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DEFENDING SOCIALISM

Playing Russia in *GATHERING STORM*

by Bruce Harper

Introduction

GATHERING STORM turned out to be a much more challenging and deeper game than anyone anticipated. It is as far from the one-hour "draw-a-few-variants" introduction to *A WORLD AT WAR* it could be.

The strategies open to all the major powers in *GATHERING STORM* promise to fuel discussion and analysis for years to come. Both the Axis and the Allies have many different options, all of which have their pluses and minuses. In this sense, Russia is unique – it initially has few options, but also has the smallest margin of safety of all the major powers.

Russia therefore has to play the first few moves well, or else it might end up in a terrible position from which it can't recover. And all the while, Hitler may be looking east...

Russia's attributes

Russia has many distinctive characteristics, and it is important to understand their implications when trying to plan a Russian strategy.

These characteristics are the Russian activity counter pool, Russia's income, and the uniquely Russian garrison requirements and purges.

Activity counters

Russia begins the game with a modest selection of activity counters, similar to the Italian and French activity counter pools.



At the start of the game, Russia's limited activity counter pool isn't a significant handicap, for, as we shall see, Russia rarely has even six tile points to spend in a turn. But later Russia may find itself constrained in its ability to build units, conduct research and diplomacy, and intervene in civil wars, all of which require activity counters.

Russia has several ways to acquire additional activity counters:



Cohesion

Russia adds activity counters as its cohesion increases:

12.22 INCREASING ACTIVITY COUNTER POOLS: The activity counter pool for each major power may be increased or decreased as follows:

...

H. RUSSIA:

- Russia adds a 1 activity counter when it reaches medium cohesion.
- Russia adds an additional 2 activity counter when it reaches high cohesion.
- Russia adds an additional 3 activity counter when it reaches full cohesion.

This means that as the game goes on and Russia incurs purges, it gains activity counters. Russia has no control over this (it can neither voluntarily purge or decline purges), but the Russian player will have a fair idea when these additional activity counters will become available.



Economic Preparation

The only other sure way Russia can increase its activity counter pool is through economic preparation research:

12.22 INCREASING ACTIVITY COUNTER POOLS: The activity counter pool for each major power may be increased or decreased as follows:

...

D. ECONOMIC PREPARATION: For Germany, Britain or Russia:

- The first economic preparation result adds a 1 activity counter to the successful major power's activity counter pool.
- In addition to the effects of the first economic preparation result, the second economic preparation result adds a 2 activity counter to the successful major power's activity counter pool.

Economic preparation research is valuable in A WORLD AT WAR, because it directly affects major power construction limits (the force pool increases associated with 15-level and 18-level economic preparation research results are almost always out of Russia's league). But the additional 1 activity counter causes some players to make it a priority, albeit an ambitious one. The 2 activity counter associated with a 12-level economic preparation research result can increase Russian power significantly in the later stages of the game – provided Russia gets there intact.

Civil wars

If Russia wins a civil war round, it may place an activity counter, just like any other major power. Civil war counters should be considered windfalls.



Tile points

Russia's real problem at the start of the game is a shortage of tile points. Russia has little control over its income, but has more to say about its expenditures.

Income

It's not necessary to set out all the economic rules to estimate Russia's income in Spring 1935:

- **Civilian factory income:** +10.
- **Maintenance costs:** -5
- **Support:** -1
- **Random tile draw:** 1, 2 or 3.
- **Random events:** Random.

Russia will therefore have about six tile points to spend in Spring 1935.

Civilian factories

Russia has five civilian factories, each of which generates two tile points, for a total of 10 tile points per turn.

Unlike other major powers, Russia may not convert its idle factories to civilian factories, and may only convert civilian factories to military factories in special circumstances that won't arise until near the end of the game.

Russia's 10 tile points from civilian factories is therefore fixed, for all practical purposes.

Maintenance costs

Russia starts with five more units than it has military factories, giving it by far the highest maintenance costs of any of the five major powers. These units are necessary, however, because Russia must meet its garrison requirements. We will return to this topic later, because understanding the Russian garrison is the key to playing Russia well.

It's enough to point out that units may not be voluntarily eliminated, so there is no way for Russia to deliberately reduce the number of units it must maintain. The term "deliberately" is used intentionally, because purges may eliminate Russian units.

Russia's starting maintenance requirements cost it -5 tile points. While this may be affected by random events, it can be taken as the norm.

Support

The Russian garrison is balanced at the start of the game, so that Russia neither gains nor loses support from it. Russia does incur a -1 support modifier for low cohesion, and this won't disappear until Russia incurs ten purge events and reaches medium cohesion.

Random tile draw

Russia's income, like that of other major powers, is augmented each turn by a random tile draw. This will

give Russia an additional one, two or three tile points. One of the many virtues of socialist economic planning is that, in contrast to the other major powers, there are no random events that prevent Russia from drawing a random tile (anyone who mentions that there are also random events that allow the other major powers to draw two random tiles risks attracting the attention of the NKVD).

Russia can assume that, over time, it will average two tile points per turn from its random tile draws, but Russian planning (in the game, at least) must take into account the possibility of poor random tile draws.

Random events

Random events can affect the above figures, but only to a certain extent. There is no doubt that unfavorable Russian random events at the start of the game narrow Russia's option.

Expenditures

The very fact that Russia has only about six points to spend in its first turn makes it very important to consider how these points should be spent. When Russia gets in trouble, it is almost always the result of mistakes at this point in the game.

Unit construction

Russia's highest priority is to spend two points to build a unit. This isn't a question of strategy – it's a question of following the rules:

18.51 NEGATIVE RUSSIAN SUPPORT LEVEL: If the Russian support level is less than zero, Russia must build at least one unit:

A. This expenditure takes priority over any other expenditures - Russia may not mobilize a factory or spend on research if this would reduce Russia's point total below the level needed to construct the required unit.

B. If Russia is unable to build a unit because it lacks sufficient points, it may make no other expenditures.

C. If Russia is unable to build a unit because there is no unit available to be built, this requirement is disregarded.

There are two important points to remember:

- this requirement is triggered by the Russian *support level* being below zero, not just the Russian garrison modifier (which is only one component of the Russian support level). This means that the -1 support modifier for low cohesion generally forces Russia to build a unit each turn, unless the Russian garrison generates a +1 support modifier or Russia is lucky enough to draw a favorable support

random event.

- No matter how low the Russian support level might be, Russia only has to build one unit.

For planning purposes, Russia can assume -2 tile points for unit construction in Spring 1935 and every turn that follows. If Russia can somehow escape this obligation, the two tile points saved are very important.

Research

As noted above, Russia would like to eventually get a 1 activity counter from economic preparation research, but it also needs to get armor research results, both to avoid a penalty in A World at War, but also to generate counters for the Russian garrison.

The question is not whether research is a priority, but whether it's Russia's highest priority at the outset.

The answer to this question is an unequivocal "no", for two reasons"

- Russia gets one research point each turn. If it wants to place a research point in a light grey cell (necessary to get the first armor, specialized unit or economic preparation result), it has to use a 1 activity counter for research. Once Russia gets into the dark grey cells, it has to use a 2 activity counter for research. Since Russia can only put research points in clear cells for the first three turns (absent a random event), 1935 is the best time to scrimp on research.
- Russia has something more important to spend its money on than research.

Diplomacy

Diplomacy is important, and Russia wants to prevent Axis trade pacts in Finland, Rumania and Turkey. In one sense, it also would like to see the French flag in Poland disappear, but this at least prevents anything worse while it remains.

Fortunately for Russia, the Axis are some distance from getting these trade pacts. One of the worst mistakes the Russian player can make is to overspend on diplomacy out of fear of trade pacts in Finland, Rumania and Turkey, for the following reasons:

- A trade pact in a bordering minor does not trigger a -1 Russian support modifier, with its associated loss of income. It simply places a counter on the Russian garrison track, so it is

more accurate to consider a bordering trade pact as being worth around half a point of Russian income.

- The Axis have other priorities in 1935, such as aggressions and their own trade pacts, so an anti-Russian diplomatic strategy early in game can be dangerous for the Axis as well.
- The Allies can counter an Axis diplomatic build up in the border countries.
- These trade pacts are vulnerable to Russian diplomacy later in the game.

An equally grave mistake is for Russia to overreact to the anti-Comintern counter. In almost every game, the anti-Comintern counter is placed in Turkey in Spring 1935.

Russia has three options:

- Ignore it, allowing a German flag in Turkey.
- Counter it with a 1 activity counter, maintaining the status quo in Turkey.
- Trump it with a 2 activity counter, getting a Russian flag in Turkey.

Of these three choices, the third is by far the riskiest (and is probably simply bad). The Russian flag, which counts on the Russian garrison, won't last long, and when the Axis eliminate it, they will get a free diplomatic modifier somewhere in the Balkans. More importantly, Russia is spending two tile points to possibly avoid building a unit in the next turn (otherwise there's not much point to getting a Russian flag in Turkey, since Germany can always use a 3 activity counter to prevent Russia from getting a trade pact in Turkey).

Again, Russia has a higher priority.

Mobilizing

While Russia has a limited ability to control its finances, this does not mean it has *no* ability. By mobilizing an idle factory, Russia can reduce its maintenance costs by one tile point per turn. This may not seem like much, but if Russia spends (say) nine tile points mobilizing, in just over two years, the mobilization will have paid for itself.

Moreover, the sooner Russia gets its sixth mobilization out of the way (Russia starts with five military factories) the sooner it can do its seventh mobilization (and its eighth and ninth, for that matter).

It is Russia's seventh mobilization that is crucial, because it not only reduces maintenance costs by

another tile point, it increases Russia's support level as well, making it worth two tile points per turn.

With an income of around six tile points in Spring 1935, and a required expenditure of -2 tile points to build a unit, Russia's sixth mobilization seems a long way away. And if the Russian player doesn't give it top priority, it will be.

The planned economy

In order to find the tile points to mobilize, the Russian player has to establish a saving schedule and adhere to it, no matter what tempting possibilities may appear (unless they guarantee profit).

The target is to mobilize in Winter 1935 or Spring 1936 (when, all things being equal, the cost of mobilizing will drop from 10 tile points to nine tile points). Since it has to be assumed that Russia will also have to build a unit every turn, this means that a Winter 1935 mobilization requires Russia to save enough tile points that it has 12 tile points to spend (-10 for the mobilization and -2 for the build), while a more realistic Spring 1936 mobilization requires 11 tile points.

Since the reduction in the cost of mobilizing in Spring 1936 balances the maintenance savings from having an additional military factory one turn early, from the cost perspective the two mobilizations are pretty much the same. The advantage to mobilizing in Winter 1936 is that it might move the entire Russian mobilization schedule up a turn, although a lot can happen to throw this out of whack.

Math is hard, but it's not so hard that it is difficult to figure out that Russia has to save two or three points per turn to get enough points to mobilize. This means Russia's research will start slow and Russia may forego diplomacy in some turns. Neither matters. This saving program is not an outlandish, surprise plan – it is insurance against Russia going into a death spiral.

Contingencies

If Russia can ever breathe easily during GATHERING STORM, or even during A WORLD AT WAR, it is probably when the Red Army is fully built and is taking Warsaw in 1944. Mobilizing in Winter 1935 or Spring 1936 is an important first step for Russia, but it doesn't guarantee an easy game.

The problem is that Russia has to have enough

resilience to deal with contingencies, which come in two forms: bad luck and Axis anti-Russian strategies.

Bad Luck

In GATHERING STORM, luck plays a significant role, and one of the skills that players must acquire is minimizing the effect of bad luck and maximizing the effect of good luck. There are countless examples of this.

From Russia's point of view, there are a number of things that can go wrong.

Adverse support events

These are probably the worst events for Russia, as they not only cost Russia income (as much as -3 tile points), but they may also force Russia to spend two tile points to build a unit when otherwise it might not have to.

There are around 20 such events, out of a total of 144 random event cards. The odds of drawing such an event is therefore less than one in seven, and the chances of getting one that is severe are even less. Each such event increases the Russian purge level by one, so there is some compensation.

Flags in Russia

Foreign flags may appear in Russia only as a result of random events. Each foreign flag in Russia increases the support level of the owning major power by +1 and reduces Russia's support level by -1. This continues each turn until the flag is eliminated, which can happen in several different ways, as set out in rule 10.91F:

- **Diplomatic Random Events:** By a diplomatic random event that would otherwise place a flag in Russia, including a Russian diplomatic event.
- **Covert Operations:** As a result of a covert operation in Russia that is not blocked by counter-intelligence. Covert operations may be conducted by the Axis, Allies or Russia, and may be directed against any type of flag in Russia. Covert operations may not be conducted in Russia to place a flag.
- **No Purge:** In any turn in which Russia draws a No Purge card, one foreign flag in Russia is eliminated. This elimination of a foreign flag in Russia increases the Russian purge level by one - otherwise the No Purge card has no effect on the Russian purge level.
- **Full Cohesion:** Once Russia reaches full cohesion and no longer draws purge cards, it eliminates one foreign flag in Russia each turn.

It follows that an Axis flag is bad, an Allied flag is better (at least Britain or France gains +1 support) and

no flag is best of all.

Early in the game, Russia has a one in three chance of drawing a No Purge card, which eliminates the foreign flag and increases Russia's purge level. A foreign flag can turn into a guest that overstays its welcome and eats you out of house and home, but the odds are against it.

Adverse income events

These are annoying, and simply cost Russia one, or sometimes two, tile points.

Poor random tile draws

If Russia is saving to mobilize, there is a big difference between drawing a "1" tile each as opposed to a "3" tile each turn. Over the course of 1935, the difference is eight tile points (if you didn't have a calculator handy). This is just about the amount Russia has to save to mobilize.

In practice the random tile draws even out and average "2" per turn, but, as for many random factors, the key question is "when?" Better tile draws in 1938 will come too late.

Dealing with adversity

Neither GATHERING STORM nor A WORLD AT WAR is intended to be a character test - that's what Real Life is for. They are meant to be fun, but it is still necessary to deal with adversity.

The challenge for Russia, which initially has a small margin of safety, is to provide for at least a reasonable level of bad luck and make sure that it hurts Russian research and diplomacy, not Russia's mobilization schedule. That's because, as explained above, it is much more likely that mobilizing will generate tile points to repair the damage to research and diplomacy, than that research results (which take a long time and are only a component of the Russian garrison) and diplomatic results (which can be reversed - profitably - by the Axis and which also are only a component of the Russian garrison) will increase Russia's income and allow for mobilizations.

Russia just isn't rich enough to have its cake and eat it too. Or, to use another metaphor, Russia must avoid putting the cart before the horse and playing as though it will always have enough tile points to use its activity counters. This may be the situation later on, but in 1935-36, Russia is nowhere close to this goal.

Russian Garrison

 Unit	 Unit	 Unit	 Unit	 Unit	 Unit	 Unit	 Unit		
									
									
									
									
									
0									
Support	+/-1		+/-2			+/-3			+/-4

Axis strategies

While it is possible to conjure up a perfect storm of random events and poor tile draws that might destroy Russia, usually Russia only gets in trouble if such bad luck is combined with Axis anti-Russian strategies – or poor Russian play.

To understand the Axis options, and the possible Russian/Allied counters to these options, it is necessary only to look at the Russian garrison table, as pictured above at the start of the game.

Let's look at the Axis modifiers one by one.

Japan's Kwantung army

While the Japanese didn't put up a great showing in 1939, and were even worse in 1945 after being depleted throughout the war, the Siberian-Manchurian border was a constant source of tension and anxiety throughout the 1930s.

Russia must use eight units against the Japanese.

Counter: None.

The balance of power

Each pro-Axis armor, infantry and air balance of power advantage increases Russia's garrison requirements; each pro-Allied armor, infantry and air balance of power advantage offsets one of the Axis modifiers.

Generally the Axis will gain balance of power advantages in these categories over the course of the game, with the main Allied advantage being in the naval category, including the battleship race. Stalin, however, couldn't care less about battleships, and an Allied naval predominance, while useful in both GATHERING STORM and A WORLD AT WAR, does nothing for the Russian garrison.

It is dangerous for the Axis to focus too much on the balance of power too early, because higher maintenance costs can be crippling for the Axis. Nevertheless, the shift in the balance of power that inevitably occurs gives Russia a limited time to get its house in order.

Counter: If Russia is under pressure, the Allies can

build units to challenge the Axis lead in the armor, infantry and air balance of power categories. This will usually come at a cost to the Allies, but the benefit to Russia may outweigh that cost. Allied armor and air research can accomplish the same goals, at a different cost.

Diplomatic results

Each Axis or Allied trade pact in Finland, Rumania and Turkey is a pro-Axis Russian garrison modifier; one or two flags in Poland have the same effect, while a trade pact in Poland is worth two pro-Axis Russian garrison modifiers.

These results are difficult to achieve, and it is easy for the Russian player to obsess on them. They are not that important. Ultimately Russia doesn't want its bordering minor countries to be infested with Axis flags, but these are dangerous territories for the Axis, for the simple reason that a healthy Russia can eventually challenge them effectively with activity and military counters. This is not to say the Russian garrison diplomatic modifiers should be ignored – they just have to be kept in perspective.

Counter: *While Russian diplomacy is constrained in the first few years of the game, Allied diplomacy is not, and if the Axis seem to be putting pressure on Russia diplomatically, the Allies can place activity counters in the border countries as well.*

European Aggression Index

There is nothing any player can do to affect the EAI, other than (rarely) having the option whether or not to start a civil war with a flexible diplomatic random event.

Russia should assume that the Spanish civil war will start in 1936, and otherwise just has to try to insulate itself from EAI increases and take advantage of the less-common negative EAI random events (EAI shifts from the economic climate are equally likely to be positive or negative). Or *vice-versa* – a higher EAI might actually help Russia if it is mobilizing.

Counter: *None.*

Occupation policies research

Another option for the Axis is occupation policies research, which can add an unwanted counter to the Russian garrison track in 1936. This is certainly a reasonable component of an anti-Russian strategy, and

what makes it palatable for Russia is the simple fact that each successive negative Russian garrison support modifier is more difficult for the Axis to achieve. While the units and counters add up, one additional counter is never fatal.

There is always a cost to this strategy for the Axis – six research points are diverted from a project which could be placed on the balance of power track instead.

Counter: *There is no direct counter to occupation policies research – obviously a Russian armor or specialized unit research result can offset it, just as it would offset any other pro-Axis garrison modifier. The more subtle counter is Allied research to swing one of the non-naval balance of power modifiers in their (and Russia's) favor.*

Conclusion

Russia is difficult to play at the best of times, as it is the least forgiving of the five major powers in GATHERING STORM.

The Russian player must channel Stalin's paranoia and, while wishing fervently for the best, he must always expect the worst. Random events, tile draws, purge events and the Axis will conspire against Russia, and even the French flag in Poland hurts Russia in the short term. The Russian player must trust no one and take nothing for granted.

Russia's highest priority is therefore to mobilize quickly, leaving research and diplomacy for later. While there are many exceptions to this basic rule, the Russian player must be keenly aware at all times that every tile point spent on anything other than mobilizing involves a risk.

Once Russia has mobilized its sixth factory, it won't be able to mobilize its crucial seventh factory for another four or five turns, depending on its purge level. At this point, the Russian purse strings might loosen, provided Russia is able to accurately gauge all the variables that contribute to its income. Russia almost never wants to miss a chance to mobilize because it doesn't have the required tile points (the cohesion delays and Great Purge will take care of that), but it also doesn't want to miss chances to improve its research and diplomatic position just to accumulate tile points it can't spend because it doesn't have enough activity counters.

It is striking this balance that makes Russia so challenging – and fun – to play. Difficult as it can be to play, Russia is the enemy Germany fears most.

Anatomy of a disaster

Our first case study is a Russian disaster, but an instructive one.

	1935			
	Spr	Sum	Fal	Win
				
Available tile points	6	5	4	4
Factories	0	0	0	0
Unit construction	-2	-2	-2	-2
Research	-2	-2	0	0
Diplomacy	-2	-1	-2	-2
Support adjustments	0	1	0	0
End of turn	0	1	0	0

Spring 1935 (Military Purge)

Economic Trend →0

Hungary-Rumania border dispute.
The Axis must support one side;
Russia or the Allies the other
EAI: +1

 Agent at western uranium conference.
Spy ring effect for one
Russian atomic project

The EAI +1 general event might have hurt Russia, but since it also got a Military Purge, the general event was harmless. Russia was still only -1 support for its garrison and saved a tile point on maintenance.

While the Russian random event is as close to useless as you can get, Russia could be said to be off to a neutral start – neither good nor bad.

Rather than save three tile points, however, Russia spent down to zero. This was a serious mistake that reduced Russia's margin of safety for little in return.

Summer 1935 (No Purge)

 Secret Russo-German economic talks in Smolensk.
Russia: 1

 Japanese defeated in border clashes.
Russian support level: +2

In Summer 1935, Russia drew the Holy Grail of random events (at least as Holy a Grail as allowed in Stalin's Russia) – a +2 support event.

What makes this event so strong is that the +2 increase in Russia's support level offsets the -1

support for low cohesion and the -1 Russian garrison support effect. This leave Russia at 0 support, which means it doesn't have to build a unit.

With two tile points in income, two tile points saved from construction costs, and one tile point from reduced maintenance in Fall 1935, the Russian random event is worth five tile points. This means that despite Russia's spending in Spring 1935, it can almost certainly meet its saving target by Winter 1935, although the unfortunate German random event will cost it several tile points.

As it happens, Russia's random tile draw was a "1", so the lost savings from Spring 1935 start to hurt. Still, Russia could save five tile points for Fall 1935.

Instead Russia spent them on an unnecessary build, research and diplomacy. The Russian build had some value – Russia got a military counter, which had the same value as a 1 activity counter, But since Russia didn't use one of its 1 activity counters, it spent two tile points (plus another for maintenance in Fall 1935) for a +1 diplomatic effect, as well as the possible benefits of placing a 0 activity counter to deceive the Axis.

Russia's effort to save two tile points was cut in half when the German secret random event was revealed.

Fall 1935 (Party Purge)

 Communists exploit worsening unemployment in Bulgaria.
Bulgaria: 1

With another "1" random tile draw, Russia is starting to get deeper into trouble, as it can no longer avoid building a unit, despite its +1 support from its garrison. This is because of the pernicious effect of the German flag in Russia.

The Russian decision to spend what little it has makes things worse.

Winter 1935 (Military Purge)

 Wreckers found in Red Army units.
Purge one additional military unit **1**

Russia purges two units, reducing its maintenance, and finds itself under increasing garrison pressure because the Axis have achieved trade pacts in Turkey and Poland. The Allies shouldn't have allowed either, but they have concentrated on other priorities.

Russia's income of four tile points is too low, and spending the two tile points not needed for construction is another mistake.

Russia ends the year not with a mobilization, but with no tile points at all.

	1936			
	Spr	Sum	Fal	Win
Available tile points	5	6	4	1
Factories	0	0	0	0
Unit construction	-2	0	-2	0
Research	0	-2	-2	0
Diplomacy	-3	-3	0	0
Support adjustments	0	0	0	0
End of turn	0	1	0	1

Spring 1936 (Party Purge)

Russian military mission arrives in Madrid.
Spain: 2

Russia now starts to take on aspects of a Greek tragedy. Despite a +1 support modifier for its garrison, in part because of a Russian flag in Finland, and a "3" random tile draw, Russia's inflated maintenance level means it only gets five tile points.

Normally Russia would be happy to be getting purge events, because of the importance of increasing its cohesion, but in this situation Russia very much wants a No Purge turn to get rid of the German flag.

Despite all of this, however, Russia spends three tile points on diplomacy, trying to maintain its flag in Finland (it does) and get rid of Germany's trade pact in Turkey (it doesn't). The problem with this idea is that Russia is spending three points it needs to mobilize to try to remove garrison modifiers that are worth less than a point each. Meanwhile, the Allies are hanging Russia out to dry by refusing to build units to eliminate the Axis balance of power modifiers for the Russian garrison (although a British armor result erases the Axis armor modifier) and by using their diplomatic strength in the Rhineland (which Germany has no intention of taking any time soon, because it doesn't want Russia to get a Great Purge, which would increase its purge level and reduce Russia's maintenance costs).

Russia ends the turn with no tile points.

Summer 1936 (No Purge)

Endowment establishes Eastern European Studies Programme at Oxford.
Russian espionage +1 level

Russia draws the No Purge card, ridding itself of the German flag, and draws a "3" random tile. Despite Russia's maintenance level of seven, this gives it a net income of six tile points.

Light at the end of the tunnel? No, because Russia continues its policy of spending, using five points on research and diplomacy.

The Spanish civil war breaks out, adding an EAI counter to the Russian garrison track for the foreseeable future.

Fall 1936 (Party Purge)

Economic Trend →0

Anti-Comintern Pact expanded.
Russia: 1

Yugoslavian communists agree to Popular Front government.
Yugoslavia: 2

The French move into the recently vacated German embassy in Moscow, triggering another -1 Russian support modifier. Despite another "3" random tile draw, Russia is running out of money, because of its high maintenance level.

This turn Russia spends on research, but still with no results, and in any case the Russian garrison modifier is bound to be -2 for a while. Trying to prevent this at this stage of the game is like trying to stop the tide.

Winter 1936 (No Purge)

Balkan communist parties meet.
Diplomacy allowed in the Balkans

This turn the wheels officially fall off. Even with another timely No Purge draw, eliminating the French flag in Russia, Russia's -3 support level and -8 maintenance level combine to reduce Russia's income to a single tile point (Russia's random tile draw was a "2").

Russia has now entered a death spiral from which it can't recover. Despite all its expenditures on research and diplomacy, Russia has no research

results to offset the increasing number of pro-Axis garrison modifiers, and its minor countries flags are only a memory. Nor can Russia build any units.

Russia's purge level is still only eight, and with Germany carefully staying out of the Rhineland, Russia can't be saved by a Great Purge.

Russia can't be salvaged, and the game is over.

Conclusion

The Russian disaster was not the fault of poor random events or bad random tile draws. In fact, Russia was probably lucky in these areas.

Russia's problems were entirely of its own making. The German flag in Russia was annoying for several turns, and the German occupation policies research was prescient, but the Allies ignored Russia and Russia itself overspent, bankrupting itself.

Russia can spend on research and diplomacy, but not before it has laid the economic foundations for these expenditures by mobilizing to reduce its maintenance costs and, with its ninth mobilization, increase its support level. Together with the support increase for medium cohesion, Russia can reach the point where it can handle its negative support and maintenance costs.

A Socialist Success Story

You will never read about the previous game in *Pravda*. It features only sunnier stories like the following, in which Russia exercised greater self-restraint in order to build Socialism in One Country.

It was not all roses and 18-hour days, seven days a week, however. Russia did get into difficulties in 1936, but managed to survive them (barely). We will take the game through the crucial first eight turns, to demonstrate that Russia can get into trouble – and survive it – later in the game as well.

Spring 1935 (No Purge)

 Hungarian communists organize underground cells.
Hungary: 1

In Spring 1935, a random event caused the EAI to increase, which was the worst of both worlds for Russia. Not only did it incur a -1 support modifier for the Russian garrison, but it did so without the offsetting reduction in maintenance costs associated with a military purge. Fortunately Russia's random tile draw was a "3", so Russia's income was the projected six tile points discussed earlier.

Russia took a chance and spent one tile point on research, and used a 1 activity counter to counter the anti-Comintern counter in Turkey. This left Russia with two tile points.

Summer 1935 (Military Purge)

 Wreckers found in Red Army units.
Purge one additional military unit 

In Summer 1935, Russia drew a purge event that, together with the Military Purge, reduced Russia's maintenance costs to -4 tile points. This gave Russia an income of six tile points (the random tile draw was a "2").

This turn Russia took its saving program seriously and only spent on building a unit, carrying six tile points over into the next turn.

Fall 1935 (No Purge)

 Russian military equipment smuggled to Greek communists.
Greece: 2

This turn Russia's random tile draw was a "1", but despite this Russia was able to spend one tile point on diplomacy and still save another tile point. The Russian player correctly anticipated being able to mobilize in Winter 1935 anyway.

The Russian savings plan aimed at saving about two tile points per turn, so going into Winter 1935 with seven tile points was just about on target – another triumph for Socialist Planning. Russia achieved this by limiting research and diplomatic spending during the turns that matter least for those areas.

	1935			
	Spr	Sum	Fal	Win
				
Available tile points	6	8	10	14
Factories	0	0	0	-10
Unit construction	-2	-2	-2	-2
Research	-1	0	0	-1
Diplomacy	-1	0	-1	-1
Support adjustments	0	0	0	0
End of turn	2	6	7	0

Winter 1935 (Military Purge)

Secret Russo-German economic talks in Smolensk.
Russia: 1

Increased investment in Red Army.
Any two Russian military projects
+1 step each

With a random tile draw of “3”, Russia had a net income of seven tile points, so it mobilized and spent down to zero points. Russia therefore accomplished its most important goal, and could look forward to the future with confidence.

It turned out this confidence was misplaced, because of secret negotiations in Smolensk. Despite this, the French decided to use a flexible random event to start the Spanish civil war, in order to discomfort the Axis.

This fit in with the overall Allied strategy, which involved mobilizing for Britain and France, rather than converting one of Britain’s idle factories to civilian use. This meant that the Allies were able to maintain a higher force level at no cost, which in turn reduced the non-naval balance of power modifiers for the Russian garrison. The Allied thinking was that this balance of power pressure, coupled with the Axis obligations in Spain, would dislocate the Axis plans, and at the same time would give Russia, now free of the need to mobilize for a year, a good chance to achieve something in Spain.

The Allied plan probably succeeded, to the extent that the Axis were thrown off, but the part about Russia calling the tune in Spain came apart surprisingly quickly, and in no time at all Russia found itself back in the days of emergency rationing and socialist fervor.

An ironic aspect of the game was that Germany took the Rhineland in Spring 1935, but Russia didn’t draw a Great Purge card until the end of 1936.

	1936			
	Spr	Sum	Fal	Win
Available tile points	4	3	5	7
Factories	0	0	0	0
Unit construction	-2	-2	-2	-2
Research	0	0	-1	0
Diplomacy	-1	0	-1	0
Support adjustments	-2	0	0	0
End of turn	-1	1	1	5

Spring 1936 (Party Purge)

Germany coordinates anti-communist groups in eastern Europe.
One Eastern European country: 1

Leningrad Party apparatus purged.
Russian support level: -1

1

Russia’s *annus horribilis* started with a Party Purge, which neither reduced Russia’s maintenance (Military Purge) nor removed the German flag in Russia (No Purge), continued with a random tile draw of “1”, was compounded by a -1 Russian support event (which Russia knew about) and was exacerbated by a second German flag in Russia (which Russia didn’t know about until it was played), for another -1 support effect.

Russia spent two tile points to build (mandatory) and spent one tile point on diplomacy (also mandatory – Spain), but found itself in an unexpected deficit of one tile point when the German random event was revealed.

This meant the Russian income for the following turn was reduced by one tile point.

Summer 1936 (No Purge)

Rumanian Popular Front gains influence.
Rumania: 1

In Summer 1935, Russia had to draw a purge card that was useful, and it got a No Purge, eliminating one of the German flags in Russia. However, its random tile draw was another “1”, and with no purge events eliminating Russian units, its net income was three tile points, despite a +1 support modifier from the Russian garrison.

This had the dubious advantage of making Russia’s turn simple – it spent two tile points to build a unit and that’s it. Russia had a free 1 diplomatic counter from winning in Spain in the previous turn (which only occurred because the Axis felt they had higher priorities), so it didn’t have to spend on diplomacy.

Fall 1935 (Military Purge)

Communist academic sympathizers.
Spy ring effect for any one Russian research project

With unrest growing, you might have expected a

Great Purge, which would have brought Russia to nine purge events, only one away from medium cohesion, but this was not to be. Russia's Military Purge stabilized Russia's maintenance costs, but a random tile draw of "1" for a third turn in a row pushed Russia to the edge of despair.

Stalin chose another route – Russia voluntarily spent a tile point on research, in order to exploit its random event and get armor research to five steps, which meant a result (and a Russian garrison counter) the next time Russia could spend on research.

Russia ended the turn with only one tile point saved, and didn't look anywhere close to meeting its goal of mobilizing in Spring 1937, the next permissible turn unless Russia got to medium cohesion.

Winter 1936 (Great Purge)



Stalin is always right! The fever breaks in Russia with the first Great Purge, which reduced maintenance costs by two and increased Russia's support level by one (medium cohesion), for a swing of three tile points. Communist ardor did the rest – the Russian random tile draw was "3", and Russia's random event built on the previous turn and gave Russia an armor research result.

The enforced savings from the Great Purge left Russia with five tile points for 1936.

1937-1938

As can be seen, Russia did manage to mobilize in Spring 1937, then again in Summer 1938 (Russia deliberately waited a turn in order to take advantage of a No Purge draw in Spring 1938). Throughout 1937 and 1938, Russia was able to conduct research and take an active part in diplomacy, keeping its tile points and activity counters in balance.

	1937			
	Spr	Sum	Fal	Win
Available tile points	11	8	9	8
Factories	-7	0	0	0
Unit construction	-2	0	-2	-2
Research	-1	-2	-2	-2

Diplomacy	-1	-1	-3	-4
Support adjustments	1	-1	0	0
End of turn	1	4	2	0

	1938			
	Spr	Sum	Fal	Win
Available tile points	8	10	12	13
Factories	0	-5	0	0
Unit construction	-2	-2	-2	-2
Research	0	-2	-2	-2
Diplomacy	-6	0	-6	-6
Support adjustments	0	0	0	0
End of turn	0	1	2	3

One concern Allied players often have is that economizing with Russia will cost them diplomatically. While the game in question was wild (Rhineland and Ethiopia in Spring 1935; Czechoslovakia and Austria in late 1937; Poland in Spring 1938, with war in Winter 1938; German and Italian shipyard mobilizations...), here is the diplomatic situation at the end of each year:

Diplomatic Situation (end of year)			
Year			
1935	8	8	0
1936	15	7	0
1937	7 (9)	10	1
1938	2 (12)	13	2

The number in parentheses indicates notional flags reflecting the Axis trade pacts in aggression targets.

These totals are a rough guide to the diplomatic situation (not all flags are equal), and are influenced in part by the additional random events the Allies were drawing in 1938 as a result of the Nazi-Soviet Pact in Spring 1938. But one of the main factors was the Russian inability to compete diplomatically in 1936, and Russia's rebound in 1937 and 1938 (when the anti-Comintern counter could no longer be used).

The main point to be taken from this is that to a large extent diplomacy takes care of itself – a strong diplomatic position is the natural consequence of a sound economy, and it's a mistake (especially for Russia) to focus on early diplomacy at the expense of mobilizing. Trade pacts matter, but it is the diplomatic

situation at the end of the game that really matters, especially in GATHERING STORM games that continue into A WORLD AT WAR.