have seen this coming and moved the Japan ftrs to Germany, you can hold WE and Germany both for a turn or two. SE will eventually fall permanently. If it's to USSR, you may want to consider letting them keep it. If it's UK, that's not too bad either. USA must not get that IC. Or alternatively, it's ok to give up WE permanently to UK if you must. It's a disaster if USA gets it and can build an IC there.

It is important for Japan to begin landing units in Egypt relatively early. Round 4 or so. They should land whatever is needed to keep Germany from losing it. Make sure you landed as many German units as you could before the German BB/trans was destroyed. Holding Egypt is Germany's life line and will keep large numbers of troops out of Europe and in Africa. The longer you hold it the more round the allies will send units to Africa. The longer you have to defend the better. It's much easier to hold what you've got than to take new territory. It will also keep the allies off Germany's back by diverting resources.

Until you have begun shipping units to Africa to support Germany, don't buy a Japanese IC. The whole objective is to secure what the Axis has and to setup for an IPC victory. -Or end up making enough IPC that you can go for a conventional attack on Karelia/Russia. If you have WE and EE secure, plus part of Africa, you are in a position to pull off the win. If it's early enough that there are insignificant UK/USA forces in Karelia, you can go for the IPC victory. If you can move in force to Ukraine, you can then spread out through Caucus, Ukraine, EE, WE and Germany with just enough that UK/USA can't take it. Be sure you've calculated on what UK/USA can take back and what Japan can get. Also, be sure that the Japan fighters are in position to reinforce the German holdings. If you've miscalculated and it rolls around to USSR's turn again, you're dead. They'll crush those spread out units at tremendous cost to the Axis. Pay very close attention when going for this move.

That is opportunity one. Two more remain for the Axis. Between rounds 4 and 5 the IPC option will begin to disappear. USA will have too many units in Europe to sneak an IPC victory on the allies. Opportunity two is setting up for a conventional attack on Russia. Germany must have been making enough from Africa to have a significant force in Europe. In addition, the allies must be devoting large resources to Africa. If you see the allies doing this, Japan should buy an IC and begin to buy armor to force it's way into Novo. This is assuming that Russia is in a weakened state and you think you can make a move on them. If this isn't the case and you feel a move on Novo would be pointless even with German pressure on Karelia, don't buy a Japan IC. You won't want Japan to have an IC's if you must resort to option three. Technology. One third of my Axis wins come from tech. Without an IC on the board, the allies will have a difficult time countering Japanese Heavy Bombers. Plus, you'll want transports to be able to threaten the western USA. If you've been buying infantry with Germany all game, you'll be in a great position to roll for tech. After 90 IPC, Japan should have IT or HB. If you don't hit one of the deadly two, keep rolling. Even if you don't hit one of the big ones right away, by the time you spend 150 you should have five of six techs. -Hopefully the lethal trinity, LR/IT/HB. With that combination, Japan can almost take on the allies single-handedly. Just keep Germany alive. If you can keep the USA from having an IC in Europe, German can hold on for a long time even if it is totally surrounded. If you've held or still hold Africa, 70% of the allied resources will be going to finishing off Germany. With about 6 ftrs in Germany, (their remaining ftrs plus Japans) it will take an enormous attack force to finally take them out. Even if you've been buying tech, Japan should still be in a decent position. Perhaps not trading the provinces around Russia but at least in a position to trade Yak and Sinkiang.

If it's more drastic than that and Japan is about to be pushed out of Asia, a play on Russia probably isn't the way to go. A surprise move on Alaska to threaten WUSA can often take the allies by surprise. You may need to set up for a "Hail Mary" if Germany is about to fall. (If you don't have Africa, you'll need to because the allies will IPC you.) If you have LR or HB you can do this. Plant 8 guys in Alaska and move your bombers to Manch if you have LR or Hawaii if you don't. You'll roll for the tech and hope you get the tech you need just before you attack. LR is great for this. Sometimes you don't even need HB's to pull it off. As long as you keep reinforcing Alaska and the allies can't IPC you. (Get the Axis to 37 IPC.) You've got a shot. If you can take WUSA and bomb the USA to zero with HB's, you might be able to hold it. (You'll need several HB's to pull this off.) Even if Germany falls and you're about to be pushed out of Asia, you'll be making 38+ which is enough to win the game with HB's. You'll begin trading EUSA with UK and then it's essentially wrapped up. Again, this requires many HBs, luck, and a mistake on your opponent's part but it's worth a shot.

The key to playing the Axis is staying relaxed and honestly assessing the situation. The Axis is especially good to play if you are against an opponent who is inexperienced or out of practice with allies. It takes a long time to learn how to finish off Germany correctly. It's just like playing the allies with less room for bad dice. Just because things look a little bad, don't panic. Wait, defend, and tech. Teching with Germany isn't always a bad idea if things go truly disastrously and Japan has crapped out going for tech. Only one tech will save you, Industrial Technology. However, a 16% chance isn't a bad one. If you've used the conservative placement to take Egypt hard and still have part of Africa, this could be a powerful tech to get. A final note on tech: If you are going to go for tech, go for it hard. Roll 30 IPC a turn if you can. Sometimes you may want to save just enough to be able to buy a bomber or something. In general, 30 a turn is the way to go.

On a final note, let's look at a standard mid game situation. Germany has Egypt to SA, WE to EE and is trading Ukraine. The allies have a significant force in Africa and the axis is holding Egypt with the help of Japanese fighters and infantry landings. In addition, Japan is holding Sink and Yak but doesn't quite have enough to make a move on Novo. The pressure on EE or WE is tremendous. Germany can only hold it for a turn or two. The choice is buy an IC and force USSR out of Novo or start teching. Personally, I prefer to stay conventional. If you can move into Novo hard, it's ok if EE goes down. If you still can't safely move into Novo without being defeated in the counter-attack, tech and tech hard. Germany is going down soon. If you've been buying infantry and it's late in the game, five rounds. Four rounds if it's still early.

It is very hard to finish off Germany, if they just curl up into a ball. 60 inf/armor and 5 ftrs will take about 42 infantry, 23 armor, 2 ftr and a bomber to take out. -Much more in split nationality attacks. How long will it take for the allies to get that many units into position while still protecting Russia? Keep German attacks to a minimum and wait for Japan to land a game altering tech. (Or better yet, one of the lethal combo's LR/HB or HB/IT). Because of the delay in Japan's troops moving to the front, it's not always a game-ending situation to trade Germany for Japan. Japan will still be moving troops to Russia while rolling for tech. LR/HB and Russia and you're still in it. The key to putting away Germany is "The Anchor". The Anchor is when USA/UK takes SE then USSR moves in from EE to keep Germany from retaking it. That spells death for Germany. -Especially if it's USA. Don't let them get the anchor on you. If you must let someone hold it permanently, let it be USSR. If UK has WE, and USSR has SE, that's ideal. That's the best you can make of a bad situation if you are forced to curl up into Germany.

This was a relatively basic article. My next one, assuming I'm still GOA, will be an advanced Axis methodology.

Some going away fundamentals that have been addressed previously:

Ranked allied value of units in Europe and Asia:

USA 1 (Because they had to move so far and they prevent an IPC victory. In addition, they can be used to get IPC for USSR in Asia.)

USSR 2 (They are the key to keeping an attack threat on Novo and EE.)

UK 3 (Worthless fodder.)

Major UK exception: Japan is holding Novo and Germany is threatening Karelia. UK troops move between Germany and Japan. That means they can defend against a Karelia attack then shift to Russia before Japan's turn. This radically reduces the number of units needed to defend Russia.

A German unit is always more valuable than any unit except a USSR unit and then only in special circumstances. (You've got USSR on the ropes, or are making more than the allies.)

Ranked value of all units:

Germany 1

USSR 2

JAPAN 3 (This is debatable. I wouldn't feel good trading 10 Japan infantry for 10 USA so I'll go with it.)

USA 4 (Exception: USA units in Russia are more valuable than Russian units.)

UK 5

Key position provinces to control and their relative importance: (Other than capitals). (The value is if you control these provinces with enough strength to hold them.)

Karelia 10

SE 11

WE 9

EE 9

Novo 7

Persia 6

Egypt 6

Sink 4

Yak 5

Hawaii 3 Key for Heavy Bombing or threatening or USA late game.

Caucus 7

RobertBrink General of the Army, Spring 1942