**Mediterranean Fury #1 – The Road to Byzantium**

**Playtest Report by AndrewJ Feb 2019**

After a few minutes of play here and there I finally have enough done to report the first day's activities...

SITUATION

It's the afternoon of Feb 13 1994, and Soviet high command has given orders to seize the Bosporus in the next 48 hours. I have several groups of amphibious transports underway near the Crimea, numerous missile and torpedo boats screening the formation, and a small but reasonably potent surface group (based around a Slava) which is meaner than anything that NATO has in the area. I also have several submarines (some quite old, and none nuclear) in the area, patrolling and screening, and readying to lay mines on either side of the Bosporus. My air fleet is quite large, with numerous middle-aged fighters and attack planes, a lesser quantity of modern aircraft, a formidable heavy bomber force (mostly set up for level bombing), and a large transport group ready to make a paradrops. I also have a large number of shore-based SSMs in the Crimea, which can reach all the way across the Black Sea, and a useful SAM belt in Bulgaria which includes SA-5s that reach well into Greece.

I’m faced by a large number of NATO fighter aircraft, mostly Greek and Turk, but with the possibility of American activity from bases in the south of Turkey. Many of their aircraft (F-16s, F-5s) only have short range missiles, and I hope that this will give my Flagons and Mig-23s a chance to engage at a distance, before the superior NATO agility can come into play. I’m not expecting major strikes (at least initially) by NATO aircraft, though that may come later. The Turkish surface navy’s larger units are not a real concern, since I have significant sensor and missile overmatch, and I expect to be able to take care of them with little difficulty. Their smaller missile boats may be a problem, if they get loose in a pack at the wrong moment, but if I’m given time to engage them I expect they won’t survive very long either. Their subs could be a real problem if they happen to be in the wrong place at the wrong time, but so far reports are that many of them are still in base, and the slow transit speed of conventional subs means they may not be able to get in the way in time.

Reports are that political operatives are fomenting a coup in Turkey, which may cause confusion and delay to work in our favour. While I am somewhat sceptical of the coup’s chances (I took choice 1, 100 pts for minor interference), I have asked the political operatives to do what they can to interfere with the Turkish sub force.

**PLAN**

The main amphibious forces will tighten up into closer formation and proceed at a slow 12 kt cruise towards the Bosporus, screened by sub chasers and escorts using active sonar, and covered by MPA which will lay a sonobuoy corridor in their path. (I really wish I had some Udaloys, since my sonar is quite weak, but this will have to do.) The SAG will slow to wait for the amphibs to catch up, so it can provide SAM cover, and the missile boats will screen without getting too far ahead. I want to keep them out of range of Turkish missiles for the moment, until I can knock down radars and give my boats freedom to operate without being observed. Hovercraft units wait off the Romanian coast, and the small frigates and patrol boats in the area move to screen them. Their oiler proceeds south towards Bulgaria with an escort, to be ready closer to the beaches when the hovercraft return.

Submarine minelaying will proceed at both ends of the Bosporus, and air-dropped mines will be emplaced at the N end of the strait, and in front of the Turkish sub base on the Black Sea.

Air operations will be initiated by recce flybys before active hostilities commence. Heavy bombers are tasked to make missile attacks on the two F-16 bases south of Constantinople, and ARM attacks on air search radars in northern Turkey and Greece. They will also make heavy conventional attacks on the third F-16 base at Murted, coastal fortifications and troop concentrations near the Bosporus, and the submarine base at Bartin. Attack planes from the USSR will support these efforts, concentrating mostly on the Bosporus area, as well as the airbase attack at Murted, and heavy fighter sweeps will cover activities throughout the area of operation. (Bulgarian attack planes are not ready today and will only be able to add their firepower to the attacks on Feb 14.)

Attack operations will cease after darkness, as aircraft return to base and ready for strikes at dawn on Feb 14. (Although the sim will let me make attacks during the night, in reality my strike aircraft have no useful night vision, and would be ineffective after dark. Therefore I will only be making attacks during daylight hours.) Fighter patrols will continue as needed throughout the night, although I hope to limit the activity to give the crews some rest where possible.

Landings could proceed on Feb 14, although it may be advisable to delay them until Feb 15, depending on the amount of opposition in the area. My main risk here is that the longer I wait, the more forces the Turks can organise and bring to the region, and the more chances they have to recover from the coup. Of course, if I go in immediately, I may not be able to provide effective support in the face of opposition which is not adequately reduced. This decision will have to be made in light of recce reports after the morning strikes on Feb 14.

**FEB 13 – First afternoon**

Operations begin with mine-carrying Backfires making afterburner dashes to try and reach their target areas before overt hostilities commence, and they make it to the north end of the Bosporus and begin their work without interference, although the Turks must be well aware that something’s going on. The pair of planes assigned to mine the sub base at Bartin have difficulty hitting the tiny target zone. (The sea-floor slopes down so sharply here that the mines, which only work down to 45m depth, have a miniscule area in which they will function.) When it’s clear that they’re not laying an effective pattern, the bombers turn and beat it for home, before the Turks can respond, leaving the base open for operation. Meanwhile, the two Kilos which have been assigned to mine either end of the strait rush at full speed to the shallows, and commence mine-laying there too. This takes longer to accomplish, but their mines work in deeper water, so they can work further out than the Backfires did. Unfortunately, they can’t get into the shallows near the shore (without surfacing), so there are gaps there which patrol boats could easily slip through.

A recce Mig-21 from Bulgaria makes it to the Bosporus coast minutes before hostilities, and flies along offshore getting a useful look at the troops which are already deployed in the area, and it’s clear that there are already a lot of them. Some of them are SAM units too, which will have to be taken care of before ground-attack planes can descend to useful levels. Airborne radar from ship and shore-based helicopters and flying boats also reveals a few merchant ships and Turkish surface combatants already at sea, but these are in range of shore-based Shaddocks, so….

**At 13:00 Zulu hostilities commence!**

Keys are turned in Shaddock launch bunkers, and missiles are away. The patrol boats east of the Bosporus die with little fanfare. The destroyer to the west neatly destroys the flight of 4 that were sent his way. The bunker commander frowns, reads his copy of Janes, and notes that the destroyer only has an 8-cell SAM launcher, which he is presumably using two per incoming missile. Very well, this time it will be a salvo of 6! Four to use up the SAMs, and two for the destroyer. As predicted the SAMs knock down 4 missiles, but the next two get shot down as well. The bunker commander grinds his teeth, reads further into Janes, and notes the extensive fit of multiple CIWS. This time it’s a salvo of 8, and this time the brave destroyer is finally overwhelmed. Eighteen missiles for a destroyer. The Committee for Internal Budgetary Expenditure Review will not be pleased…

Air launched missile attacks (made from the safety of Romanian airspace) on the two F-16 bases south of Constantinople go well, and the Turks have nothing ready to oppose the incoming shots. All the runways and taxiways are cratered, and the bases should be out of operation for a couple of days. ARM attacks also go well, and many of the forward search radars go down, which may give some cover for our operations. Unfortunately, airborne ELINT assets are reporting the distinct signal of AWACS units deep in the enemy’s rear, so they still have effective radar cover over their own territory.

Air-to-air fighting begins ahead of my incoming attackers. I had hoped the Flagons would be useful against F-16s and F-5s due to the range advantage of their missiles, but the difference is minor, the chance of hitting the agile F-16s is minimal, and by the time the missile gets there the F-16s are usually in range anyways. They kill a few, but the exchange is poor, so I pull them back to screen. The Mig-23s do better, but I have to be careful not to press into short range missile range after the AA-7s are gone (especially if using AA-8s), and of course the Mig-25s and Mig-29s have plenty of range advantage for their initial shots. As expected, then, the few NATO planes that are up to begin with are dealt with reasonably quickly.

This leaves the window open for four aging Blinders, each toting a single massive bomb, to make a low-level attack on the sub-pens at the Bartin Naval Base. During planning I didn’t expect decisive results against the tough target, but after the failure of the minelaying attempt this has taken on new importance. As the bombs burst the crews are astonished to see the entire cliff-face collapse over the tunnel entrance to the pen, trapping (and maybe crushing) all the subs inside. (Miss distance: 4m!) The Turkish AAA gunners open up with a furious barrage, but the tough old Blinders are made of cast iron and horse-shoes, and although chunks get knocked off they keep flying, and all of them make it home again. This stroke of luck is a huge relief, as the subs are what concerned me the most of all of Turkey’s forces.

The next attack to go in is actually composed of Mig-23s from Krasnodar, attacking the F-5 base at Merzifon. The first flights go in at very low level, but get savaged by Rapiers, so the following flights pull up steeply and dump their bombs all over the airfield from above Rapier altitude. The results are not impressive, although the escorts do make a good score against the F-5s that come up to fight. The main benefit is that command issues a new directive – no further low-level attacks against defended airfields! The SAMs and flack are just too intense.

This information comes in time to modify the attack on the F-16 base at Murted. Attack planes with AS-14s manage to destroy the Rapiers from altitude, and the first heavy bomber run manages to lay a good stick of bombs across one of the runways. Then my raid director (in one of the Blinders, which have recce cameras) makes a mistake, and decides to postpone the rest of the strike to allow attack planes to try and deal with some of the AAA. This would help the bombers, allowing them to get lower, but while I’m spending time screwing around it also gives time to the Turks, who start surging F-16s from their shelters. That results in a dangerous situation as my attack planes and bombers scatter to get clear, and my escorts struggle to contain the defenders. The escorts eventually regain control of the air, and the bombers return to close the other runway and taxiway, but it’s a good lesson in not wasting time.

Over at the Bosporus, the first portion of the attack is lead by two flights of Fitters, coming in low to eliminate the two Nike sites using AS-14s. (They pick off a couple of missile boats coming out of Golcuk naval base too.) With those obstacles gone, the main attack focuses on the fortifications and troops at the north end of the strait. Su-24s use their big PGMs on the fortifications, attack planes try and deal with the SAMs and the better AAA using AS-14s from altitude, and the heavy bombers drop sticks of bombs across the major troop concentrations and fortifications. It’s not a well organised attack, and at the end of it some of the main forts still survive in damaged condition, the ground forces are battered, but not entirely eliminated, and the small coastal outposts are almost entirely intact. I think we have killed most of the medium SAMs and 35mm AAA (and sank the destroyer lurking near the south end of the strait), but any defences at the south end are entirely untouched. Recce flights have also detected some armour concentrations in the valley to the east of Golcuk, and those will have to be dealt with too. Clearly a lot of work remains to be done, which makes me think that landing tomorrow morning may not be wise.

As all this activity is ongoing, and the Turkish air-force has been mostly dispersed, the Mig-25s take the opportunity to make a special attack. Two flights of lightly laden Foxbats, carrying only two big missiles, some Aphids, and external tanks, make a deep penetration flight, heading due south towards the American presence which is presumably around Incirlik. Crossing the coast, they light their burners and dash south at top speed, blowing past some F-4s and heading straight for the AWACS. They manage to destroy it and a tanker before the defences can react, and they turn back north. They don’t have the fuel to dash home, and the F-4s are closing in, but they manage to just scrape by, using their reserves for outrunning Sparrows, before landing at the closest available airport (Belbek) on fumes.

In the meantime, one of the Turkish subs surfaces near our fleet and announces that it is neutral and retreating from battle! I guess the political guys really do have their act together after all… I have to hastily mark it neutral, after I notice my Be-12s all converging on it with hostile intent. I consider sinking it, but for the moment I will monitor it and let it go. Since I was very close to ruining a convoy right in front of it, it’s a good thing they surrendered.

My own subs are getting some activity too. My Kilo on intelligence duties down in the Aegean Sea gets vectored onto a pair of destroyers, and it manages to sink them both, before resuming its intelligence gathering. For some reason they were not using their active sonar. The Kilo which laid the southern minefield also spots some ships (missile boats out of Golcuk) and manages to kill one and startle another, but that now leaves him with no anti-ship torpedoes. (Most of his magazines had been filled with mines.) Hopefully he’ll not need them.

**FEB13 – First night**

As evening falls the last of my attack planes and bombers are landing at their bases and preparing loadouts for the next day’s work. With no effective night attack capability, the entire force will stand down for the night, and be ready for a dawn attack tomorrow. Naturally, this makes it the perfect time for HQ to announce that they want us to destroy a Turkish government radio station which has started trying to assert control over the coup situation. Within the hour, no less!

I literally have no ready attack planes, and even if I did they wouldn’t be able to see in the dark to make their attacks. There’s no such thing as a Russian TLAM in my fleet, and nothing’s remotely in range for NGFS. I could try and use a fighter to strafe (if I could see in the dark), but that wouldn’t be enough to destroy the transmitter building. The only thing I have is some of my missile boats, which are equipped with Styx missiles with a ground attack capability. These are promptly given orders to rush for the coast at flank speed, but it takes them far more than an hour to get within range. Before they can arrive the GRU takes care of the station, and I am informed that my lack of support has been noted. The life of a Soviet commander is a never-ending joy!

One of my patrol boats does, however, get sent to bombard and destroy a coastal radar at Zonguldak, which it accomplishes easily, before turning west to engage the next coastal radar at Kefken. Attacking that radar with guns would bring him into range of Harpoons on the Turkish fleet, so he fires a pair of Styx missiles at it before turning for home. They fail to hit anything, which is probably indicative of how well an attack on the radio station would have gone.

The situation along the Greek border has been fairly calm so far, with occasional fighter skirmishes during the afternoon, but now the fighting intensifies dramatically, as more Bulgarian fighters come on-line, and I begin making fighter sweeps. My MiG-23s learn that their all aspect AA-8s (normally a short-ranged weakness against something like an F-16) are a tremendous advantage against F-5s carrying rear-aspect missiles, and they begin aggressively hunting them down, as well as using their AA-7s to fence with F-16s and F-4s. After a little of this, my Aegean Kilo (on ESM duty) begins reporting large numbers of Mirages launching out of southern Greece. Emissions indicate these are mostly Mirage F1s, the attack version of the Mirage. There are at least a dozen of them, but where are they going? To attack my ships?

This prompts me to start launching a significant number of fighters in response, and soon there’s a massive engagement with all sorts of planes over northern Greece and the Sea of Marmora. It turns out the Mirages are loaded with Sidewinders, and aren’t attacking anything in particular, but the fight is on. My MiG-23s try to take AA-7 shots from outside Sidewinder range, while running away from the better missiles on F-4s and Mirage 2000s, and MiG-29s arrive from the coast to try and play their part too. The Mig-21s get into the action, using afterburner dashes to try and pick off planes which are returning home low on fuel, or distracting long-range shooters to lead them astray. (Attempts to take them into combat against alert opponents with all-aspect missiles are futile.) I have to pick my fights, and avoid the temptation to close in, but the engagements generally go in my favour.

Throughout this the enemy’s SAMs are a constant obstacle, particularly the HAWKs on the Greek mainland, and the Nike in Turkey. They don’t actually shoot me down, but I keep getting forced to burner out of the edges of their envelope, and my freedom of maneuver is constantly being restricted. My own SAMs participate too, and my long-range SA-5s actually manage to claim a number of kills. During the day the enemy could see the missiles coming far off and dive to safety below the radar horizon, but now it seems like they don’t see them coming in the dark until it’s much too late, and the SAM crews claim a number of better enemy aircraft this way.

The MiG-25s launch another anti-AWACs raid, and this one is much more carefully supported given how close they came to being caught last time. An Su-15 lure, two flights of MiG-25 fully loaded to kick in the door, two flights of lightly loaded planes to dash in for the kill, two more lightly loaded flights to cover their retreat, and a final flight fully loaded to act as a backstop. Sheesh…. But it worked, killing two F-4s on the way in, getting two AWACS (a second one was coming to relieve the first), missing the tanker but killing a refuelling F-16, and killing two more pursuing F-4s on the way out. There was a brief moment when active radar homing heads were detected in pursuit, but an afterburner dash let my planes outdistance them. Clearly there are angry Americans down south!

Things have calmed down in the air now, as most of my Bulgarian fighters are reloading, and I want my pilots fresh for morning activities. At sea, the Kilo at the south end of the Bosporus detected a creeping SS and used one if its two remaining torpedoes to sink an ancient Tench class sub, which first saw action sinking Japanese freighters in WWII. Surveillance radar flights have also noticed the loss of several merchant ships to the Bosporus minefields, as well as a flotilla of Turkish missile boats passing safely through the hole in the minefield and heading north through the strait. They’re halfway through the straits now, and hopefully they’ll hit some mines at the north end. Meanwhile a destroyer, on a slightly different course hit a mine and sank, marking the first military loss to the lurking explosives.

I have had several warnings about rebel aircraft flying defensive patrols over the Ankara area and along the coast against the Greeks, but so far, I haven’t spotted any activity in that area. I’ll keep an eye out for further developments.

**THOUGHTS FOR NEXT DAY**

If nothing else happens tonight, my intention is to rest my planes as best I can, and then have a major raid hit the Bosporus area as soon as they can see to target things. Everything coming from the USSR airfields will be going here, as well as most of the planes in western Romania and Bulgaria. My first priority will be to finish destroying the coastal forts, and then the coastal outposts. Second priority will be dealing with local air defences, third will be tackling concentrations of armour east of Constantinople, and fourth will be continuing the destruction of local troop units. Some of the more distant Bulgarian planes will also tackle the Nike site and the radar station in the Dardanelles. I may just be able to recycle some aircraft for a dusk strike, but a 10 hour recycle time and short winter days makes that difficult.

At sea, amphibious forces will continue to advance, limited by the presence of the Turkish missile boats. Those must be sunk first. I anticipate being able to kill them with Shaddocks once they clear the Bosporus, hopefully while still dark. If that is accomplished, then I can have some forces dash in for NGFS at dawn. If all goes well, then the go will be given for an ASW sweep off the beaches, and the landing by mid-day. If not, then we can pause for a day, and commit the following morning.

I’m not sure what to expect in terms of NATO offensive action. I’m certain there will be some sort of strike once they spot my ships, but I think I can limit its effectiveness. Incoming heavy army units (especially if not spotted on the march) could be a real problem after the landing, especially as much of my attack airpower will be spent by then.

I continue to wonder what the Americans are up to. (Presumably sinking our Mediterranean comrades.) They have the potential to make a real mess of the situation. Some TLAMs into a bomber base could be nasty surprise tonight, for instance. Or some F-15s could make a right mess of my attack planes. They’re a real wild-card.

A little more progress to report.

**FEB 14 – pre-dawn operations**

Both sides take the opportunity to rest their air-forces overnight, while the landing force continues to advance towards the Bosporus. Radar operators begin to report signs of the rebel air activity, as some NATO contacts are observed running intercepts on each other. They don’t seem to be shooting, but they are taking up each others time and fuel, which is good for us.

The Turkish missile boat flotilla passes north through the Bosporus, and our air-laid minefields pay off handsomely, eventually sinking or crippling the entire fleet. The few drifting stragglers are dealt with by long-range missile shots. The Turks still have a destroyer and some minesweepers approaching the south end of the Bosporus, in the Sea of Marmora, but my task-force’s long-range Shaddock missiles prove excellent for destroying these lightly defended targets. The big old missiles fly over Constantinople at high altitude, and then descend to make their attack once they are over open water again. When the explosions are complete this leaves three more minesweepers coming out of the Erdek naval base further south, but they won’t make it to the Bosporus for some time, so they are not a current concern.

With the Turkish ship-launched missile threat eliminated, my own missile boat flotillas accelerate their approach to the coast, as do a variety of patrol boats and frigates from the Bulgarian and Romanian ports. Those which have 76mm guns will provide fire support for the upcoming landings, engaging coastal strong-points and troops near the shore. For the moment, they loiter just outside of the radar range of the forts.

Further south in the Aegean, my Kilo (which had been on ESM duty) lowers its mast and heads west towards the position of a destroyer it had noted before, eventually intercepting and sinking it. This makes three destroyer kills for that sub, none of which were using their active sonar. As my sub clears the area and resumes ESM patrols it detects yet another warship’s emissions further west, but for the moment I am not moving to engage. The ESM warning will be more valuable during the morning’s air operations.

The last hours of darkness are used by the one set of attack planes which do not need to see their targets – my ARM shooters. Some of my Fitters with AS-12s are escorted into the Bosporus area to engage the next layer of surveillance radars. My escorting Foxbats have to kill a pair of Mirage 2000s that try and engage, and there is a tense moment as rebel planes make a flyby to ID our strike package. Have we made a mistake, and let them get too close? After a tense approach, everyone holds their fire and our strike proceeds without incident. Unfortunately, the radars on the coastal fortifications are not radiating, but one other coastal radar, and a number of air search radars, are destroyed by the strike, and the Nike south of the Dardanelles is damaged. This should give us a few more kilometers of operating room before the Turks can see our incoming strikes.

**FEB 14 – initial morning strikes**

Major strike operations begin with long duration surveillance planes (mostly various ELINT Badgers) lifting off in the dark to head for their stations, and then the wave of recce, escort, and strike aircraft begin to converge on the Bosporus as light grows in the sky.

The first to arrive are the Su-24s, which use their heavy PGMs to finish the destruction of the major coastal fortifications. The remaining coast defence outposts are destroyed by Fitters with AS-14s, and other lesser PGMs are used to engage air defences. I may actually be striking too early, while it is still dawn, since my planes have some difficulty spotting targets despite having half a dozen recce planes acting as dedicated FACs. Nonetheless, they do the best they can. Bomb-laden MiG-23s and MiG-27s do a lot of the initial work engaging troop concentrations, joined by Su-25s as the daylight grows. Attacks in the Bosporus area manage to disrupt large numbers of infantry deployed west of Istanbul, but there are still plenty left north of Istanbul along the west bank, and it seems that the more troops I hit the more I find. Most worrying is the spotting of an armoured formation across the Bosporus, SE from Istanbul. Those will definitely need to be hit before they can go far. I don’t have swarms of American-style anti-tank PGMs and attack helicopters, so preventing the armour from getting into my vulnerable newly-landed troops may be difficult.

The large armoured concentration I had previously spotted east of Golcuk gets its own special set of strikes, but the results are less effective than I had hoped. I manage to suppress much of the air defences using AS-10s, but Floggers with iron bombs have little effect on the sturdy tanks. I scuff the paint and knock off a track or two, but I’d estimate the tanks have suffered less than 5% attrition. The mechanized infantry is more vulnerable, and the results are better there, completely destroying several elements and damaging more, probably accounting for ~ 20% of the formation. A third formation and the artillery park remain essentially untouched. When this formation gets moving I could be in real trouble, unless my ATGMs can make up for the difference. I have a few more strikes yet to come during the day (although I had hoped to use them closer to the Bosporus), and the heavy bombers will arrive in the afternoon, so I may yet have a chance to knock them back more. I really wish I had plentiful effective cluster bombs, but 1990s Russians love their iron bombs, and the smaller ones just aren’t good enough against armour.

Some of the MiG-23s, launching from Krasnodar in the east, continue west and land in Romania, where they will be closer to the action for subsequent strikes. A number of my Ukranian MiG-23s (initially tasked for anti-shipping work) are also used for a PGM strike on Merzifon, the site of the earlier massacre of my low-level attackers. They’re carrying AS-7s, which may be old, but they have a higher operational ceiling than the Rapier. Accompanied by a recce plane FAC and a flight of Mig-29s, they make their own massacre, destroying the SAMs and some of the accompanying AAA. No enemy planes are spotted at the airbase, but if I need to shut the runways I now have a clear route to get in at low altitude.

The Turkish airforce is essentially a no-show during this time. Aside from a pair of F-4s which come to investigate the attack on Merzifon, there is no sign of them. The Greeks, however, are a constant thorn in my side, with numerous patrols coming up to meet me. I can’t afford to let them get within dash range of my vulnerable strikers over the Bosporus, so I find myself fighting deeper and deeper into the Aegean, to keep them at a safe distance. They’ve got good long-range missiles too – F-4s with Sparrow, and Mirage 2000s with R530s – so I can’t rely on AA-7s to keep them at arm’s length. Screening MiG-29s and MiG-25s get drawn into the fight, and many of the latter don’t have the fuel to get back to their distant Ukrainian home. Consequently, many of them divert into Ravnets in Bulgaria, planning to refuel for a few hours before dashing back to home base later in the morning. The Greeks even try launching what I presume was an anti-shipping strike after my missile boats are spotted near the coast, but that doesn’t get far, and the A-7s and F-5s are cut down with few survivors.

My patrol boats, in the meantime are closing in to conduct coastal bombardments (staying away from my minefields, of course). The results are mixed, with my two eastern groups doing a reasonably useful job on nearer troop and AAA units (although some targets just seem invulnerable). The western group of five Tarantuls (very good boats those) gets a shock when one of them suddenly vanishes in a thunderous explosion. Torpedo! Now Tarantuls are nearly as fast as the torpedoes, so they have a good chance of out-distancing them, but only if they run in the right direction. Unfortunately, the Tarantuls are blind, and they don’t have a clue which way the shot came from. The flotilla leader makes his decision, sets a course, and orders flank speed. Foam flies, and mighty engines roar! Alas, it’s all futile. The Turkish SS skipper watches in delight as the boats run right into his torpedo spread, and one after another, the remaining four disintegrate from shattering torpedo impacts. The western beaches will get no NGFS until the landing force itself arrives. (In retrospect, I should have scattered the pack and sent the individuals in all directions. That might have saved one or two. Still, better to lose missile boats than troop ships, I guess.)

Fortunately, the Turks aren’t having it all their way. I had been keeping the ASW planes near the landing fleet, for fear of SAMs near the beaches, but now they’re ordered to the front. One does indeed get shot at by a Redeye gunner, but the shot misses, and the others find that murderous sub and sink it. I’m sending many of my reserve Be-12s hunting now, because if there’s another sub there then I could loose most of a landing group. My eastern missile boats sink an oiler that tries to sortie from Golcuk, and some Bulgarian Mig-21s swoop in and sink the three minelayers that were headed up the Sea of Marmara. Their colleagues also bomb a smaller surveillance radar and finish off the damaged Nike site, taking a couple more radars out of the equation.

No further action from the coup to report. Perhaps it’s shot its bolt?

**THOUGHTS FOR MID-DAY**

Unless I want to wave them off, my landing ships will arrive shortly after mid-day. In the east they’ll have reasonably easy going at first, but they have two armoured formations on their side of the Bosporus, which will be tough to face. In the west, there will be more enemy troops at first, but they’re mostly infantry, so the threat should be lower. So far, I haven’t seen any armour on that side. (Although I haven’t looked very far either. I should definitely schedule a recce run towards the Greek border.) The eastern armour is what worries me the most. I have some additional strike planes (mostly Bulgarian) which will ready through the day, but the rest are mostly flying home now, and the majority of those won’t be ready again before it’s too dark to see. I don’t expect to be able to eliminate the enemy with the remaining attack planes. The heavy bombers would be useful against static troop concentrations, but I’m not certain how realistic it would be to use them against movers. Should I hold off the landing until late afternoon, to let the bombers go to work? Or land as soon as I can, make a defensive perimeter, and prepare to receive the blow which I’d expect in the late afternoon or early evening? Or bombard all day and land tomorrow morning? As tempting as it is to wait and bombard, I think in reality while grabbing the Bosporus rapidly might work (maybe, barely), giving the Turks an extra day to recover, mobilize, and organize would be disastrous. City fighting in suburban Istanbul against Turks defending their homeland. What could go wrong?

I’ll need to make a decision soon, and it needs to be better than my missile boat course!

---

"Sir, I'm getting an SRS-4 contact! Fighter radars, very high power, crossing the southern tip of Greece. I make it eight of them sir."

"Are those Tomcats, sir? Sir?"

---

Had a bit more game time on the weekend, so here’s the next installment.

**FEB 14 – morning operations**

As morning progresses, the planning staff pump more coffee into the bleary-eyed commander, and try to convince him to pay attention to the detailed schedules of what assets are available to support the landing operations. (Translation: I finally got organised and started making a mapped list.)



It turns out that there is more out there than I had realized, particularly among the lesser Romanian and Bulgarian assets, and I should be able to generate several waves of attacks at 8:30, 10:30, and 12:30, to support a landing at 13:00 hrs. Courses and speeds of the amphibious forces are adjusted to match this timing, and takeoff times are set for the waiting paratroopers. All is in readiness, and the final go is given!

The first wave of attacks at 08:30 concentrates on units near the south end of the Bosporus. Su-25s, carrying very heavy bomb loads, just manage to struggle to the western bank and finish the destruction of the infantry formations there. Other attackers pass over the Bosporus to hit the remaining mechanized formations on the east shore, and their cluster bombs prove to be very effective. Incoming BDA reports suggest the formation is no longer combat effective, and only a few damaged stragglers and the remains of the AAA are left in the area.

The next wave at 10:30 was to be two parts – short ranged planes continuing to make strikes in the Bosporus area, and longer ranged planes flying further east to attack the major mechanized formations beyond Golcuk. However, with the success of the earlier strike, there aren’t any major targets left near the Bosporus, and the short-ranged planes don’t have the legs to hit the more distant targets. They could be used to hit remaining flack, but that seems to be a risky move with little payoff, so I elect to hold them on the ground in reserve. If I’ve missed another Turkish formation, then they will be ready as a quick reaction reserve. The second part of the 10:30 attack proceeds as planned, and the MiG-23s use AS-7s to eliminate more of the air defences around the distant artillery, and then the bomb-carrying planes swoop in low to completely destroy the guns, as well as inflicting some more damage on the mechanized infantry formations.

The aircraft haven’t been having all the fun, and my missile boats continue their coastal bombardment work as they engage the broken remains of defensive infantry formations. The eastern landing beaches are cleared of known enemy troops by a storm of rapid-fire 76mm shells, but the western beaches (where that sub destroyed my entire patrol boat flotilla) is bare of support. Into this gap steams the ancient and unfortunately named Smeli, an ultra-utilitarian Riga class frigate built back in the 1950s, in the time before Sputnik flew. Its three 100mm guns start thumping away, slowly and steadily hammering the remaining troops under the guidance of a FAC overhead. She is eventually joined by more light craft from further up the coast, and between them the landing beaches are cleared.

Meanwhile, my heavy shipping is getting closer to the shore, and the Admiral Gorshkov's long-ranged SS-N-12 missiles can now reach deep into the Aegean. The enemy destroyer there is threatening the operations of my submarine on ELINT duty, so a salvo is sent its way. The destroyer easily spots the high-altitude missiles, and it shoots some down, but the Gorshkov's captain has learned the lesson of his shore-based counterpart, and there are too many incoming missiles for the destroyer to stop. It only takes one hit, and the destroyer is torn in two. Other ships use shorter range missiles to strike the minelayers which are advancing towards the Bosporus, and these defenceless targets soon die to a missile each.

All this activity just off their shores seems to have provoked a reaction from the Turks, and mid-morning they launch a large strike from airfields at Merzifon and Konya. The strike seems to be primarily F-5s (over two dozen of them!), and it’s not clear exactly what it’s targeting, since it seems to be on a course for the Crimea. This delights the MiG-29 pilots in Gvardeyskoye. Many of them have been sitting out the battle, since they are only armed with short-ranged AA-11 missiles, but a brace of defenceless F-5s with rear-aspect missiles is the perfect target. They fall on the cloud of advancing strikers, shoving aside MiG-23s in their haste, and between them both they manage to destroy almost all of the enemy.

Throughout the morning, Spetznaz teams on deep recce missions have occasionally reported sighting large aircraft in the area where the E-3s had been patrolling. I haven’t had any indication of AWACS radar emissions, so presumably they’re seeing tankers. These could still be enabling prolonged fighter patrols or strikes, so another deep Foxbat raid is sent in (not quite as large this time), killing a tanker and a couple of fighters before withdrawing in good order. Hopefully this will further disrupt NATO operations. (We do pick up American F-16 radar emissions down south again, but so far, we’ve not seen any of their major combat assets.)

My final wave of Warpac attackers at 12:30 is actually preceded by major activity in the Ukraine. The first of the bombers are ready again, and the Backfires surge into the air and hasten towards the eastern armoured formations, hoping to get to troops before they leave their assembly areas. Roaring in at 1,000 meters up, they lay strings of massive 3,000 lb bombs across the static tank formations. Previous attackers with small bombs didn’t do much, but these heavy weapons can flip over entire tanks and tear off turrets. The smoking ruin they leave behind makes the commander smile – the elimination of those tanks takes tremendous pressure off the landing forces. Not content with that, other bombers make more attacks, and the mechanized infantry formations take heavy blows. The 12:30 strike from Bulgaria is in the air and on the way with numerous cluster bombs to continue the attack, and the situation looks good for us.

Not so good for the coup plotters, perhaps. I’ve seen no sign of new coup activity since before dawn, and I suspect they’re being rounded up and shot by now. Still, the confusion they caused was probably helpful in giving us an extra half a day of time.

**FEB 14 – LANDINGS ~ 12:45 hours**

While the air strikes have been ongoing, massive streams of Soviet transport aircraft have been converging on the Bosporus, dropping to low altitude as they approach the coast, and flying to their designated drop zones.

The short-ranged An-26s barely have the range to make it to the coast, dropping their paratroopers to seize the ekranoplan landing site on the NE of the Bosporus, before turning to land at nearby bases along the Bulgarian and Romanian coasts. They’ll be pushed off the taxiways onto the grass, for the moment, before eventually being refuelled and sent home. The paratroopers find the landing site is unoccupied, so they consolidate their perimeter and send the go-code back home. Soon the ekranoplans are winging their way south with supplies for the troops.

The An-12s and An-22s out of Odessa head for open ground west of Istanbul, where their paratroopers land without opposition. I don’t expect a large amount of enemy formations on the west side, and they will be expected to control access to Istanbul on their own for the moment.

All the IL-76s bring their troops in on the SW side of the Bosporus, in the limited ground around the Samandra civil airport. They have to pack into a very limited area, and the commander looks the other way when staff try and report on how many men were crushed by falling BMDs, but eventually the troops manage to make it down. There is one nervous moment when the low-flying stream of transports finds an active 35mm AAA position in their path. This contact had been briefly spotted and then lost again earlier in the day, and the intelligence clearly didn’t get passed on to the transport crews. Most divert around it, but one plane loses an engine and has another damaged while its troops frantically bail out. The plane staggers away smoking, and the troops watch the remainder of their comrades fly past. Then, to get their revenge, they set up their 120mm mortar and pound the offending 35mm gun into rubble.

On the coast, landing ships and hovercraft make it to the beach and unload without any opposition, and begin to consolidate their formation. Approximately one third land west of the Bosporus, and the bulk of the formation land on the east side, where I expect more risk of enemy activity. The landing craft immediately turn back to head towards Sevastopol (or the tanker coming down the Bulgarian coast, in the case of the hovercraft), but many of the escorting ships will stay just offshore to provide SAM cover for the landing beaches.

**FEB 14 – NATO reactions early afternoon**

NATO ground troops don’t hesitate, and the moment my forces hit the ground they begin to react. My SE air landing is quite close to the remains of the mechanized formation in the area, and the stragglers advance and open fire before my drop is complete. Their IFV autocannons are like laser-beam death-rays, compared with my 73mm guns, and my AT-5s are demonstrating appallingly bad accuracy for an ATGM. Fortunately, there’s a lot more of me than them, and direct fire, combined with some hastily set up mortars, manages to destroy them. Curiously, their remaining air defences (mostly towed 12.7s) pass me by and withdraw to the east. I’m not sure where they’re going. Perhaps they are trying to regroup on a defensive line further east. They’re as fast as I am, so I only manage to catch a few before they’re out of reach.

The remaining NATO troops on the west bank (a scattering of damaged air defences and lesser troops) don’t seem to be making aggressive moves or withdrawing at the moment. My recce planes are occupied elsewhere, so I’m not actually certain about this.

The surviving elements of the major mechanized force out east (two battered mech inf formations in M113s) also start moving, and they’re coming west, towards my troops. Fortunately, I have the 12:30 strike of attack planes with cluster-bombs inbound, which should tear them up further. Unfortunately, they’re not the only moving element out there. Spetznaz elements posted just east of Golcuk, begin making excited reports about a tank formation near Izmit, at least a couple of companies, maybe a battalion, headed my way. Recce overflights had spotted some of their formation yesterday, during the raid on the Nike sites, but once again the information was filed and forgotten. Now their reappearance in strength is an unwelcome development. The 12:30 strike will have to hit them instead, and then hopefully attack planes from Crimea can deal with the other formations. Orders are given, and then NATO changes my plans again.

Spetznaz teams begin reporting multiple bogies lifting off at Konya, down south and then at Eskisehir. They’re seeing multiple F-5s, F-4s, and RF-4s, and the count soon numbers in the dozens. A major strike’s coming my way, and to make matters worse there are also reports of over a dozen F-104s forming up in the skies over Athens. The Eskisehir situation is a real problem, since I’ve done nothing about that airfield so far. I knew it was a major base by size, and I’d spotted the heavy Rapier defences around it, so it was obviously a valued asset. It’s only about 100 miles away from the landing beaches and drop zones, so my reaction time is very limited if they launch from it. Yet, I’d done nothing about it, and all my strikes always seemed to have something better to do. I’d seen no activity there, so I had shrugged my shoulders and waved it away as possibly unoccupied or far down the readiness chain. It’s a beautiful example of confirmation bias. I don’t want any enemy in Eskisehir, I haven’t spotted any enemy hanging around outside in Eskisehir, therefore there are no enemy in Eskisehir! Wrong….

The enemy has sprung an entire “new” airbase on me, but fortunately I have a “new” airbase too. I’ve got a dozen MiG-29s at my closest base at Ravnets (plus three -B models), and I’ve kept them in reserve all this time as my emergency air defence reaction force. I think I will have to use it now, since most of my other bases are too far away to get there in time. Those other bases are launching anyway (the F-104s still have to be dealt with later), but the Ravnets squadron are the only new planes I can add to the fight before the strike arrives.

My expeditionary force isn’t completely without cover. I have Mig-25s and some MiG-29s loitering in the area already, and they close in to begin the engagement. The MiG-25s engage first, launching before the F-4s can, but they don’t have a lot of missiles, and their hit rate is low. They get some kills, but they’re soon reduced to being a distraction, trying to draw enemy fire and then burner out of range at high Mach. My MiG-29s have Alamos, which have range parity with the Sparrow, but their radar is sub-standard, and the F-4s inevitably launch first, so the Fulcrums spend more of their time running than shooting, and the enemy continues to advance. Each F-4 has a pair of Sparrows, and it’s proving to be a real problem to get past that. Fortunately, some turn back after shooting, before resuming their course, which gives me a bit more time. The Slava gives me some help at the critical moment, lighting up its radar and firing a barrage of 6 high-powered SAMs into the enemy formation, killing a few and forcing others down low. That’s where the MiG-29s shine, and now they get their short-range missiles into play and begin to destroy the Eskisehir strike. The fight whirls down around the Golcuk naval base, and it turns out there’s some 35mm AAA there which takes an unpleasant bite out of one of my MiGs.

As the Eskisehir strike is driven back, I have a few minutes for my 12:30 cluster bomb strike (which had been driven away for fear of the enemy raid passing right over their target) to come back and pummel that new tank formation. Cluster bombs work wonders, and by the time my planes are gone there are only a few tanks left, which I hope my defences can handle when they get to my troops.

The Konya strike (F-5s and F-4s) comes immediately on the heels of my retreating attack planes, and once again my MiG-29s keep getting forced to run away by the steady stream of Sparrows from the F-4s. Nonetheless, they must run out of Sparrows eventually, and I should be able to handle that raid too, shortly before it reaches my troops.

**FEB 14 – Americans!**

That’s when the dreaded call comes in. “Tomcats over southern Greece!” The Americans are coming…

Up to this point I have been able to hold my own in the air against medium range missiles like Sparrow and R530, but I’ve got nothing that can compete with a Phoenix. Things may get very nasty in the air.

If the Americans are just here as an escort, to support the incoming F-104s, for example, then I may be able to fall back and let my ship-based SAMs and land based MANPADS and flack handle the old attack planes while taking only minimal damage. However, if they’re here as part of a complete strike package, with jammers and HARMs and heavy bomb-loads backed up with good search optics, then I may have a much worse time of it.

Therefore, the following orders are issued:

MiG-29s and supporting fighters will continue to fight the Konya raid, and then fall back towards the Black Sea near the Bosporus.

Troops in the beaches will rush to combine forces and activate what SAM defences they have.

Air defence warships will move at flank speed to provide SAM cover for troops on shore.

Other warships and amphibious vessels will retire at full speed towards the Crimea.

Paratroops will hurry as best they can to place a ring of MANPADS and flack around their formations, while sheltering valuable units (particularly artillery) in the center.

Non-essential aircraft (ELINT, FAC, etc.) and incoming heavy bombers will withdraw and loiter over the sea (or Romania).

Jamming aircraft will concentrate over the Black Sea behind the capital ships.

Once that is done, planning staff will begin preparation for a late afternoon attack on Eskisehir with intention to shut the runways.

We shall see what happens….

Another weekend, a bit more game time, so...

**FEB 14 – early afternoon**

The Konya strike of F-5s and F-4s is pressing towards my landing beaches from the Golcuk direction, there’s a pack of F-104s hurtling my way across the Aegean, and the ominous signals of F-14 radars are concentrating over southern Greece. It’s afternoon in Turkey. What’s a tourist to do?

As my amphibs turn to hurry back to Sevastopol, my warships rush to put SAM cover in place over the landing beaches, and troops on the ground scramble to arrange themselves in coherent defensive postures. My empty hovercraft are heading west along the coast towards Burgas, but they don’t have the fuel to get there, so they meet up with their tanker near the defences at the south end of the Bulgarian coast, and then proceed home at good speed.

The Konya strike continues to press me back, but when their Sparrows run out my planes are able to get in amongst them, and they destroy the raid before it can reach its targets. A pair of MiG-29s which were patrolling the coast further east manage to sweep in from behind and mess up the planes in the Eskisehir landing pattern too, which is also gratifying.

Down in the Aegean the F-104s are coming in in a pack, about a dozen of them, and they’re moving very fast under afterburner. I’ve got nothing that can match their speed (my MiG-25s are heading home empty by now), but one flight of old MiG-21s is directly in their path, and might be able to take some unopposed shots as they fly past me. I turn in front of them, relying on their overtake, and that’s when the F-104s open fire. They’re up on an air superiority mission! It never occurred to me that these high-speed antiques would be used that way. I’d assumed they were on a bombing dash. Whoops! One of the MiG-21s manage to twist out of the way while the other goes down in flames, and as the F-104s turn to fight I have time to bring in Bulgarian MiG-23s and more MiG-21s. As fast as they are (and they can change altitude like a rocket), the F-104s are at a disadvantage against radar guided missiles and forward-aspect homers, and the fight eventually goes my way.

In the meantime, I’ve been anxiously watching the signals of the Tomcats coming across the southern tip of Greece. Now I can detect four or five EA-6s with them, so this is going to be more than an escort sweep. I’ve pulled most of my Ukrainian planes back towards the beaches, while the Bulgarian ones are retiring up along the north coast of the Aegean, hoping to stay out of Phoenix range. I do want to test their responses, however, so two of the Bulgarian MiG-29s are sent towards the F-14s at medium altitude. My hope is that when the Phoenixes launch I will have time to dive to the deck and beam the missiles. The combination of sea-skimming in a very agile plane with chaff might drop the hit rate low enough that the Fulcrums can survive to close the range. If that works, I’ve got a large number of MiG-29s forming up near the beaches, and we’ll try that tactic en-masse. Casualties will be high, but it may be the only method I’ve got.

So the two white-faced pilots turn and close on the approaching F-14s. The enemy don’t fire. The Fulcrums get closer still. The Tomcats still don’t fire. What’s going on? Our jamming isn’t that good, and they must clearly see us. The MiGs have their radar on, so the EA-6s must have ID-ed us. Why don’t they shoot? It’s not ‘till we’re only 55 miles out that they open fire – with Sparrows! They’re not carrying Phoenixes! Now an F-14 with Phoenix is a fearsome beast, but an F-14 without Phoenix is just a funny looking F-4. And I can deal with F-4s…

New orders beam out from ground control. General Attack! My pilots turn and fly towards the foe. The first fight begins as the dozen F-14s turn north and engage my planes coming over the north coast of the Aegean, and my initial optimism starts to cool. They may just be “F-4s”, but their missiles still outrange me greatly, and with their powerful radars they can engage to the full limit of their range, and then turn and leave. My planes spend a lot of time running away on afterburner, and by the time the F-14s have stopped shooting at me and turned back, I don’t have enough fuel left to use burners to catch them. I’m not going to lay a glove on them. I do, however, have a flight of MiG-23s coming in from the NW, perfectly placed to cut off their retreat! That’s when a pack of F-5s pops up behind me out of Thessalonika, and I’m forced to turn to defend myself. By the time that’s over, the Floggers have used most of their missiles, and they only manage to lightly damage a couple of F-14s. They all get away.

But, while the escort F-14s have been diverted to the fighting up north, two more groups of F-14s have shown up, and these ones are pressing in towards my landing beaches. I get forced back repeatedly by their Sparrows, but I have far more planes there than they do. The enemy gets most of the way up the Sea of Marmara before their missiles run out, but they press on nonetheless, and my swarm descends around them. None of the Bombcats make it out of the cloud of MiGs, and there is great celebration at the control centers. The jubilation increases when my fighters continue to sweep south, destroying the valuable EA-6s, a flight of Greek Corsairs, and a pack of S-3s pretending they’re bombers. A sound defeat for the imperialist aggressors!

**FEB 14 – late afternoon**

Once the Americans have been driven off, my strike planes return. Attackers from Bulgaria swoop in with iron bombs and cluster bombs, and manage to destroy and disperse the last of the Turkish reaction forces which were advancing in my direction, as well as cleaning up some scattered AAA and damaged infantry units on the west bank of the Bosporus. In the east, recce planes have spotted some small troop concentrations behind the line of coastal defences, and those receive explosive gifts too, particularly the artillery units. MiG-23s with AS-7s prove to be particularly useful for picking off light AAA and MANPADS units so the remaining planes can attack safely from low level. There is a fairly large concentration of infantry at the headlands near Kefken, and those static troops are engaged by level-bombing Badgers, who sprinkle the area with bombs doing a moderate amount of damage.

Turkish airbase and naval infrastructure are the target of the next series of attacks. Eskisehir is the first to get hammered, as Ukrainian Fitters strike the air defences with powerful AS-14s, letting Backfires and Blinders safely pound the runway and taxiways with heavy bombs. Su-24s arrive a little later to finish the destruction of the runways with heavy PGMs. Level bombers also strike the soft targets (hangars, etc.) at Eskisehir and a couple of other airbases, but most of the enemy aircraft are safely tucked away in their hardened shelters, I imagine, so this has only moderate effect.

Other than the sub pens on the Black Sea, I haven’t struck any naval facilities yet, being reasonably confident I could handle the Turkish navy at sea. That was fine when they were at a distance, but now another destroyer gets underway at Golcuk, and promptly salvos its Harpoons at the retiring amphibious fleet. This prompts a hasty afterburner dash from orbiting fighters, which manage to catch the missiles a few kilometers before they reach their target. (A swift counter-barrage from my Sovremmenys sinks the destroyer with no difficulty.) I don’t need any more surprises, so Su-24s and MiG-27s strike piers and sub pens at Golcuk and Erdek, while Blinders return to complete the destruction at Bartin. I don’t expect any further Turkish naval activity this side of the Dardanelles (barring subs already in the water, of course).

**FEB 14 – evening and night**

As the sun sets NATO persists in trying to hit the beaches (or perhaps the ships patrolling nearby). Several flights of attack planes, usually four Phantoms at a time, try flying in from the Athens area, but their attempts are futile. The Bulgarians have got the rhythm for dealing with these isolated attacks now, sweeping in from the flank and engaging from behind with short-ranged missiles. MiG-29s are deadly at this game, and even the MiG-21s get some respectable kills, given the horrible hit rate of their ancient AA-2s. None of the enemy make it beyond the Sea of Marmara.

It’s a good thing they can handle these attacks using limited resources, because most of my fighter planes are initially down for refueling after the big enemy attack. More pressingly, I’ve also got a shortage of air-to-air missiles which is forcing many of my better planes into reserve. In the growing darkness, some of my fighter pilots are pressed into “missile ferry” duty, hauling 6-packs of surplus AA-11s from Gabrovnitsa and Gvardeyskoye to Ravnets, on the Bulgarian cost, where they can be mated up with the surplus of AA-10s which are there. Most of this cross-leveling is completed before midnight, and the bulk of my MiG-29 fleet is eventually reloaded and resting at their home bases.

Submarine activity also picks up in the evening, as two separate Turkish submarines raise masts to snorkel a few hours apart, one at each end of the Dardanelles. Fortunately, the surface search radars on the Be-12s doing ASW duty at the landing beaches have just enough range to pick them up, and the flying boats manage to sink both subs. (Although one has a very exciting adventure when a passing F-4 on one of the raids takes a Sparrow shot at it, missing by the narrowest of margins.)

During the evening we also receive some encouraging intelligence about the coup. It’s not dead after all! It seems to be making good headway, and causing all sorts of mobilization delays for the Turks. The commander makes sure to praise the efforts of his comrades in the political warfare directorate, just as the zampolit is walking by…

**Plans for FEB 15**

The identified enemy mobile formations are dispersed now, so I feel my ground troops are reasonably secure for the moment. If the coup reports are correct, and mobilization is severely delayed, I don’t expect any immediate threat against them on the ground. They will continue to hold their position.

The situation seems reasonably controlled at sea as well. Unless I stumble across an enemy sub (always a risk) I should be free to operate as I please.

Enemy air activity seems greatly reduced for the moment (although damaged planes may be returning to service now). NATO may try more of the 4-plane raids from Greece, but I should be able to handle those like before. I think the main risk will be an American night attack from an unexpected direction. F-111s? A-6s? I doubt we’ll see anything strategic at work, and the stealth fighters are probably busy in Europe. Cruise missiles are always a risk when the American navy’s involved, but it’s probably too late for them to have a significant effect on our landings. Hitting our airfields and radars now could be damaging, but last night would have been more critical, I think. Orders are being given for CAP flights close to our airbases, but given our lack of AWACS we probably won’t have enough warning to stop a determined missile raid. I don’t plan on any other air operations during the night. I would prefer the crews to rest.

For tomorrow, the main strike I want to conduct is against the concentration of Turkish Nike sites and radars on the Izmir area, south of the Dardenelles. The range is too far for my lesser strike aircraft in the Ukraine, but I should be able to get in under the SAMs with a MiG-23 strike from Bulgaria. This will significantly reduce Turkish radar cover, and eliminate the last air-navigation obstacle in that region. (I suppose I should really be working on the Greek HAWKs too, but those are a much tougher target.) Other than some additional attacks against ground forces (the infantry at Kefken, etc.), I think I have mostly exhausted my target set.

Aaaand, done!

**FEB 15**

Patrols continued uneventfully throughout the night, and no new enemy contacts were spotted. Ground commanders reported that their areas of operation were secure. Shortly after dawn the commander is issued new orders, and proceeds to the next theatre of operations, leaving landing area security in the hands of capable local commanders. (At this point, with no sign of further activity I paused the scenario. Looking on the enemy side, it was clear there would be no further activity based on my current position and plans, so I brought the scenario to an end.)

**OBSERVATIONS**

(This is mostly based on the V1.3, which I played.)

**Overall Play Experience**

This is another big scenario, and I really liked how the I kept having to switch focus as different priorities came to the fore. First the minelaying, then the initial air strike, then naval activity, back to ongoing air combat, pre-landing reconnaissance, planning the next round of strikes, directing air and naval landings, etc. etc. There was plenty of work to do, and enough time and scope for the player to have a range of different plausible options to explore. You definitely do not feel railroaded into a pre-defined plan by this scenario, and there’s plenty of opportunity for a concentration in one area (bomb the shore defences!) to leave you exposed in another (what do you mean we never bombed Eskisehir!). Your decisions make a significant difference, which is great.

I think the Coup comes across to the player the same way as it would to a real commander; as an occasional operational distraction from a different sphere of activity, that can't quite be ignored when it intrudes into a focused military operation.

I had the random events at their lowest setting, so there wasn't a lot of activity for me. I had one explosion at Murted, a bit of troop movement, the sub defection, and a couple of cases of Turkish aircraft doing odd things. The series of coup messages were read quickly, but there didn't seem to be much I could do about them or with their information, so I was quickly back to the main operation.

The important thing the coup does is help lend plausibility to the entire operation. I really doubt the Russians would be able to seize the Bosporus from a unified and alert Turkey. They can take the seas, and contest the skies, but I think the Turks would have the ground power to overwhelm the invaders before too long. But if there's a paralyzing coup going on, nobody's in charge, and confusion is the word of the day, then I can start to see a way it might work. So I think it's important to keep this in the player's mind.

Perhaps the player would feel more involved in the coup progress, if it were somehow tied in with their own progress? Perhaps something like a series of report options tied to the player's score? (For example, Low score = "angered by your attack, thousands of angry Turks are flocking to their units", High score = "your rapid progress is causing more confusion, mobilization is is slow".) Perhaps this could be tied to threats of a major military unit on the way if the player's doing poorly? But it might be more effort than it is worth, just to add some extra atmosphere