

STRATEGIC CONSIDERATIONS IN BAR LEV

by Daniel S. Palter

BAR LEV, while an excellent game, leaves much to be desired as a simulation. The strategies advocated here will work in the game but would have led to utter disaster in the real world. There are reasons for this. On the Arab side the game makes the presumption that there is an Arab side that wins or loses. In the real world that simply is not the case. Although there is a general Arab bloc, Egypt and Syria win or lose on their own and each would be quite reluctant to sacrifice itself for the other's benefit. However, Egypt is contrawise in no position to be quite as selfish as the game strategy requires (in the real world they came out from under their missile umbrella in large measure to avoid having it look as if they were really abandoning Syria). On the Israeli side it is the geography that is off. The area included on the boards gives almost no depth to the Sinai front when in a strategic sense they had all the room in the world. Contrawise, the great danger of a Syrian descent from the Golan plateau directly into the populated Galilee and from there on to the Med doesn't come off as the Arabs only win an instant victory here by clearing the board instead of making a dash for the sea as they would have in the real world.

SYRIAN STRATEGY: Forget the instant victory rules here. Any vaguely awake Israeli Player will manage to use the terrain to keep himself on the board, even in the opening turns. In fact, and in large measure, forget about winning on this front. You are going to have to be awfully lucky or up against someone fantastically inept to pull it off.

Does this mean you retreat into a defensive shell? Of course not. Remember the victory conditions. You get one point for a draw, and for the Arab to win the game he needs that one point. To win the Israeli Player must take four of your villages and give up none of his own. (The Ft. Hebron rule amounts to the same thing only it counts the other crest hex as one of the villages.) Now holding your entire front can be difficult. The Israeli Player can always bring on enough better pieces to overwhelm you eventually. So the key to pulling off a draw becomes holding onto at least one of his villages. But which one?

Shaba: It is right on the start line and is at most defended on the first turn by only one(8)-6 artillery unit. With or without the unit it is a sure bag on turn one, and by driving south from there towards Banayas and Massadah you stand a chance of sealing the Banayas road and limiting the reinforcement of the counterattacking force. You can further implement the second part of your strategy.

Attrition: Your second main objective beyond forcing a draw here is killing Israeli units. Don't be overly deterred by your breaking point- whether you reach it or not is almost totally in the hands of the Israeli Player anyway. The key thing is to seize every possible chance to knock out Israeli factors, especially air units. Remember that your Mig-21's are much better at air-air than at air-ground. Load the max in the first few turns on the air superiority scene. If the Israeli comes up to meet you, you will get him badly with attrition while getting blown out of the sky. If he doesn't, you will cream any air-ground he's got out and to get an attack going on the Golan he's going to need them. Hold your SU-7's in reserve. The Israeli Player, in his key attack turns, will have to leave some of his F-4's on CAP or see you get to knock back a key attack or two with air attacks.

Final Note: Remember the Jordanians. If you get lucky and get a large turnout send them after Rafid. Your

basic strategy is going to force the center of gravity for the game towards the North end of the Golan. Rafid may well be left lightly covered. Even if you fail, it will certainly pull the Israeli dispositions off balance. Remember again, it does not matter how many villages you lose, if you can cling to one Israeli village and wear down his forces without getting utterly destroyed in the process the Syrian front has done its job.

EGYPTIAN STRATEGY - THE VICTORY FRONT: This is where the Arab Player is going to win the war. A draw here leaves virtually no chance for an Arab victory and a defeat here is an Arab disaster. Again remember your victory conditions. All you have got to do is clear the Bar Lev line, which is not going to be hard to do, and hold it while maintaining a sufficient reserve to knock any Israeli penetrations.

The vista of the instant victory: The Egyptian front can see an Arab instant victory. If you are a good tactician, and the Israeli Player overcommits to the Golan, you may be able to pull it off, but for God's sake don't commit for it until the Israeli forces are stuck on the Golan and cannot get back in a hurry. Otherwise you risk throwing away the game, the same way Sadat almost did in the real war.

The Basic Egyptian Strategy: First clear the Bar Lev line. The victory conditions require CLEARING them (Note: you still win even if you don't hold them all). Second, grab and hold the northern and central Israeli road entrances. Use your airborne if possible if you have to (this is going to depend on Israeli air strategy, if he wants to stop you, you will never get the required air superiority, but given the Syrian air strategy outlined above you will probably get the chance before mid-game). This will shorten your front and limit your troubles, but be very careful not to overextend yourself, unless the Israeli Player is TOTALLY committed to the Golan. Even against a minimal Israeli commitment you will usually be better off nibbling at the heights between the central and southern east-west roads rather than attempting an all-out offensive. You get stuck with a draw if the Israeli Player pulls off a groundborne canal crossing even if you can immediately wipe out the pocket. So you are strategically on the defensive after the first few turns even if you use offensive tactics. The only exception is a clear line on an instant victory.

DON'T MAKE SADAT'S MISTAKE!!! An Egyptian general offensive with no instant victory potential will merely weaken the Egyptian army without taking any real pressure off the Syrians.

Egyptian Air Strategy: Keep your planes in reserve on the first few turns. Let your SAM's and the Syrians chew up the Israeli Airforce before you even THINK about committing anyone. On the turns after you clear the BAR Lev and start driving towards the road entrances, send up as much as possible on air superiority to use or threaten your paratroops, but, if the Israeli rises to meet you, back down until he's back to sending his airforce to the Golan. Your airforce is your key reserve when the Israeli counterattacks you will need it to take the sting out of the Israeli ground-air attacks via the air superiority route.

Final Summation: Clear the Bar Lev line briskly, remove if possible the northern half of the Suez front map from play and then form the best possible DEFENSIVE frontage, keeping adequate reserves on BOTH banks of the Canal to deal with Israeli airmobile operations and limit penetrations. Offensive moves should be limited to exposed Israeli pieces - attrition works against you here and merely adds to the possibility of breaking.

ISRAELI STRATEGY - THE TWO OPTIONS: As an Israeli Player you should see your problem merely by reading the Arab strategies. The Syrians are definitely beatable but you are going to have to work for it. The Egyptians are very hard to get a draw against and require an almost impossible effort to defeat. Yet you lose on a tie so you need at least a draw in the Sinai to win the game.

The Beginning Israeli Player's Strategy: This is not the optimum, but merely the easiest to deal with while you are breaking into the game - go all out in the Sinai. Accept a draw in the Golan, do not even try to defend Shaba. If the Syrian Player makes the great northern push I recommend, give up all three of the northern villages and be content with taking Kafir and Jasin (to give yourself a good chance of holding at least one by the end of the game). If the Syrians adopt a broader front strategy, give up Shaba and Rafid, and hold the other four strongly, but without even really trying to cross the start line - your troops are better than his. He breaks easily if he keeps battering too hard at a good perimeter along the ridge line covering your redoubt. On the Suez front, mass your available units in the El Shatt sector. Retreat slowly into the hills but hold the CENTRAL ROAD at all costs. As soon as the bulk of your reserves come up get your bridgehead first at Suez - then swing up the west bank of the canal pocketing the entire Egyptian bridgehead. After three turns they vanish. Using air support you should have a good shot at blasting your way up the causeway to Port Said - If possible use your air mobile capability to help by leapfrogging Egyptian reserves. **Warning:** This will tend to produce a narrow front battle in the El Shatt-Suez region deciding the war on turns 5-8 as once the Egyptian Player sees what you are doing he will adjust. However, if you strike fast and hard he will probably be expecting you to clear out his forces on the east bank first and be caught off balance.

Advanced Israeli Strategy: As any of you more adept at Bar Lev can relate, the above works progressively less well familiar the Egyptian Player is with the game. By this time, however, you should be able to use this approach and reverse things. Spread your units out a bit more in your opening to force the Egyptian to do likewise. Reinforce Suez first and punch a hole across the Canal (remember even a one unit crossing will do). But once you get your bridgehead, pull out fast and form a good perimeter around the two southern road exits. Any excess units go back to Syria as do ALL regrouped units. Use the entire airforce to blow out your bridgehead on the Egyptian front and then no more air to Egypt for the rest of the game. Only use airmobile if you can do so without risking your Chinooks - you will need all your lift for the--

Golan: Take your losses in territory on the first few turns while you salvage your Egyptian draw but don't despair, just keep your units intact as well as at least the El Quantara road. Once the big push begins, destroy the Syrian airforce as soon as it offers itself for battle. Clear Israeli territory first here - the only possible exception would be in the case of a superstrong Syrian push in which case it would be permissible to go for Sasa at the same time you go for Shaba. Use your Chinooks to switch units being withdrawn from Suez to the Syrian front box. Your optimum targets are Sasa, Baytima, Quanta, and Kiswah. Damascus may be threatened but is not worth the effort. Hebron must be threatened but is only to be hit if very weakly held (Hint: Even then you are probably better off isolating the garrison on the crest and killing it off that way.) Optionally, Kafir may be substituted for Kiswah, but the full southern push is only to be tried if the Syrian Player's dispositions are so lopsided as to concede the sector, and even then proceed with caution - the Jordanians could always arrive. Breaking the Syrian army will help but territory rather than blood is your main objective - if you can take by maneuver it beats banging your head in attacks given the games loose supply rules.

How to Choose: QUICKLY!!! The Israeli Player must decide in basically the first one or two turns which sector is to be the win and which is to be the draw. Beyond an airmobile threat any Israeli reserve is a needless risk.