

After Action Report

Prelude to War

Hexacon, Braunfels, May 2017

(Current graphic treatment of game components is home-made and playtest version only. In no way does it prefigure final artwork.)



Spring 1936 (turn 1)

In France, the recent triumph of the Front Populaire government is watered down by the combined pressure of right-wing agitation and continuing workers' demands. The government is reshuffled in an attempt to pacify the situation.

Manpower and funding are injected into the moribund Comintern networks in Europe, as Stalin opts to revive the “class warfare line” endorsed by the Comintern 6th Congress of 1928 against the more conciliatory position of the 1935 congress. Unexpectedly, the first successes materialize in Finland, where an underground communist opposition is painstakingly resurrected, after the brutal repression following the Finnish civil war.

Hitler seizes the opportunity of France's internal convulsions to order the reoccupation of the Rhineland. Paris and London immediately demand an international conference under the auspices of the League of Nations, hoping to avoid losing face by allowing German unilateral action to tear down the post-Versailles status quo. Berlin deflects this proposition. Paris then decides to take a hard stance, backed by very vocal anti-appeasers in Britain, and demands the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of German troops.

The Führer, in turn, addresses the nation in a vitriolic and bellicose speech, promising destruction to whoever opposes him. Tension escalates as both sides, unwilling to back down, declare partial mobilization. The French beg the British for concerted action in case military intervention proves necessary. To their great relief, the British agree to initiate emergency joint staff talks.

On the other side of the Rhine, the Führer in private is not as confident as it may seem, as the current unreadiness of the Wehrmacht and the vulnerability of the Western border is a serious cause for concern. Rearmament is only in its initial phase and the Reich has initiated a vast program of state-subsidized exports to obtain foreign currency, of which it is dangerously lacking.

The war of nerves ultimately plays to the Führer's advantage, but the coup de grâce is delivered by the French antisocialist and anti-Semitic ultra-reactionaries, who would rather sabotage the government's efforts to build national unity than allow the Front Populaire and its Jewish head of State, Léon Blum a domestic political victory. The guns remain mute on either side of the Rhine, and Adolf Hitler scores his first foreign policy triumph.



The Führer addresses the nation at the annual Nuremberg party rally.

Play notes: The Western player chooses a “consolidate Regime” as his opening action (thus forfeiting foreign policy action). It is the safest option, as with two current disorder factors (right-wing agitation and worker's demands) an unlucky dice-roll (a 10 on 2d6) could lead to a Major Political Crisis on the following turn.

While not initially intending to play a Comintern strategy, the Soviet player got the “Comintern” card in his opening hand and decided to give it a shot. A “Comintern Agitation” marker in Finland is a rare result (2,7%), and the Soviet player hopes to be able to put that Trojan horse to good use sometime in the future.

The “Coup de Force” that is conducted to resolve the “Remilitarization of the Rhineland” action is hereafter described in same detail. (Further turns will be commented more succinctly.)

German initial Resolve is 1, Western is 2, but this particular action gives German Resolve a +2 bonus (it's German land, after all), so the “visible” Resolve values shows a +1 advantage for Germany, just enough to prevail in case no side willingly concedes victory.

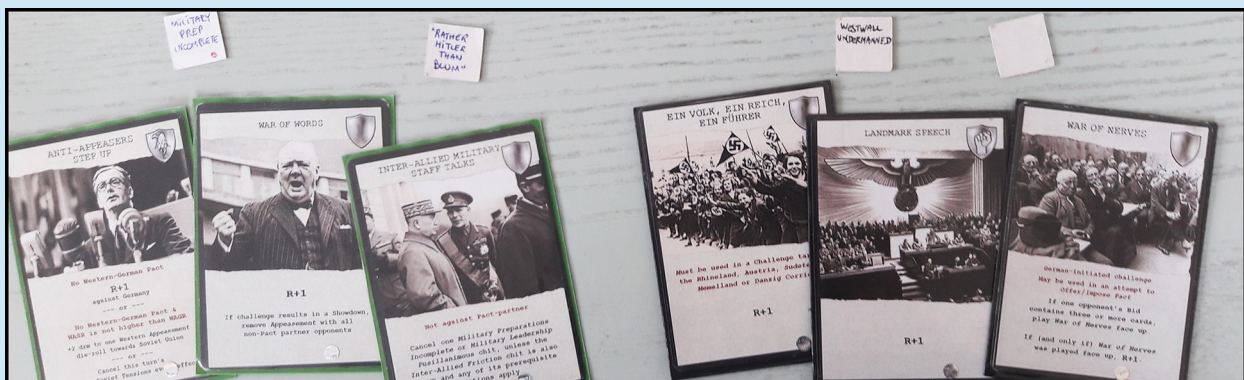
But the “visible” value is potentially modified, positively by the cards in the player's hand, and negatively by the hidden chit drawn at the beginning of each turn by each player: in this case Germany drew “Westwall undermanned” (-1 Resolve) which is effective since the Westwall isn't even built yet, while the Western Democracies drew “Military Preparations Incomplete”, which *would* be effective, but for the “Staff Talks” card the Western player got in his opening hand and played during the challenge process – which cancels that particular chit.

The Western player has two Resolve bonus cards in his hand, (in addition to the one cancelling his chit), which can be considered a very lucky initial hand. While not frontally opposing the action, he decides to demand an international conference (to reduce the prestige damage) which would also give him a resolve bonus if the conference is turned down (outrage at Germany's contempt of orthodox international proceedings).

Unfortunately for the Western player, his German opponent has also drawn a solid hand: two Resolve-bonus cards and a third one playable under certain conditions (War of Nerves – effective if things escalate far enough), and although he drew a penalizing chit, he knows that chits generally penalize the Western player more, so he boldly decides to refuse the conference. (Much to the chagrin of the Soviet player, who had the “Soviet delegation” card in his hand, which could have allowed him to invite himself at the table of negotiations’.)

The German rebuttal gives the Western player the choice between a humiliating “back down” or an escalation, with potentially even more damaging effects if a showdown is called for and the Western Democracies lose.

After a few rounds of escalation, both players have emptied their hand, and since no-one is willing to back down, the challenge is resolved by a mutual “showdown”, where all cards and chits are revealed, and an extra “surprise” chit is drawn by each player (this represents unforeseen difficulties): the “attacker” (Germany) wins if his modified Resolve value is higher than the defender's.



The chits drawn and the cards played by the Western and German players over the Rhineland crisis.

The German player reveals “Landmark Speech”, “Ein Volk, “Ein Reich, Ein Führer” and “War of Nerves” (for a +3 Resolve bonus), but his initial chit was “Westwall undermanned” (-1). His Current Resolve modifier is +2.

The Western player reveals “War of Words”, “Anti-Appeasers Step-Up” (+2 Resolve bonus) and “Staff Talks” (which cancels the “Military Preparations Incomplete” chit). It all comes down to the final chit, as the values are currently tied, which gives the Western player the victory. While the German player draws a blank chit, the Western player draws “Rather Hitler than Blum”, a chit that reduces Resolve by 1 if both the Front Populaire government and the “Right-wing Agitation” disorder factors are in effect, which is the case. German Resolve now exceeds Western resolve, the Western player loses, which has damaging effects on the prestige, the resolve, and the regime stability of the Western faction.

Summer 1936 (turn 2)

Civil War has erupted in Spain. The Nationalists close in on Madrid. The Comintern conducts an effective campaign throughout Europe to recruit volunteers for the coming struggle.

In France, the discredited government collapses and plunges the country into social and political turmoil. Strikes and demonstrations spread throughout the country. In order to keep up with Germany and the Soviet Union, both known to be investing massively in the building up of their armed forces, the newly-formed socialist government takes the very difficult decision, in this explosive social climate, of increasing pressure on the workforce in the rearmament industry.

The 1936 Berlin Olympics are held in an atmosphere of tension. A number of Jewish and workers organisations, including the French Communist Party, conduct boycott campaigns.



In Madrid, militiamen practise operating a Soviet machine gun

Play notes: The Western player rolled the dreaded 10 on his Events Table! There are two at start disorder factors (“Right-wing Agitation” and “Workers Demands”) and two additional ones (“Government Discredited” due to the lost showdown and “Accelerated Rearmament”, (which pressures the workforce, a dangerous decision made by the Western player).

Regime stability drops four boxes, straight into “Major Political Crisis” (a dice-roll of 9 reduces Stability by half the disorder factors, rounded up, and an 8, same thing rounded down. Both would have averted the crisis.) The Soviet player obtain a timely “Comintern politics” result on the Events Table. He picks “International Brigades Reinforced” from the options available. Otherwise an uneventful turn as players rebuild their hands.



Fall 1936 (turn 3)

Soviet tanks and planes are shipped to Spain in large numbers. The poorly organized republican forces are reeling from the blows of Franco's insurgent army, but with the support of Soviet war material and international volunteer contingents flocking from all over Europe, they manage to bar the way to Madrid and Bilbao. Meanwhile, the uncontrollable political ebullience in the Comintern begins to be perceived by Moscow as a threat to its grip over the organisation. Fear of giving dissenting elements a voice and a platform causes Stalin to brutally reverse his strategy and command a purge of the Comintern leadership and of all of its unregistered elements.

Relations between the Soviet Union and the Western Democracies sour, as the British view Soviet involvement in Spain with utter displeasure (the Foreign Office is favourable to the Nationalist), while in Moscow the lack of firmness demonstrated by the guardians of the international order during the Rhineland Crisis prompts harsh criticism in Moscow. The Franco-Soviet Pact of 1935, still awaiting ratification, is now but a hollow shell.

In an attempt to forward Soviet penetration into the Balkans, Litvinov flies to Bucharest and initiates diplomatic manoeuvrings to try and drive a wedge between the Romanian government and the Western Democracies (Romania is a member of the Little Entente). The talks are inconclusive but the Romanians dare not shut the door to further negotiations.

In France, the short-lived Front Populaire falls apart. A new centrist government led by the Radical Party (radical only in name) takes over, amidst great popular enthusiasm.

This is another blow to the Spanish Republicans' morale, as the new government is openly hostile to intervention.

Germany engages in very dynamic trading within its economic sphere of influence and manages to secure the necessary imports, for the time being, to maintain the pace of its rearmament programme.

The Austrian Chancellor, Schuschnigg is presented with a set of demands from Berlin, including the immediate release of all imprisoned Nazi agitators. With no allies to turn to, Schuschnigg agrees to a number of concessions, among which the promise that Austria would follow Germany's lead in foreign policy – a first dent in Austria's sovereignty.



Daladier, the new French Prime minister, with the Foreign Minister and the Commander-in-Chief

Play notes: the Nationalists rolls high (which is good for them), but this turn the Soviet player gets hefty DRMs ("International Brigades Reinforced" and "Arms shipment") and prevents the Spanish Civil War progress marker from shifting one box towards a Nationalist victory. The offensive is delayed but not halted (not converted into a "Stabilized Front"), so the Nationalist player will still roll on the favorable "Offensive" column next turn.

The Soviet player obtains a "Treason suspected: Comintern" result, which harms his Regime Stability. He subsequently purges the Comintern to avoid further damage from the that source.

The German player obtains "Trade" result from the Events Table, allowing him to cancel his current foreign exchange shortage.



The Nationalist offensive is barely contained.

He then clears his Shortages box with the card “Trade Agreements” (which cannot be played if Germany suffers from foreign exchange shortage – Germany needs the cash to pay for its imports.). Then, a German level 1 Intimidation (“Concessions”) is successfully placed on Austria.

Western-Soviet Appeasement breaks down due to an effective “Western-Soviet Antagonism” result (the subsequent die-roll requires one sole “tension factor” to be effective: this is the case since the Soviet Union is currently intervening in Spain, which constitutes one of the five tension factors.)

The Western must conduct a mandatory Consolidate Regime action, since he suffered a regime Crisis. Because the second Front Populaire government just collapsed, a dice is rolled to check if a centrist government takes over (33% in 1937). The dice-roll is successful, the government will take a harder stance against communist subversion, and the right-wingers are assuaged. But intervention in Spain is no longer an option.



Winter 1936/37 (turn 4)

Soviet tanks and planes are shipped to Spain in large numbers. The poorly organized republican forces are reeling. In Spain, the purges of the Comintern have sown disarray among the Republican forces. In Barcelona, bitter street fighting erupts between anarchists and Stalinists. Bilbao falls after a short siege; the northern front is liquidated soon after and the frontline settles for the winter.

In the Far-East, Japanese provocations result in a series of border clashes with Soviet and Mongolian forces, causing serious concern in Moscow as to Japanese future intentions.

In France, the new government faces its first challenges as unresolved social issues resurface and workers take to the streets once again.

Pro-Nazi Austrians grow in strength, belligerently asserting that their country is German by reason of racial ties and common culture and language. Schuschnigg is summoned and meets Hitler in Berchtesgaden. Browbeaten and threatened by the Führer, he cedes more ground, and accepts discussions on the appointment of Nazi sympathizers to positions of power in the government.

Rearmament proceeds at a steady pace everywhere.



The Austrian chancellor arrives in Germany and meets Adolf Hitler

Play notes: The German player keeps rolling high in Spain (with some help of the -1 DRM for “Republican Infighting”, a consequence of the purging of the Comintern) and progresses steadily towards victory. During the Events phase, the Western player keeps being unlucky and rolls more Disorder, and is again one box away from a “Major Political Crisis” on his Regime Stability Track. The Soviet player rolls “Kwantung Army Provocations” which forces him to discard a card, since the Far-East military theater is not garrisoned yet. It is, however, a little too early to redeploy an army on that remote theater of operations, as he would risk giving the Germans a balance of forces advantage if a mandatory purge of the Army (not an unlikely result on the Events Table) forced him to further weaken the Red Army.

All three players obtain good results for Their Rearmament rolls.

The German player successfully places a second intimidation (“pressure”) on Austria.

Spring 1937 (turn 5)

In Spain, Catalonia is cut off after the Nationalists launch a surprise attack that routs the Republican defenders. The Soviet and the Western foreign offices are increasing at odds as their geostrategic imperatives clash in Romania. The French government now openly professes its hostility to communism, and Stalin is less and less inclined to abide to the norms of international good behaviour prescribed by the victors of the Great War. Western diplomatic efforts to consolidate Romanian allegiance by renewing a formal alliance fail: as the Soviets menacingly concentrate troops on the Bessarabian border, Bucharest stalls talks and drifts away from West, hoping to placate its dreaded neighbour.

Meanwhile, Moscow comes to an arrangement with the Japanese in the Far-East.

In Germany, rivalries between departments competing for the Führer's favour cause some internal chaos. But the French own internal convulsions have convinced Hitler of his Western neighbour's impotence. Delaying the completion of the Westwall and maintaining only token forces to garrison Germany's western border, he opts to assemble his newly mobilized divisions on the Austrian and Czechoslovakian border.

The Führer now sends an ultimatum to Schuschnigg: appoint the Nazi Seyss-Inquart Minister of the Interior, or face military action in the event of non-compliance. Cornered, the Austrian chancellor has no other option but to give in. He hopes that by surrendering his country's sovereignty, he will be able, at least, to preserve its formal existence.



Japan and the Soviet Union reach an understanding over the litigious border issues.

Play notes: The German player rolled “Nazi Party Infighting” during the Events phase and was forced to discard a valuable card. He receives a newly-mobilized army and places it in the East – this is an additional factor of pressure against Austria.

It is a daring move, because the Western border is not properly garrisoned yet, which puts Germany Resolve at a disadvantage against the West, but Western Anti-German Resolve has been damaged so it's worth trying.

Austria is now “subdued” by Germany (third and maximum German Intimidation level).

The Soviet Union successfully appeases Japan (helped by the “Narkomindel” card DRM), therefore lessening the threat of Japanese hostile military action in the Far-East.



Austria is subdued and ripe for the picking!

Summer 1937 (turn 6)

Spain is now a lost cause for Moscow. Continuing support will only hurt Soviet prestige, and Stalin announces the discontinuation of military aid and the withdrawal of the now-decimated international brigades. In a last desperate gamble, the Republican army launches a counter-offensive with all the forces it can muster. Unfortunately for the agonizing republic, Hitler has just ordered the reinforcement of the Condor Legion with some of Germany's most modern war equipment, expecting to find in Spain a valuable testing ground.

In the Soviet Union, Marshal Mikhail Tukhachevsky and a group of senior officers from the Soviet High Command are found guilty at a closed trial of coordinating a German-funded military plot inside the Red Army and are sentenced to be shot. The trials spark a massive military purge and a wave of arrests as Stalin seeks to cleanse the ranks of anyone associated with the alleged conspirators.

In Romania, ultra-nationalistic elements in the ruling circles sabotage the government's recent overtures towards Moscow. Diplomatic relations with the powerful eastern neighbour revert to inimical.

The world wakes up to the news of the Wehrmacht's entry into Vienna. Hitler has ordered the unilateral annexation of Austria and put everyone before the fait accompli.

The Austrian workforce is fed into the German armaments industry and the Austrian national bank's gold reserves narrowly avert a new foreign currency crisis.

The Wilhelmstrasse decides to exploit this tour de force by tightening the bonds with fascist Italy.

Informed of the German initiatives towards Rome and faced with the dreadful prospect of a united fascist bloc, the Quai d'Orsay sends Laval, its most fervent advocate of an Italo-French entente, to meet the Duce, hoping to forestall an Italo-German rapprochement. Mussolini, flattered by the courtship of both Berlin and Paris, plays hard to get and remains uncommitted.

In Germany, the frantic pace of German rearmament is starting to exact its toll on the German workforce. But support for the regime is still formidable, and the foreign policy triumphs vindicate the faith the German nation has put into their Führer.



King Carol II of Romania, pressured by far-right elements in the government, terminates talks with Moscow.

Play notes: Snake eyes for the Spanish Civil War progress die-roll! The first result below 8, resulting in a Republican strategic counter-offensive.

The Soviets lose their "Agreement" with Romania due to a "Minor Country Reconsiders Position" result on the Soviet Events Table.

The Soviet player chooses a "Consolidate regime" action. He suspects an imminent *Anschluss*, which would make the game enter its more "active" phase ("Into the Storm"), where players would be able to conduct two actions per turn instead of one. Since the "Regime Consolidation action" uses up the whole actions allotment for the turn, he does not want to waste a two-actions-worth turn to do it. He also chooses to purge the army in the process, a painful choice as it weakens his military power, but suspicions of treason within the army can seriously endanger regime stability. The three German Intimidation levels on Austria reduce the prerequisite Tension Level to conduct the *Anschluss* from 6 to 3, therefore matching the current Western-German Tension level.

In addition, "subdued" status will grant Germany a +1 Resolve bonus for the *Anschluss* challenge, so Austria is as good as defenseless.

The German player declares he is conducting the *Anschluss*, and, with no valuable cards in hand and a damages resolve, there is nothing the Western player can do but to “Ignore” the challenge and take the prestige hit (Austria is not in the Soviet sphere of influence so the soviet player is not involved).

The Western player made a costly mistake, he forgot to appease Germany (in 1936/37 it is still relatively easy – afterwards, Hitler grows bolder and is less likely to heed appeals to reason). Had he done so, German resolve would have been one lower (2) and the prerequisite Tension would not have been met. The German player would have had to cancel Appeasement with a successful *Provocations* challenge, or focus his military effort on garrisoning the Westwall first which would have increased his Resolve against the West but weakened his chances of obtaining the last, critical, Intimidation level on Austria. Austria succumbs three turns ahead of its historical counterpart, a significant advantage for the German player.



Fall 1937 (turn 7)

In Spain, republican hopes to delay the inevitable crumble: their short-lived offensive meets a crushing counter-blow, in which the Condor Legion is put to good use.

The French rearmament programme suffers as the antiquated industrial base is ill-fitted to the army's growing demands. On the other side of the Channel, however, new credits are voted to modernize the British air Force and Navy.

Abruptly awakening from its torpor by the unexpected annexation of Austria, the League of Nations debates the opportunity of sanctions against Germany. Tension is somewhat defused as Hitler, temporarily satiated by his recent success, and eager to avoid retaliation, offers promises of future good behaviour.

Mussolini, envious of German successes, steps up his imperialist rhetoric, with claims of “Dalmazia o morte!”

As a consequence, Italo-Yugoslav relations steadily deteriorate, and Belgrade finally breaks off diplomatic contact when Italian negotiations with the Ustaše, a fascist Croat underground organization, are revealed by the press.

In Rome, a request arrives from Berlin for a meeting with Hitler. Mussolini does not comply at first and allows several more requests to go unanswered, but finally makes the journey. The Duce is received with lavish decorum and impressive military manoeuvres, and upon his return agrees to the idea that Italy and Germany share “a common destiny”. Essential to this conversion was Hitler's emphatic support for Italy's revisionist claims and expansionist ambitions.



The Little Entente States – Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and Romania – meeting at Bled

With Romanian doors now closed to diplomatic penetration, Moscow cracks the whip on the Bessarabian issue. Soviet forces facing Romania are ostensibly reinforced.

In an attempt to reduce pressure on its borders, the Romanian government had been working on a rapprochement with Hungary for some time now, and has finally convinced its Little Entente partners (Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia) to propose recognising Hungary equal rights in armament in exchange for a joint renunciation of the use of force in their mutual relations (Hungary was forbidden to rearm under the provisions of the Treaty of Trianon, although it had already started to rearm on a limited scale and in relative secrecy.) While Budapest had at first rejected the overtures, the government now views a formal agreement with the Little Entente as beneficial to Hungary's international position. The representatives of the four nations meet in Bled and sign an agreement which, while incomplete and ambiguous on many counts, revokes most restrictions of the 1920 treaty.

Play notes: Another high roll for the Spanish nationalists, converting the unexpected Republican counter offensive into a Nationalist counter-counter offensive.

The German player obtains "Italian Foreign Policy" on the Events Table, which produces into a Italo-Yugoslav dispute. Italy is now hostile to its eastern neighbour, and this is a prerequisite condition for selecting the "Croatian Autonomist Claims", should the German player subsequently roll a "Minor Country Dispute / German Arbitrage". An interesting prospect.

Rather belatedly, the Western Player succeeds in Appeasing Germany (with the +1 Resolve bonus of the "League of Nations" card). This reduces Western and German reciprocate Resolve values by one, making it more difficult for the German player to attain the prerequisite tension level of his next Coup de Force.

Germany played the "Disintegration of the Little Entente" event, which replicates the historically effects of the Bled Agreement of 1938 and whose effects are represented by the removal of the Western intimidation on Hungary (in effect at the start of the game). Germany launched a diplomatic offensive towards Italy, with three diplomacy attempts rolled for this turn: one (unsuccessful) postponed from last turn thanks to the intervention of the Western "Quai d'Orsay" card, but the following two were conducted with strong DRMs ("Italo-German Summit Meeting" and "Revisionist Agendas") and resulted in Italy being aligned to Germany. Germany consequently gained another Prestige point.

The Soviet player succeeds in placing a "Concessions" level 1 Intimidation marker on Romania.



Winter 1937/38 (turn 8)

In northern Spain, the Republican forces are reeling in the wake of the nationalist counter-offensive. Barcelona falls after heavy street fighting.

Hitler is convinced that Germany is now adequately sheltered against French military intervention, as a number newly-formed divisions are sent to man the Westwall fortifications. The German state-directed programme of investment and militarization continues to absorb all available resources, with no regard to its brutal effects on household consumption. The Gestapo reports worrisome signs of discontent. Uneasiness also ripples through the highest spheres of the military leadership. Hitler is particularly dissatisfied with the two senior commanders, von Blomberg and von Fritsch, regarding them as too hesitant towards the war preparations. They are, along with several other generals and ministers, replaced with men more loyal to the Nazi regime.

The Führer tightens his grip on the Wehrmacht.

In the aftermath of the *Anschluss*, the German Sudeten Party demands union with Germany. Nazi propagandists stoke the fires of unrest. German newsreels start reporting “evidence” of Czech oppression against the German *Volksdeutsche*.

In France, nationalist demonstrations flare up calling for more firmness in the dealings with Germany and the Soviet Union.

The new earthquake comes from the East. Western passivity after the *Anschluss* convinced Stalin that neither France nor Britain are willing to take decisive action to protect the territorial integrity of minor countries. Moscow issues an ultimatum to Romania demanding immediate cession of Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina. Bucharest is given four days to evacuate her troops and officials.

After three feverish days of debate, the Romanian government gives in. The smouldering hostility between Stalin's Russia and the Western democracies erupts into an open war of words, as Stalin is now portrayed as a “backstabber” and “worse than Hitler” in Western newspapers.

The Soviet press vituperates against the “imperialistic decadent western bourgeois democracies”, and Stalin poses as the “Little Father of the Peoples” coming to re-unite the oppressed, ethnically Ukrainian, population in Bessarabia with the “Motherland of Socialism”.

Yet, the military high command in Britain and France pours cold water over the inflammatory discourses of the political leadership by pointing out the impracticality of military retaliation plans.



The startled inhabitants of Chisinau, Bessarabia, watch as Soviet armoured columns roll by.



The Führer and his generals discuss the strategic situation in Central Europe.

Powerless to carry out their threats, Paris and London now scramble to avoid losing face. Bonnet flies to Odessa to meet with Litvinov, on the insistence of Moscow that the summit take place on Russian soil. An improvised peace conference is set up, where the Western representatives coyly agree to declare invalid the Treaty of Paris of 1920, whose purpose was the recognition of Romanian sovereignty of Bessarabia (arguing it was never ratified by one of the signatories – Japan!) In exchange, Moscow makes a show of good faith in agreeing to guarantee the rights of the Romanian minority and to renounce further territorial claims.

Play notes: a third consecutive German “disorder” result brings Nazi regime Stability to 3 (on a scale of 5. (Germany has only one effective disorder factor – the accelerated rearmament – and foreign policy successes offset the damaging effect of disorder, so “disorder” result are not exceedingly problematic for Germany. But going below 3 – “Stable”– would be begin to be preoccupying, and require corrective domestic action that would undermine Germany’s drive in foreign policy).

On the positive side for Germany, this also triggered a change in military leadership (from “Old Prussian guard” to “O.K.H.”), meaning that the “Old Prussian Guard Generals Faint-Hearted” chits that penalize resolve are no longer active.

The Westwall is now properly garrisoned, with beneficial effects on German Resolve in challenges against the West. Germany succeeds in placing another Intimidation marker on Czechoslovakia – the *Anschluss* automatically places one Intimidation – bringing the Intimidation level to 2 (“Pressure”).

France uses its “Resurgence of French Nationalism” card to regain lost Resolve.

Soviet highest Resolve value is 3 – rather high, due to two effective *Western-Soviet Antagonism* events. Concessions on Romania reduces the prerequisite Tension level of any Coup de Force against that country by one, so the Soviet Union is in a position to attempt the annexation of Bessarabia (TL 4). The challenge escalates to a showdown, but the Western player loses by only one point, so with his “Peace For Our Time” card he converts the result into a conference: he concedes the annexation of Bessarabia but at a lower cost in Prestige and Resolve.



Spring 1937 (turn 9)

The Spanish Republican forces regroup after their staggering defeat. Nationalist forces pursue their offensive and converge towards the capital but meet with pockets of fierce resistance. The Madrid front is extensively fortified, the Republic prepares for a last-ditch defence.

In Hungary, the Romanian surrender to the Soviet ultimatum is interpreted as an admission that the government in Bucharest is no longer willing to resist attacks on the country's territorial integrity if under sufficient pressure. The Hungarians therefore escalate their efforts to resolve “the question of Transylvania”. Budapest demands total retrocession, while Bucharest submits only a small piece of territory for consideration. The negotiations fall through entirely after only a week. Both governments then ask Germany to arbitrate the dispute. Bulgaria seizes the opportunity to reclaim South Dobrujda, lost in 1919.

Germany accedes to the requests of the claimants in spite of the vehement but useless protests of Paris and London.

Stalin, who wanted Romania to act as a counterweight to a Hungary very hostile to Bolshevism, is extremely unhappy to see Bulgaria potentially drift into the German orbit. Following the formal acceptance of Hungarian rearmament by the Little Entente members, this territorial redistribution, orchestrated by Germany alone, completes the isolation of Czechoslovakia and is the final nail in the coffin of the French system of friendships in Central Europe.

Hitler steps into the breach and proclaims his irrevocable decision to reunite the Sudetenland with the German Reich. Paris and London, whose commitment to preserve Czechoslovakian territorial integrity is now viewed as a burden and an embarrassment, try and find a way to preserve some semblance of regulatory role in the international game. A request is sent to Berlin to set up an international conference to debate the question. Hitler flatly refuses, declaring that “the fate of Germans should be decided by Germans alone”.



The Czechoslovakian government desperately seeks assurances that Paris will honour the terms of the Franco-Czech alliance of 1924, only to be rebuffed. In case of war, Czechoslovakia will stand alone. With the Wehrmacht conspicuously poised to invade, and its fortification belt bypassed by Austria's absorption into the Reich, Prague formally consents to the cession, incidentally losing its most industrialized region. Three millions cheerful *Volksdeutsche* are reunited with the Germanic fatherland.

Play notes: A turning point! The German player rolled a “Minor Country Dispute / German Arbitrage” result on the events Table. The fact that Bessarabia is now Soviet-annexed and Hungary is freed from Western Intimidation (due to the “Disintegration of the Little Entente” card) allows him to choose “Romanian Border Revision”. (“Croatian Autonomist Claims” was also available, but is less advantageous.) The arbitration is successfully conducted: Northern Transylvania and Southern Dobruja are returned to Hungary and Bulgaria, granting Germany extra diplomacy towards these former Great War allies, but also placing critical extra Intimidation on Czechoslovakia. Czechoslovakia is normally a strong Western position, because it is Western-aligned (and being a Satellite it is immune to counter-diplomacy). Alignment grants Western resolve a +1 bonus, which means that Germany needs a 2-point resolve differential to prevail (basic Western and German Resolve values start at the same level). This third Intimidation causes Czechoslovakia to become “subdued”, a dramatic reversal of the balance of forces since not does Czechoslovakia no longer count as Western-aligned (losing the +1R bonus) but Germany even benefits from a +1 when attacking. The stumbling block of German expansion in central Europe is now no more than a speed bump.

This stroke of luck, combined with Western failure to appease Germany before the *Anschluss*, puts Germany strongly in the lead.



Northern Transylvania is ceded to Hungary.



Summer 1937 (turn 10)

Hitler now turns his attention to the Free City of Danzig, where the Nazis have achieved dominance in the government for many years. Ribbentrop summons the Polish ambassador and officially presents him with a demand for the return of Danzig to the Reich along with an extraterritorial highway through the area of the Polish Corridor for land-based access from the rest of Germany.

The Western chancelleries try to persuade Warsaw into signing a bilateral defensive pact, but Józef Beck, the Polish foreign minister, bluntly dismisses the idea, expressing serious doubts about the dependability of British and French commitment, in light of the recent events in Czechoslovakia, amputated from the Sudeten while still formally allied to France. Suspicious of German-Soviet converging interests in the weakening of Poland and therefore disqualifying Stalin as a counterweight to Hitler, Beck, while ferociously Germanophobe, believes Poland is not in a position to reject the German demands flat-out. The Polish military, on the other hand, are unanimously in favour of armed resistance, and Marshall Rydz-Śmigły, the Polish commander-in-chief, threatens to resign. Yet, the hopelessness of the situation soon dawns on the Polish government. Beck negotiates the cession of the city of Teschen, (at the expense of Czechoslovakia!) as a compensation and demands a 10-year extension of the German-Polish Treaty of 1935 and a mutual territorial integrity guarantee of the redesigned borders. Paris and London, probe the Soviets and regretfully acknowledge their lack of interest for resisting the German move. Anyway, Danzig's current status has been widely accepted as problematic in the French and British foreign offices, and a hard stance would be very hard to justify at this point.

Desperate to recover some of the moral ground lost in the Sudeten affair, the Western democracies consent to dropping their objections if the retrocession is formalized by an international conference under the auspices of the League of Nations, to which the Soviet Union, now no longer a member, is invited to attend.

Convinced by Göring – against Ribbentrop's ill-advised exhortations – that Poland is not Czechoslovakia, and that a unilateral move against Danzig would probably result in an untimely war, Hitler accepts the idea of a conference and hosts the theatrically-staged event in Breslau. Called to the balcony to the acclamation of the crowds, the Führer proclaims the return of Danzig *Heim ins Reich*. The spectre of social unrest no longer an issue, the inebriated masses celebrate this new foreign policy triumph.

In the Soviet Union, purges continue unabated, strengthening the convictions of those in the West who oppose closer relations with the Stalin.



Sir Neville Chamberlain announces that the United Kingdom is not prepared to let British soldiers die for Danzig.

Play notes: The Western player attempts diplomacy on Poland but fails (with a Neutrality Value of 9, Poland is very disinclined to take sides at this point). Although Czechoslovakia is at the mercy of a German coup, the German player chooses to act against Danzig before a potential Western-alignment of Poland makes it nearly impossible to secure a diplomatic victory against Warsaw (therefore damaging Western and possibly Soviet prestige) without triggering war and ending the game. The Western and Soviet players, perhaps a little meekly, do not oppose the action and offer a conference to reduce Prestige damage: Germany annexes Danzig.

Going for Danzig is a clever move, although somewhat risky, because German Resolve is not high enough at this point to convert a challenge defeat into a declaration of war. The German player, however, is confident that he his opponents will let him get away with his new demand.

Indeed, Poland is likely to go to war to defend its territorial integrity (Polish Resistance value of 11, -4 DRM for Danzig, still results in war on a die-roll of 7 or less), unless forced to remain passive by a multilateral conference (which would effectively grant Danzig to Germany).

A Polish declaration of war would give the Western player no choice but to try and follow suit, but even if he manages to do so (which would end the game), the German player has calculated (and obligingly informed his opponents) that at this point the very likely outcome would be a German victory (albeit a narrow one).

So he expects the Western player to push back war and offer a conference. Indeed, the Western player does as expected and the German player gladly accepts the conference.

The value of an early capture of Danzig is not about the ½ VP, since Danzig will be part of the loot when Poland is invaded. But if war erupts at a later stage over the Danzig question (as it did historically), the Western player may be able to prevent the prestige loss by declaring war. On the other hand, an early annexation will inflict prestige damage that may prove decisive in the final VP count, while granting Germany the fruits of another foreign policy victory.

Because both the Comintern and the Red Army have been purged, the Soviet player now considers the possibility of purging the third apparatus: the Narkomindel (the Soviet Foreign Office).

This would require to conduct Regime Consolidation which would consume his two actions for the turn, and would damage Soviet Prestige heavily (although lost prestige could be recovered by discarding certain cards) but would put aside all risks related to Regime Stability and allow the use of the “All Dissent Quelled” card to increase resolve.

The Soviet player decides on an intermediate solution, because he wants to preserve Soviet prestige and use of the “Narkomindel” card – he will conduct Regime Consolidation but spare the Narkomindel. If Regime Stability reaches its highest possible level (“Strong”), the Soviet player will still be able to use the “All Dissent Quelled” card. But he remains vulnerable to a “Treason Suspected: Narkomindel” or “Purges out of control” events. He invests three cards as generic resources, for a +3 DRM and reaches the “Strong” Regime box.

→ Fall 1938 (turn 11)

Hitler’s bullish moves and successes convince Stalin that the Führer has unlimited ambitions and will only be checked by a credible show of force. The red Tsar for a while considers attempting to revive the German-Soviet friendship of the Rappallo epoch and join in for the loot, but ultimately fears that this will benefit Germany more than the Soviet Union. The continuing inflammatory anti-Bolshevik rhetoric spilling over from Berlin does not make things easier.

Litvinov, head of the *Narkomindel* and a staunch proponent of a collective security system against Hitler, is given instructions to probe his Western contacts for a possible non-aggression pact, including a secret military convention directed against Germany.

This appears all the more necessary that Hungary makes no mystery to where its allegiance lies, and Bulgaria, the other beneficiary of the German territorial arbitration, was prevented to follow the same path only by desperate Soviet diplomatic manoeuvres of counter-offers and veiled threats, (but for how long?)

The mounting menace of German expansionism and a growing sense of their own impotence make Paris and London reconsider their aversion to Soviet interference in European affairs and the diplomatic expediency of a Western -Soviet Pact.

After a number of preliminary meetings, an Anglo-French military delegation travels to Leningrad to discuss its provisions.

The pact is signed, although very imprecise in many aspects. The military cooperation is stated as a principle only, as both sides have not departed from their mutual distrust and each fears to be dragged into an unwanted war by the other.

In Germany, rearmament is severely hampered by critical shortages. Foreign exchange reserves are depleted and food imports are reduced to a trickle.

Food shortages are a cause of concern for the Nazi leadership, who fear its damaging effect on civilian morale. Social and economic tensions find a savage outlet in the growing persecution of Jews, made responsible for all the evils that beset Germany. The *Kristallnacht*, an orgy of anti-Semitic violence, lays bare the repressive and brutality of the Nazi regime and sparks international outrage.

In all democratic countries, the press, regardless of political orientation, expresses horror and shock and unanimously condemns this heinous attack.



Daladier returns from Leningrad after signing the Anglo-Franco-Soviet friendship pact

Play notes: Germany suffers from all possible shortages except steel. Rearmament die-roll is penalized by a -2 DRM (-4 DRM for shortages, +2 for Accelerated Rearmament). The German player is lucky and rolls a 3, just enough to prevent his next mobilized army from being delayed one turn.

The Western player discards the “Outrage Against Anti-Semitic Brutality” resolve card to regain Anti-German Resolve, and is now at 6, the current maximum value.

As the German player is clearly in the lead, the Soviet player decides to try and conclude a non-aggression pact with the Western Democracies, to help contain Hitler. Western Anti-soviet resolve is 5 (as a result of two Western-soviet Antagonism events and the annexation of Bessarabia) which precludes the conclusion of a pact. The Soviet player thus declares his wish to appease the West: because the Western player agrees to the Appeasement, no challenge is conducted and Western and soviet reciprocal resolve values are lowered by one. A Resolve value of 4 now allows the Western player to consider a pact with the Soviet Union. The Soviet player then proposes the pact. Again, no need to strong-arm the Western player, as he agrees to the pact. The pact is concluded. It limits Soviet territorial demands but more importantly, activates three German chits that penalize Resolve (“Two-front Threat”). That could make a difference in the upcoming German-initiated challenges.



Shortages hamper German rearmament effort.



Winter 1937/38 (turn 12)

The Spanish Republic has succumbed. Franco's troops enter Madrid after weeks of vicious fighting.

France continues to suffer from chronic social unrest. The new government was unable to respond satisfactorily to workers demands and its heavy-handed repression against the communist party and the organs of the workers' movement did little to pacify the social climate.

News of the Western-Soviet pact are received with consternation and anger in Berlin, as well as in Rome. As a reaction to the signing of the Western-Soviet pact, the German and Italian dictators decide to strengthen their ties by means of a formal alliance. The Pact of Steel is signed in Berlin: Germany and Italy pledge mutual military and economic assistance in the event of war. The Führer does not plan to lose the momentum he acquired in the aftermath of the Breslau conference. He is intent on probing the solidity of the Western-soviet partnership.



General Franco reviews his troops after entering Madrid. The Spanish Civil War is over.

Volksdeutsche agitation in the Memelland, a predominantly ethnic German coastal strip of land occupied by Lithuania since 1923, presents him with an opportunity to act.

Incensed by the return of Danzig to the Reich, Nazi hotheads in Memel have been boisterously demonstrating for the same right to be reunited with the motherland. In the wake of several violent incidents, Hitler unleashes his aggressive rhetoric against Lithuania. German propagandists capitalize on the hard-line Lithuanisation campaign conducted by the Kaunas government in the previous years, a policy that has deepened the antagonism between Prussian Germans and Lithuanians. The Army finds a Baltic expansion an idea to be commended: the German officer corps has strong ties with the Prussian land-owners, who for centuries had constituted a ruling class over native *Undeutsche*, but whose privileges had come to an end with the demise of the Russian Empire. Furthermore, the revival of *Ritt gen Osten* adventure resonates with the many *Freikorps* veterans now enlisted in the Wehrmacht.

Hitler is well aware of the fact that France and Britain have refrained from extending their territorial guarantees to the Baltic States, and interprets this as a clear indication that they are not ready to fight a war over such an insignificant country such as Lithuania, that they wouldn't be able to help anyway. A thrust into Lithuania, he believes, would drive a wedge between Stalin and his improbable democratic partners.

The Soviet Union immediately reacts to the threat by guaranteeing unconditionally the independence and neutrality of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. This unsolicited offer is rather unwelcome to its recipients, whom regard Soviet interference, whatever its nature, with utmost distrust. But Stalin is convinced that a German penetration into Lithuania would inevitably entail the vassalization of all three Baltic republics, an apprehension shared by Litvinov and most of the Stavka generals. A German springboard for invasion, less than a hundred miles from Leningrad, is an unthinkable proposition.

As the Germans seem intent on carrying their plan, the *Pravda* announces the mobilization of a million reservists. Incidents of Soviet aircraft crossing into Baltic air space multiply. A gunfire exchange is barely avoided when German and Soviet naval patrols come within salvo distance of each other.

Paris and London affirm publicly their intention to come to the Soviet Union's help if the worst comes to the worst. Despite Ribbentrop effort's to dismiss Western statements as hollow threats, the German High Command shivers at the prospect of facing Germany's ultimate strategic nightmare: a war on two fronts. Hitler initially refuses to back down from the confrontation, but alarming reports on the state of unpreparedness of the armed forces, in addition to meteorological conditions completely inadequate for offensive operations, make Hitler vacillate and finally convince him that now is not the time to fight the Russian bear.

Hitler's generals, however, are well aware that Germany had just teetered dangerously on the brink of the abyss. Talk of a coup to depose the reckless Führer began to circulate. The conspiracy is a loosely organized group whose main instigators are the army's Chief of Staff General Beck, the *Abwehr* chief, Admiral Wilhelm Canaris, and the Foreign Office's State Secretary, Baron von Weizsäcker. The coup fails to materialize, due to the plotters' dilettantism, but the latter remain committed to the overthrow of the reckless "Bohemian corporal", lest he plunge the German nation into another unwinnable war.

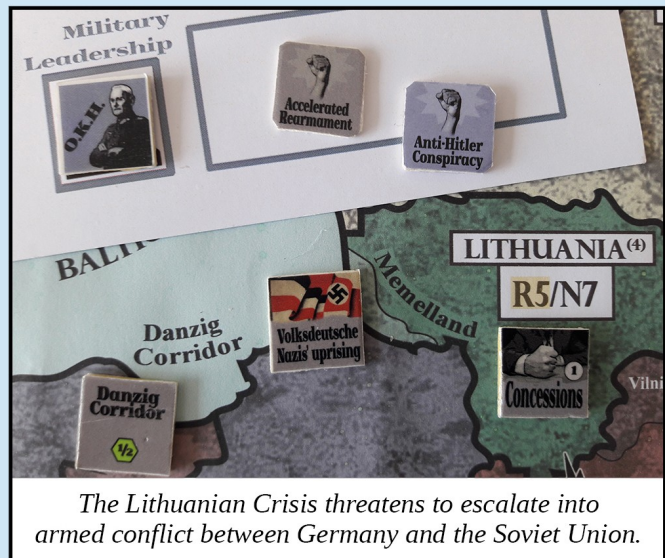


Soviet display of military power: the Red Army conducts aggressive maneuvers on the Soviet-Lithuanian border.

Play notes: During the Events phase, the Germany plays the “Italo-German Summit” card to upgrade Italy's status to “Pact of Steel”, which turns Italy into a German satellite (impervious to opponents' diplomacy) and grants the German player a valuable ½ VP.

The Western player continues to roll damaging results to France's domestic stability.

The Soviet player now also enjoys Balance of Forces Superiority against the West. The German player rolled a “Volksdeutsche Nazis Agitation” event result, which he places on Lithuania. The event grants him an Intimidation bonus DRM or a Tension Level reduction against the target country. The German player hardly needs the DRM to Intimidate Lithuania (not the least impressionable of all minor countries) but the TL reduction comes in handy. He uses his first action to place an Intimidation on Lithuania and the second to demand the annexation of the whole country (TL for that action is 7, German highest resolve is 5, but the *Concessions* marker on Lithuania reduces the TL by one and the *Volksdeutsche Agitation* by a further one). The challenge is directed at the Soviet player only, as the Baltic States are not included in the Western Sphere of Influence. Both sides escalate until the Soviet player calls for a showdown. The German player is penalized by a -1 Resolve penalty inherent to the action itself (Germany is clearly encroaching on the Soviets' vital perimeter) and another -1 for the *Military Preparations Incomplete* chit he drew at the beginning of the turn – unknown to his opponent. It's an audacious move, but the Soviet player has spend a lot of cards on Rearmament and his hand is nearly empty. The German player gets unlucky with his “surprise” chit, as he draws a *Two-Front Threat* (now effective due to the Western-Soviet Pact), which proves too much. (The Soviet player, on the other hand, was lucky, as his initial chit was not penalizing, and the second one was a “Treason Suspected”, but the purges have uprooted all (real or imaginary) opposition, so the chit is not effective). Germany loses the showdown and suffers its first serious diplomatic defeat. This, in turn, causes the placement of the Anti-Hitler Conspiracy marker, which could subsequently trigger an assassination attempt against the Führer.



Spring 1939 (turn 13)

Unrest in French North Africa forces Paris to redeploy forces and divert credits to pacify the region. This is a most unwelcome sideshow, as the widening rearmament gap between the Western democracies and the Nazi and Soviet dictatorships is a growing source of concern among the Western leadership. Germany, however, experiences some difficulties of its own: shortages in fuel, steel and other raw materials combine with problems of workforce allocation and competition between industrialists for army contracts and slow rearmament.

In the Far East, the fragile Soviet-Japanese understanding breaks down. Japanese border infringements continue. Tension culminates as the Japanese mount a full-scale assault on a group of hills regarded as part of Manchurian territory but where Soviet forces are firmly entrenched. Japanese antiquated and foolhardy tactics result in a resounding débâcle for the soldiers of the Rising Sun. Shamed, the reckless commanders of the Kwantung Army are restrained by Tokyo, with the Emperor stepping in personally. Talks with Moscow re-initiated, and the Japanese accept the Soviet version of the frontier delimitation, with a few symbolic adjustments.

Stalin capitalizes on his war of nerves success against Hitler by guaranteeing Polish territorial integrity. Warsaw reluctantly agrees to a joint declaration of friendship under the condition that Soviet help in case of German aggression is limited to sending military equipment and no Soviet troops actually enter Poland. Józef Beck brags publicly about Polish impregnable defences and prophesies a German humiliation if the Wehrmacht ever dares to cross the border.

Hitler decides to strike without delay before the Soviet Union and the Western democracies are able to mount a united front against German ambitions in the East. By liquidating the rump state of Czechoslovakia, the Führer removes a thorn on Germany's side, while simultaneously isolating Poland, expected to be a bastion of resistance against this ambitions. He bullies the autonomous government of Slovakia into proclaiming independence, then orders the Wehrmacht to move into the Czech remaining territory, declared to be no longer viable as a state. The Führer accedes to a plea from president Hacha to accept his government's surrender to avoid bloodshed.

The Czech army is disarmed, not a single shot is fired. Paris and London roundly denounce Nazi perfidy. Yet, despite the indignation in Western public opinion, the elimination of Czechoslovakia is accepted as an accomplished fact. But this coup tips the scales decisively against the appeasement factions in the Western governments.

In the wake of this success, the plot to remove the Führer from power fizzles out. Never too comfortable with the very un-Prussian prospect of betraying their oaths of obedience, some conspirators have second thoughts, in particular in light of Hitler's undiminished popularity among the populace.



*The Wehrmacht enters Prague.
Czechoslovakia has ceased to exist.*

Play notes: The Western player rolls boxcars on the Events Table - “unrest in the colonies” (the French ones in this case), resulting in the next French army mobilization being delayed by one turn. Not likely to help the West catch up in the arms race! From the Soviet Events Table, the breakdown of Soviet-Japanese appeasement comes in handy, as it gives the Soviet player the opportunity to use his “Japanese Defeated in Border Clash” resolve cards, which he has been holding on to for a few turns. Germany's showdown defeat against the Soviet Union last turn reduced German Anti-Soviet resolve by one (the German player may sacrifice a resolve card to recover lost resolve, but hasn't done so yet), so for once German and Soviet resolve values are equal. The Soviet player decides to “offer protection” to Poland, in order to remove the German level one intimidation (“concessions”) - a result of the cession of Danzig on turn 10. He wants to prevent the German player from conducting “Case White” - the invasion of Poland, which would end the game and result in a German victory, considering the current VP count. Indeed, the TL prerequisite for “Case White” is 8, and while German maximum resolve value is currently only 7, the “concessions” on Poland lowers it by one. The challenge is successful and German intimidation on Poland is reduced to a level 0 “No Diplomacy”.

The German player sweats a little over his Events Table: with an “Anti-Hitler Conspiracy” in effect, an 8,9 or 10 on 2d6 would result in a Coup against Hitler.

That would be pretty bad because Germany would lose this full turn to restore order and “purge” all potential dissenters, (a mandatory “SS and Gestapo Crackdown on Dissent” action), at a further cost of one random discard and ½ VP. Fortunately for the German player, no such thing happens.

He chooses to conduct the “Dismember Czechoslovakia” Special Action. It's an easy pick, (worth 2VPs!): Czechoslovakia is German-subdued, so Germany has the Resolve advantage, and the Czechs won't fight back. The Western player chooses to “ignore” the challenge, at a cost of one permanent prestige point. He doesn't want to risk offering a conference (for a reduced prestige cost), because if the German player refuses the conference and gets away with it, Western resolve would suffer and possibly (with some bad luck) endanger the Western Democracies ability to go to war over a German-Polish war, bound to happen very soon. Tension escalates by two points (once for the Coup de Force and one extra for annexing Prague, which is a “Strategic Location”), which means German and Western reciprocal resolve values are increased by two, up to 9. The German success removes the “Anti-Hitler Conspiracy”.



Summer 1939 (turn 14)

Recovering from the shock of Czechoslovakia's sudden demise, the Western chancelleries scramble to Warsaw to upgrade the Western guarantee to a full treaty of mutual defence against Germany. This tardy show of firmness is expected to make Hitler think twice before embarking on further adventures. As the Western military attachés in Moscow press their counterparts for staff talks, Stalin sees an opportunity to cash in on his indispensability. He has not rid his mind of his obsessive suspicions of British treachery, and fears a separate peace with Germany, allowing Britain to turn against the Soviet Union, in the form of a new Crimean War or an intervention like the one that followed the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. Gaining a position on the Turkish Straits would seal off the southern avenue of invasion, and also tighten the grip on Bulgaria, which he hopes to use as a bridgehead against German penetration in the Balkans. He instructs Litvinov to let it be known that the Soviet Union is highly unsatisfied with the current regime regulating the straits: the 1936 convention of Montreux allows Turkey to close the straits whenever it so wishes; it is not acceptable, Litvinov affirms, that Turkey be given the possibility to throttle Soviet imports and exports and even compromise Soviet Union's southern defences.

Arguing that the convention is anyway obsolete, since it is tied to a League of Nations that no longer exists, and signed at a time when British-Soviet relations were not at their best, Litvinov contends that the new geostrategic configuration calls for an immediate revision of the convention, and goes as far as demanding Soviet 50-year-lease air and naval bases in the area. The British remind him that their government has pledged to inform Ankara about all issues that affect its interest, and demand that the Turks be included in the discussion. Stalin's blunt refusal comes out as a bombshell in Ankara.



*Soviet battleship Sevastopol
en route to the Turkish Straits*

Soviet naval patrols are already conspicuously trespassing into Turkish waters. Turkish demands for urgent deliveries of modern military equipment are dismissed in Paris and London. The West has no troops to spare. After two weeks of negotiations, London and Ankara cave in. The Soviet Black Sea Fleet will guard the straits.

Soviet pressure on Bulgaria, however, ultimately backfires, as it pushes King Boris into the arms of Germany. Suspecting Stalin of wanting to vassalize his country, the king tightens the ties between Sofia and Berlin, effectively bringing Bulgaria into the German sphere of influence.

Play notes: the Western player plays “Guardians of the International Order” on Poland, which makes it immediately aligned to the Western Democracies because it is currently subject to German Intimidation (even if it's now only a level 0 intimidation). This will make it easier, in fact almost automatic, for the Western Democracies to go to war to protect Polish independence. The Soviet player has moved an Army into the Black Sea/ Caucasus military theater and successfully intimidates Turkey. Then he demands the “Revision of the Montreux Convention and Naval Presence on the Straits”, sensing that the Western player will be reluctant to use his good cards with an attack on Poland so imminent. Indeed, the Western player chooses to ignore the challenge, and the Soviet scores 2VPs, and gains a precious prestige point (Prestige also counts for Soviet VP calculation). The German player uses both actions to align Bulgaria through successful diplomacy – helped by the +1 diplomacy DRM due to Germany's high prestige.



Hitler's Czech loot includes the famous Skoda ironworks and hundreds of captured tanks.



Fall 1939 (turn 15 & End of the Game)

Stalin, emboldened by his success in the Straits, is convinced that Britain and France will do anything to keep the Soviet Union by their side. However, by upholding the principle of collective security and associating itself the Western democracies to check German predatory appetites, the Soviet Union has limited its ability to upset the current Eastern European territorial distribution to its advantage.

Therefore, Stalin once more turns his sights on the Middle-East: he plans an extension of Soviet influence into Persia and a reinforcement of Soviet position around the Black Sea.

The Turks will inevitably stand in his way, and will need to be neutralized. Stalin sees no better moment to take action than now, while Turkey's would-be protectors, France and Britain are weakened and absorbed by the German peril. Litvinov arrives in Ankara and presents president İnönü with a demand for a “normalization” of the Soviet Turkish border, consisting in the cession of the eastern Anatolian provinces of Kars and Ardahan, which are still mainly inhabited ethnicities who now have titular Soviet Socialist Republics.



Turkish president Ismet İnönü and the British ambassador discuss the terms of a defensive alliance.

In Paris and London, the reaction to Soviet demands is not what Stalin expected. This renewed Soviet incursion into the Middle-East is rightfully viewed as a direct challenge to both French and British colonial influence in the region. The Turkish straits affair has inflamed anti-Bolshevik feelings, and public opinion is vastly in favour of firmness. The British and French ambassador in Moscow join forces and informs Litvinov that any encroachment on the Turkish border will be treated as an act of war – and the Turks have already declared a partial mobilization. Stalin is aware that the Western democracies have very little in the manner of offensive military power to back their threats, but the spectre of a Western-German rapprochement at the expense of Soviet interests is a powerful deterrent. Stalin dares not cross the Rubicon: the Red army will not cross the Turkish border.

Hitler, of course, could not be more delighted with the much publicized Western-Soviet disenchantment. He feels that the moment has now come to liquidate Poland. While Ribbentrop insists that Britain and France will not intervene, the Führer does not rule out war. A clash is inevitable, and better sooner than later: time plays against Germany – rearmament progress has been disappointing in 1939, due to serious shortages in raw materials, fuel, steel and qualified labour. France and Britain will only get stronger, as their economies gear up for war. War preparations are hastened, Poland must be finished by the time the bad weather settles in.

The Nazi war machine is set in motion. On a clear morning of September, the Wehrmacht crashes into Polish border defences.

Paris and London have no choice, the policy of appeasement has come to its inglorious end. Inaction would mean conceding hegemony in Europe for Hitler's Germany, and maybe worse.

An ultimatum is sent and expectedly unanswered, and France, Britain and Germany are at war once again, after 20 years of an uneasy peace.

Stalin considers sending aircrafts and anti-tank guns to Poland, but the risk of intervention escalating into open conflict with Germany is too high, and the Red Army is not ready yet for such daunting endeavour. The red Tsar watches, not with a measure of revengeful contentment, as Poland is ripped apart. To London and Paris pressing him to send help, he replies that Poland has brought this evil upon itself, with its intransigence and refusal to negotiate passage for the Red Army, and not without a measure of revengeful contentment, watches his old Polish foe being ripped apart by the German panzer divisions.

The Second World War has just begun.



*Sirens screeching, German dive-bombers
plunge towards fleeing Polish troops*

Play notes: The Soviet player tries to grab some last-turn gains by playing “Claim Kars & Ardahan”, expecting the Western player to refrain from standing in his way, as he did on the previous turn. Indeed, the German player will most certainly invade Poland this turn, and he is currently leading in VPs. The Western player will have to oppose the German move (it would make no sense not to) and if he loses the challenge, he may avoid the penalties by declaring war instead. He needs an anti-German resolve value of 9 or more to do that, which is the current value. But since it could potentially be reduced by resolve-penalizing chits, the Soviet player assumes that the Western player will want to hold on to at least one Resolve asset card to offset a potentially negative “surprise” chit, possibly two if his current chit is already

penalizing. (The Western player will anyway be able to automatically declare war on Germany *after* the challenge, but that means he would incur the penalties for losing the challenge first, which will hurt his prestige and therefore his final VP count).

The Western player, however, player calls the Soviet's bluff. The challenge escalates and culminates in a showdown. The Soviet player has laid three cards on the table, hoping to deter his opponent, but none of any use. So he loses the showdown, losing, in the process, one prestige point and therefore 1 VP.

The German player, as expected, launches “Case White”. The Western player calls for a showdown, loses it, but declares war instead. His secret chit was a “no effect”, and he drew a “Military Leadership Pusillanimity” “surprise” chit, which normally penalizes the resolve, but whose effect is cancelled because he had the “War, After All?” asset card in hand (hence his confidence in opposing the Soviet challenge).

The Poles fight back automatically, and the Soviet player is given the option to send military aid to Poland. He needs an anti-German resolve of 5 or more to do that, which is the current value. The current Soviet secret chit is a “no effect” but the “surprise” chit is a “Politburo non-committal”, which brings the resolve value down to 4, and the Soviet player has no +1 Resolve asset cards to offset to chit. The Soviet Union may not send help to Poland.

The military campaign against Poland is resolved: Germany has eight armies in the East, so uses the 8+ armies column. Poland uses the 11 resistance column. The Success number is 3. Thus, if the German player rolls 6 or more on 2d6 he obtains a crushing victory, 5 or 4 a decisive victory, 3 a marginal victory, and 2 a protracted conflict. DRMs are +1 because he outflanks Poland via German-controlled Czechoslovakia, and -1 because of the fuel shortage currently in effect. The die-roll is an 8, resulting in the occupation of the whole of Poland, with insignificant military losses.

The game ends and VPs are calculated.

Germany wins with 12 VPs (+1 for Rhineland, +2 for Austria, +3 for Czechoslovakia – including Sudetenland, +4 for Poland – including Danzig. +4 for German-aligned Spain, Italy, Hungary and Bulgaria. +½ for Pact of Steel. +1 for two armies in excess of Western armies total and +½ for one army in excess of Soviet armies total.. -1 for Western-Soviet Pact and -3 for war against the Western Democracies.) Soviet Union is second with 9½ (+4 for final Soviet Prestige of 4, +2 for Bessarabia, +2 for Naval Presence in the Turkish Straits, +1 for Western-German war, +½ for one army in excess of Western armies total). Western Democracies are last with 8VPs (default 10 VPs, -1 for highest scoring opponent with 12 or more VPs, -1 for final Western prestige of 3).

