**Mediterranean Fury #2 – Syrian Surprise**

**Playtest Report by AndrewJ Feb 2019**

Good grief, that's a long list of Syrians.

Air Defence! I need Air Defence!

(The Bain in Spain causes me a migraine...)

Edit: and if there's a Slava off Latakia, then we're all in range right now

Having invaded Turkey last week, it’s time to step back a couple of days in simulation time, and defend myself from a surprise Syrian attack!

**THE SITUATION**

With the sudden possibility of hostilities breaking out, I’ve been given the responsibility of keeping my forces safe until the situation can be determined.

On land I’m in charge of two main airbases, one at Incirlik in southern Turkey (where my AIM-120 carrying F-16s live), and one at Akrotiri on the south coast of Cyprus (where I have an assortment of British fighters and support planes, in small quantities). I’ve also got control of two other Turkish bases, with a pile of old F-4s, lesser F-16s, and F-104s. Far off in Greece there are some F-5s, F-18s, and a large number of A-7s, which I’m told are being put under my control, but of course nothing is ready yet. I can forward base them to Akrotiri, if I want, but I have no ammo for them there, so it will be ‘bring your own ammo’ for a single strike, if I do fly them in.

At sea I have a Turkish destroyer and a little Turkish sub on the N side of Cyprus. To the south I have a scattering of mid-grade assets spread out on an exercise. These include three very capable SSNs, one of the Marines’ Harrier carriers, the venerable battleship Iowa, and the long-range SAM power of the Leahy (the next best thing if you can’t have an Aegis cruiser). They are supported by lesser warships, most of which are actually pretty good, although the old Andromeda and Descubertia are definitely low on the power curve. I’ve also got a bunch of vulnerable amphibs along with the little carrier, and a number of oilers and replenishment ships, all of which need to be defended.

The Russians are in Latakia, where they have based a modest airgroup. Fortunately, it looks like they’ve got nothing truly modern, and are operating a little over a dozen MiG-23s, but their pilots should be good. Their surface force is just fine, based around a Moskva and the Moskva – not confusing at all! The old helicopter carrier is interesting as a technical experiment, but other than a flock of ASW helicopters it doesn’t bring much to the fight. The Slava, on the other hand, is a very dangerous foe, and it’s backed up by a Sovremenny, a Neustrashimy, and a bunch of decent middle-aged ASW-type cruisers and the like. That’s a surface group with a lot of punch. There may be an SA-10 in Latakia to give them extra cover too. As an added bonus, there is apparently a Victor lurking around somewhere, probably keeping an eye on my exercise.

The Syrians, of course, are here in huge quantity. (Well, they do live here after all.) They have lots of everything in terms of SAMs and aircraft, including MiG-29s, MiG-25s, and Su-24s, all of which are significant threats, if they know how to use them. Even if they don’t the sheer quantity of them means operations over Syria are probably out of the question, and TLAM strikes are probably going to be snapped up by the numerous fighters. They’ve got a couple of groups of Osas and some ASW patrol boats with the Russians near Latakia, but no major assets. Hopefully their attention will be diverted by Israel, my quiet ally to the south. Jordan’s here too, and hopefully they will maintain their usual ‘competent but somewhat independent and calm’ role. The longer they’re neutral the better.

**THE PLAN**

My instructions for the moment are to protect and preserve my forces, primarily Incirlik, Akrotiri, and my main ships.

My scattered ships don’t have enough air cover on their own (just a pair of Harriers), so the fighters from Akrotiri will head south to cover them. This will leave Akrotiri open to attack, so the American F-16s from Incirlik will head south to cover Akrotiri. This in turn leaves Incirlik open, so the F-4s from Malatya will head west to cover Incirlik. That leaves the Turkish F-16s and F-104s to stretch west and cover the Turkish/Syrian border. (In effect, my air force is doing a quarter turn counter-clockwise.)

My ships and subs will jink to try and avoid any diesel subs which may have crept into their path, and then move at full speed to converge about 80 miles south of Cyprus, hoping to form up in a strong battle group before they can be interfered with by the Russians. After that we will consolidate and see how the situation develops.

**FEB 13 – Opening Salvo**

As the clock starts running, it’s clear that the Russians know exactly where I am. I can detect the radar emissions of multiple Badger reconnaissance aircraft over Syria, and I’m well within their radar range. There’s a tattletale only a few miles away from the Iowa group, and another relatively close to the Andromeda group. And it doesn’t take long before the Russians use the data.

VAMPIRE! VAMPIRE!

Radar operators start picking up multiple high-speed targets soaring upwards from the Russian battlegroup, heading straight for the Iowa. The admiral’s reaction is immediate, and moments later a Harpoon leaps off the Perry’s launcher, towards the hapless AGI, and within a couple of minutes the snooper is sunk. The little Andromeda further north finds it is within Exocet range of its AGI too, and a pair of missiles soon take care of that little problem.

That does nothing to help me with the stream of 16 enormous supersonic missiles hurtling through the stratosphere towards the Iowa group. What does help is the extreme long-range of the Leahy’s SAMs, firing in salvos of four at the distant targets. Soon I have over a dozen missiles of my own in the air, and the Leahy’s four large illuminators begin directing them in sequence. The Leahy is perfect for this type of attack. Obvious high-altitude targets at long range are its dream target, and the ASMs begin being shot down with pleasing regularity. The F-18 CAP dashes in and picks off a straggler or two, but the last couple of missiles make it through, and it takes a frantic burst of missile fire from the Perry and the Leahy to shoot them down about five miles out.

Meanwhile, fighters from Akrotiri and Incirlik are dashing towards the Andromeda group on afterburner. The Andromeda is an ancient Leander, retrofitted with a single 6-cell SeaWolf launcher, and she’s guarding two large, ponderous, vulnerable, and very valuable supply ships. She’s also the closest of my ships to the enemy. The stream of heavy missiles has passed her by, but now AWACS calls in a contact on supersonic sea-skimmers headed her way. The Sovremenny’s chosen Andromeda’s group as their target. The fighters get there just in time, dashing in low to fire on the incoming missiles with everything they have. Fortunately, a Sovremenny only carries 8 missiles, and the fighters manage to shoot them all down before they get to the group.

(I ran this part of the scenario twice, to try some things out, and the second time gave very different results. The random deployment of my ships and the Russian tattletales was different this time, and neither of the AGIs was within spotting range of their groups. As a result, the Russians were firing at unknown targets on radar only, and they spread out their missiles. Some went to Andromeda, and some went to the Iowa, but some also went towards the amphibs, and some went towards the distant solitary Concord. The ones headed for the amphibs and the Iowa all got shot down by SAMs and planes. The Leahy’s attempts to shoot down the missiles headed for the Concord all failed, because even at that mild crossing angle the missiles couldn’t make their end-game maneuver. Fighters got only one of them, and three got through, sinking the Concord. Six came for the Andromeda group, and the Leahy couldn’t get them either. Planes got two, SeaWolf got 1, chaff decoyed two, and the last one sank the Blue River. And that was just the Slava… So opening position will have a big impact here, and the player may have to let some ships die (Concord) so planes can concentrate to save others.)

Everyone’s alive for the moment, but the Syrians want to change that, and AWACS reports large formations of aircraft assembling in Syria. It looks like one of them may be headed for Incirlik, and one for Akrotiri. About this time orders come in to stay alive, protect our forces, but to not interfere with Syria. Well, it looks like the Syrians are about to interfere with me!

The first raid to hit turns out to be aiming for the radar station in southern-most Turkey, not Incirlik itself, but my F-4s which are rushing to the area make the adjustment in time. The moment the Syrians cross the border my pilots open fire, and there’s a furious low-altitude exchange, against what turns out to be a pack of Albatross trainers. Those die readily enough, but their MiG-23 escorts and nearby patrolling MiG-29s are more difficult targets, and the Slava lobbing in SA-N-6s every time I poke my head over the mountains doesn’t help either. Nonetheless, this fight resolves itself in my favour. (Although I do have a Turkish pilot with his feet up in the local café, waiting for a ride back to his squadron.) I have to wonder if this raid was more of a diversion, intended to keep my F-16s busy here rather than further south? I’m glad I brought the F-4s here instead.

The second raid goes for my ships, not the airfield, and the fighters burnering south from Incirlik are vital additions to my defence. There are swarms of MiG-23s and other fighters on high altitude escort, and packs of attack planes coming in low. I manage to concentrate my fighters on the attack planes, while the Leahy and Perry contribute by disrupting escort formations with long-range SAM fire. Even the Iowa gets into the action, blasting away with 5” guns at some passing MiGs which had been driven to the deck to avoid the SAMs. I don’t press a pursuit against the escorts once the attack planes are gone, since I’ll need every plane and missile for ongoing defence, and my planes fall back and let the enemy retire.

**FEB 13 – Orders and Developments**

Fresh orders come in at this point. It’s a general hot war, and while we’ve still got to preserve our forces, we’ve also been handed some objectives. We’re expected to sink the Russian fleet, and attack their forces and facilities in Latakia, as well as continuing to fend off the Syrians. The fleet is going to be a very tough target. It’s heavily defended by its own SAMs, its operating under a land-based SAM umbrella, it’s in the immediate proximity to fighter bases, and it’s got ASW patrol boats (we’re picking up Petya radars) screening its movements. This is not something that can be handled with a hasty attack. The orders also come with some good news. HQ is scrambling to get us some ammunition, and cargo flights should be headed for Akrotiri in a few hours, which will help immensely.

The strength of the air attacks on my ships prompts a change of orders. I had been planning to converge all naval forces in one location south of Cyprus, but that would leave the Andromeda group all alone as tail-end Charlie, fat, slow and vulnerable. Therefore the Iowa group is ordered to turn north and head directly for the Andromeda, who will hurry south to meet her. This will give some decent SAM protection to the isolated group as soon as possible. Once they are together they will turn WNW and head for Akrotiri. My other forces will continue to converge south of Cyprus, and once they are together they too will head north for Akrotiri. My plan is to drop off the vulnerable logistics ships and amphibs at Akrotiri, where they will anchor immediately west of the base in the shelter of the SAM defences and fighters stationed there. My warships can then leave them behind (with a small ASW escort) while they form up for the main attack on the Russian fleet. My SSNs, meanwhile, are to head NE directly for the fleet, but they have to move at speed, which will limit their sonar performance.

I’m also eyeing those two packs of Osas with concern. Normally they’d be trivial to destroy, since I outrange them in all respects, but my planes are all AA focused at the moment. I could destroy them with Harpoons, but I need those for engaging the Soviet fleet, so I’m reluctant to use them up on missile boats. I’ll have to let them keep closing for the moment, but if I don’t stop them they’ll be in fighting range early this evening.

Meanwhile, only 49 minutes into the fight, my ESM crews start reporting traces of HAWK radar illumination emissions from the south. It looks like the Israelis have started taking shots at Syrian aircraft which pass too close to their borders. Hopefully the situation there won’t progress beyond skirmishing, otherwise we may be drawn into a growing conflict we are ill-equipped to support.

Of course, I will have to survive the ongoing heavy attacks before any of this can happen.

**FEB 13 – Heavy attacks**

The next raid nearly gets into the Andromeda group (still alone), and it’s only the arrival of F-5s and F-18s from Greece which let me fend it off. The F-18s did an amazing afterburner run from Souda, tanking just west of Cyprus, and then burnering the rest of the way in. Lord knows what condition their engines are in now. It’s only a few minutes to the next attack, as MiG-23s press in to bomb the Andromeda, and this time British F-4s and the F-18s (now down to guns) shoot down the attackers. The Syrians make three more raids in the next hour or so, all trying to get at the Andromeda or the Iowa, but now the Turkish F-4s start to play a starring role. They have to fly the long way around Syria, turning south at Incirlik (and avoiding the heavy SAMs on the Slava), and hurrying down to the fight. They only show up two at a time, but that’s enough to match the pace of the raids, and these old work-horses hold the line and do a tremendous amount of good work. These raids also don’t have the heavy escort that the first ones did, so they are easier to tackle directly.

About this time AWACs starts spotting extremely low altitude high-subsonic contacts moving in the direction of the Andromeda group. Judging by their speed, these are probably Kh-35s, in which case they must be from the Russian fleet, which would be well out of range. Could they have been launched from something closer? A few minutes later the contacts are lost again, as the missiles run out of fuel in mid ocean. The Iowa group’s been jamming, so perhaps Russians were firing at sensor ghosts? In any case, now that those missiles have been used, a naval attack on the enemy fleet will be much easier.

In all the confusion the Syrians manage to get a few fighters through the line. Occasional MiG-25 incursions along the Syria/Turkey border cause localised disruptions to patrolling fighters there, but the really embarrassing one is the MiG-21 that I suddenly realize is headed right for my AWACs. None of my fighters are in position to intercept it, unless I launch my AIM-120 reserve from Incirlik and burner them away from the fight, which would leave a dangerous vulnerability. So the AWACS turns and flees into southern Turkey, and gets chased most of the way to the Dardanelles before the MiG has to turn back when it runs low on fuel. (It then gets whacked by a pair of F-104s. Early cold-war justice!)

The underwater scene isn’t quiet either. There have been numerous false contacts throughout my area of operation, but my P-3 patrolling in the naval assembly area south of Cyprus picks up a positive contact on one of its high-performance VLAD sonobuoys. Overflying the contact confirms it with a MAD hit, and sonar resolves it as a Victor, cruising towards my slow-moving amphibs, which are only an hour or so away. It takes a couple of torps (Soviet decoys seem to work very well), but the Victor is soon sunk, and the P-3 resumes patrol. Further north, the little Turkish diesel sub Dolunay is just passing the eastern end of Cyprus, hoping to make it to the Latakia area, when it picks up a moving underwater contact. This is a very bad thing, because the Dolunay has no ASW torpedoes at all, and is utterly defenceless. Slowing and creeping to the far side of the layer doesn’t help, and the contact follows me up and down. It’s a Kilo. We’re sure to die.

The Dolunay releases a radio buoy to call for help, and tries to hide in the layer, maybe getting into the Kilo’s baffles, but that doesn’t work. Nonetheless, the Kilo doesn’t fire. It seems like it can’t figure out what I am. As this dance continues, a Nimrod is hurrying in at lowest altitude. The sub is near the enemy fleet’s SAM radius, and the CAP loitering therein, so Tornado F3s and F-16s with AMRAAM are sent to escort it. The two subs are so close together that the Nimrod can’t safely drop on the enemy, so it drops a torp some distance off. The Kilo hears it and moves away to a prudent distance, and so does the Dolunay – but in a different direction. Once the two subs are far enough apart the Nimrod moves in and makes the kill. The Dolunay is saved and can continue to close on the enemy fleet.

All this activity has definitely caught the interest of the Russian CAP, and four angry MiG-23s are headed in on afterburner. As the Nimrod flees my escorts move in and kill the charging MiGs, while the Slava takes SA-N-6 pot-shots at us, continually forcing my planes down to the deck. The combination of fighters and SAMs is going to be a real problem, which I have to start working on before I can get into the fleet. My fighters withdraw for a few minutes, and then advance to provoke another fight with the Russian MiGs, winning that one too. Then the Tornadoes continue in as low as possible to try and hit the ASW helicopters, which I really need to get rid of if the Dolunay wants to get in. My very long range Sky-Flash missiles are the only hope I have of reaching into the fleet’s SAM umbrella, but despite all the effort they only hit two of the helicopters before retiring. Given the indecisive results, I may need to try something else.

The Syrian raids continue, coming in without escorts now, and I’m getting a bit complacent when one of them suddenly opens up with a frontal aspect missile! These are Fencers, not Floggers or Fitters, and they’re not such easy kills. Wrenching away from the missile, my pilots draw back and come around from the rear, but that gives more time for the Fencers to close in on my ships. I consider opening fire with SAMs, but if these are Fencers they may be carrying ARMs, so I elect to keep radars off as the planes rush towards me. Fortunately, my fighters manage to make the intercept in time, but it’s a sobering lesson in making sure about what my targets are in advance.

Two more raids follow, but these turn out to be the more vulnerable MiG-23s and Su-22s, so they are dealt with long before they reach my ships. (A bit more cautiously though…)

**FEB 13 – Dusk**

As dusk falls I’d been starting to wonder if the Syrian air-force would simply destroy itself, by sending in multiple small unsupported raids that I can easily overwhelm, but it seems like they’re getting more organized now. The next raid of note is 10 attack planes, distributed in several flights of two, including Su-24s, plus four escorts. My fighters handle the situation again (love that steady flow of Turkish F-4s!), but at the end of this fight I’m growing concerned that the cupboard is getting bare, as more and more of my fighters have completed their second quick turnaround flight and are now down for three hours of maintenance. The F-18s and F-5s that flew in from Greece earlier in the afternoon are also grounded in Akrotiri with no missiles to reload, waiting for their slow-moving C-130 to come droning in with a load of AAMs.

Over by Latakia my F-16s have continued trying to draw the Russian MiG-23s into fights outside the reach of the Slava’s SAMs, coming in very low and shooting upwards with AMRAAMs, when they find that the rumours of an active SA-10 in the area are true. They manage to dive under the shots in time, but that’s one more impediment to any attack I make near Latakia. I certainly won’t be loitering any recce planes overhead in that area.

Out at sea, the approaching Osas are applying more pressure. I’ve been looking for a ‘cheap’ way to deal with them, and my helicopters may be a solution. I have one Lynx ready with Sea Skua, and one Cobra loaded with TOW (plus two other Lynxes and three more Cobras readying, but it will be a couple of hours more before their loadout is complete). These are launched under cover of darkness to sneak in at extremely low altitude, while fighters loiter on guard over the southern group of Osas. The attack works very well. A single Sea Skua hit doesn’t sink a missile boat outright, but it usually leaves it burning dead in the water. Similarly, TOW missiles are much too small to sink anything, but a barrage of them can batter the target enough that it can’t shoot back, letting the helicopter close in a bit to pummel the target with rockets. By the end of my attack I’ve hit every ship in the group, which has now come to a full stop, and my helicopters retire safely while my escorts down a MiG-21 that came to investigate.

I’m confident my other helicopters would be able to deal with all the Osas, if I had time to wait, but I don’t think I do. Now that the Iowa group has dropped off its logistics ships at Akrotiri, it has turned and headed back east, and the northern group of Osas will be in range of them in about an hour. Reluctantly, I think I must engage the Osas now, so my Perry starts shooting Harpoons at them one by one. I regret the use of every single missile. Other missiles will follow until the Osas are gone.

By this time my evening flights of F-18s and F-5s are arriving from Greece, with their C-130 full of missiles following a few minutes later. Two flights of F-18s break off to refuel, going into CAP, while the remaining F-18s and all the F-5s are sent to land. As this is happening, AWACS starts reporting many new contacts launching and forming up in Syria. ESM suggests we’re looking at large numbers of MiG-23s and MiG-29s. Whatever’s happening is going to be big. The trouble is, I don’t know where it’s going yet. So three flights of Turkish F-4s launch to cover Incirlik, while a flight of F-16s with AMRAAMs launch and head south for Akrotiri, joining up with some F-4s already en-route. They’ll meet up with the planes already in that area. Hopefully that will cover all my major assets.

As radar operators peer at their screens, the enemy’s course becomes clear. They’ve got four Fitters escorted by eight or so MiG-23s, followed by roughly a dozen MiG-29s, and it looks like they’re headed for my ships again. (I really need to kill those damned Badgers who are watching me, but I’m very much on the defensive, and can’t spare planes for a death-run into Syria.) I’m facing them with the two new flights of F-18s from Greece, two flights of F-16 with AMRAAM, and a flight of Turkish F-4s. They outnumber me 2 to 1 in fighters, but I have much better missiles. After a last-minute splash of fuel from the tankers, we turn to engage!

First shots are taken by the F-18s, picking exclusively on the MiG-23s and trying to turn them aside with Sparrow shots, and then pressing on to take some long-range shots at the MiG-29s, and this works reasonably well. Most of the F-18s manage to disengage after their Sparrows are gone, and then the F-16s are in place for a blast of AMRAAMs at the MiG-29s. This goes very well, and only three of the MiG-29s survive the double AMRAAM barrage. The Fitters have been essentially ignored in all of this (one died to a hasty Sidewinder shot), but all their dodging must have used up valuable fuel, since they now turn for home. My remaining planes burner west for some clearance, before turning back to deal with stragglers, and they get the last of the MiG-29s, but the surviving Fitters and Floggers get away, and I don’t pursue. My pilots call for the SAR helicopter for my swimming crewmen, as my planners take note of the ready board which is now very nearly empty.

**PLAN FOR THE NIGHT**

At the moment I’m rather low on aircraft in the Akrotiri area. All four Tornados are ready to go, but the rest of my force is essentially reloading or waiting for missiles. Another big hit here might be tough to fend off if it came quickly. Incirlik doesn’t have much left either, although the three flights of F-4s orbiting overhead give me a good feeling. However, if the Syrians (and Russians) give me two hours or so, then I’ll have a lot more ready planes back on line, and I don’t think they’ll be able to force their way in after that.

That means I have to start thinking about forcing my way into their domain instead, to deal with the fleet and land-based elements.

I think I’m doing okay whittling down the Russian MiG-23s (although there’s a lot more than the dozen or so that intel suspected), and I can probably kill some more, or at least be ready to hit them if they appear. I might (maybe) be able to get subs in (go Dolunay!), if the Russians aren’t using active sonar, but if they are then I’m so much dead meat. The big risk will be MAD hits from the swarm of ASW helicopters, which I still need to deal with, and that’s very much a roll of the dice. Unfortunately, I’m not set up for SAM suppression, so going in with attack aircraft (either from LGB altitude or low level) will probably be a disaster. I may need to rely on an ASM and TLAM saturation attack to try and empty SAM magazines, followed by an immediate medium altitude air attack on the major SAM assets, particularly the Slava and SA-10. (I really hope they don’t have two of the latter. Only seen one so far.)

To accomplish this I’ll continue to gather my main fleet tonight, dropping off the last of the amphibs, etc. at Akrotiri, and then ready for a combined missile and air strike, most likely in the pre-dawn hours of the morning. We’ll only have one big shot, so it must be concentrated and powerful.

(And then there’s the Israeli wildcard. Will things get politically messy in that corner of the Med? I do not need a diversion of assets down there!)

We shall see.

---

Well crappity crap. They do have two of them.

Edit: And they're big units too. 48 cells each, 96 ready tubes between them! Saturate that - yeah right!

---

A little more game time, a little more report...

**FEB 13 – INTO THE NIGHT**

As last light fades and full darkness sets in, the Syrians seem to change tactics in the air. There’s another small flight of doomed attackers, but then there’s a dropoff in overall activity. Instead of anti-shipping attacks, I start to see intermittent probing flights by individual fighters, particularly Mig-21s and MiG-25s. I assume they’re trying to play a harassment role of some sort, maybe capitalizing on gaps in my defences to try and pick off unwary isolated units. However, with AWACS alerts identifying the MiGs while they’re still over Syria, I usually have fighters ready for these lone intruders, and they are soon shot down. I’m not sure the Syrians are getting a useful return from expending their planes this way.

At sea, my operations continue as planned. The logistic ships from the Andromeda group are now anchored off Akrotiri, and the Andromeda is patrolling back and forth with active sonar in case any subs try to sneak in to attack them. So far there’s been no activity there, other than the arrival of another cargo plane from Greece, bringing much-needed ammo for the F-18s. The Iowa group is slowly steaming east along the south coast of Cyprus, having finished destroying the northern Osa group with Harpoons. The amphibs and the Marine carrier have detached from their escorts, and are headed the last miles into Akrotiri, while the escorts (essentially all my other warships on the south side of Cyprus) are hurrying to join up with the Iowa. Once they are all together, they will proceed east, ready to engage the enemy fleet.

My SSNs continue NE, in the direction of the enemy. My MPA have been patrolling ahead of them, but so far they’ve seen nothing in the area except fish, false contacts, and the remains of the southern Osa group. These have started moving again, after their crippled comrades burned and sank, so one of my subs pauses to put an old torpedo into a damaged Osa that’s passing nearby. The other Osas are tackled by Cobra attack helicopters from the Kearsarge, which bombard them from a distance with anti-tank missiles and rockets until they eventually succumb.

Further north, the little Dolunay is still creeping towards the Russian fleet. I’d like to stay under the layer, to dodge their hull sonars, but the Russian ships have some reasonably good VDS being towed under the layer, so the best course of action is probably to stay within the layer itself. I could actually speed up and make the intercept within the hour, but I suspect that unless I’m extremely quiet I’ll be heard. So the Dolunay proceeds very cautiously, creeping in at a mere 2 knots, and lets the Soviet fleet pass by about six miles away. My submariners should be well positioned to strike the fleet when their patrol brings them near again around midnight. In the meantime, I’ve got a flight of AMRAAM carrying F-16s loitering nearby, just outside the fleet’s SAM range, ready to intervene in case the Russians suddenly surge ASW helicopters towards my sub.

The Russians don’t do that, but they do let fly with another salvo of Kh-35s at some phantom target or other. Nothing of mine is in the area, and the missiles once again fall harmlessly into the ocean.

**FEB 13 – BADGERS**

One thing that’s been causing me difficulty is the constant surveillance by the Russian Badgers, who’ve kept my ships under continuous radar observation since the beginning of the fight. If I’m going to close the range to launch a Harpoon attack with my task group, then I don’t want to be visible while I do it. This means I need get rid of the Badgers, as well as the surveillance helicopters guarding the fleet. The Badgers are over southern Syria and Lebanon, about 30 miles in from the coast, with fighter patrols up, fighter bases nearby, and SAMs on guard. I may provoke a fighter surge going in, so I can’t just assume a single flight of fighters will do the job. Therefore, Operation Bye-Bye Badger is born. It’s small, but it’s my first coordinated offensive action of the theatre.

The main power will be my two flights of Tornado F3s, carrying the longest-ranged missiles (55 nm) I have. They will be guarded by a flight of F-16s with AMRAAM, to deal with high-end fighters (the MiG-29s in particular), and screened by three flights of Turkish F-4s. This actually uses the last of my ready fighters in Incirlik and Akrotiri, until other planes come on line in an hour or so, but I think the Syrians are in a lull right now, so I should be okay. As the flights assemble near the enemy coast, the F-4s start skirmishing with enemy planes, but they don’t press the pursuit, letting enemy planes which have expended their missiles turn for home undisturbed, rather than chasing them deep into dangerous airspace. The Syrians soon have a second batch of fighters inbound, and these cause more determined fighting, while the Tornadoes begin engaging the Badgers. Although my screen shoots down the Mig-21s and a few MiG-23s, I still don’t achieve decisive results against the MiG-29s, which disengage and head home for more missiles. But in the meantime the two surveillance Badgers are shot down, as well as one jammer Badger, and my raid turns back and clears the coast. Phase 1 is successful! (Assuming the Russians don’t simply launch two more… I’m hoping intelligence reports that they only have a very small number of them are correct.)

For Phase 2, the planes which still have long-range missiles remaining turn north and head for the Soviet fleet, intending to approach at low altitude and take shots at the helicopters there. But, as they begin to fly north AWACS reports more Badgers lifting off from Damascus behind them. The Russians do have more! Oh, and by the way, there’s a four-plane raid of attack planes with a pair of escorts coming in at the same time. My fighters turn about and re-engage, fending off yet more defensive fighters, and getting the raid, and one jammer Badger and one surveillance Badger, and failing yet again to inflict decisive damage on the elusive MiG-29s. This time there don’t seem to be any new Badgers coming up, so the fighters which still have long-range missiles head for the Russian ships once again.

The planes circle around and approach the fleet from the WNW, so they can stay as far away from the land-based SA-10s (yes, plural, dammit) as possible. Coming in extremely low they, try to get radar locks on the helicopters and planes orbiting the ships, but that Su-24 jammer loitering up there is making things very difficult. As my planes get closer and closer the pilots get more and more nervous. Shouldn’t they by in SAM range by now? Or has the Slava finally run out of missiles, after disrupting my operations for hours? As their radars start burning through the jamming they begin to open fire, killing an ELINT plane, and a handful of helicopters, until they finally get close enough that the Sovremenny opens up with its own medium-range SAMs. The pleased pilots turn and dash away, taking back the good news that the fleet’s major SAM defence is down!

Behind them the Su-24 jammer sits smugly above the formation, completely immune to their attacks…

**FEB 13 – NIGHT-TIME**

As the successful fighters head home from operations, I’m expecting the Syrian attack operations to cease, since I’ve removed the Badgers which had me in radar range. But before long, AWACs reports another four attackers coming in. How are they spotting me? Are they coming in based off an old contact? Have I missed a sub? Is there an observation team cheerfully tucked away in a rustic coastal villa on Cyprus, drinking wine, enjoying the night breezes, and looking through their night-vision scope as the Iowa cruises up the coast? In any case, planes are coming ready on Akrotiri now, so a pair of British Phantoms meet up with a pair of Turkish Phantoms, and they go and step all over another set of Fitters.

**PLANS FOR NEXT DAY**

It’s now nearly midnight, and plans have to be made for the following day.

The Syrians have made some desultory single-plane probes towards the Turkish bases in the north, but so far the F-16s and F-104s there haven’t been hard pressed. The Turkish F-4s have been heavily involved in air-to-air fighting near Cyprus, but I suspect that air-to-air pressure will diminish, given all the kills they have accumulated so far. All these planes are currently carrying AA loads, but that probably won’t be needed now, and I am pretty sure I’ll need some air-to-ground ordnance, either for anti-shipping or anti-airfield work in the Latakia area. Therefore, a portion of the F-16s and F-104s are directed to stand down for iron bomb loadouts, while some of the F-4s are equipped with LGBs.

Analysis of ESM tapes has shown that there are actually two SA-10s in the Latakia area, not just one. This is somewhat offset by the fact that the Slava is now out of long-range SAMs, but I still suspect thoughts of a single saturation attack on the fleet and airfield are unrealistic. My surface group will be together in a couple of hours, and they will combine Harpoon fire from all ships, aircraft and subs in an attempt to overwhelm the enemy fleet. I’ll have to be careful of the Sovremenny’s OTH radar. It’s off now, but when it lights up they’ll see my entire fleet, so a fighter backstop may be needed in case they still have some missiles on board, or there’s a hidden shore-based SSM battery somewhere.

The big question is what to do with the F-16s at Incirlik, and the A-7s in Greece. Low-level attacks against Soviet air defences are a death ride, but so are medium altitude LGB attacks in the face of paired SA-10s. Do I take all my best fighters out of the line for six hours, to load up every HARM and Maverick I have and make a daylight (!) attack on the SA-10s, in the hope that will clear the way for the A-7s? (Not to mention the SA-2s, 3s, and 6s in the area, of course.) Or do I admit that I’m not getting into Latakia today?

The decision needs to come soon…

And now, the conclusion of Syrian Surprise!

**FEB 13 – PLANS FINALIZE**

After extensive discussion among the command staff, the decision is made shortly before midnight. We will launch a simultaneous all-arms attack on Latakia airbase, the Latakia port area, and the Soviet surface group. Participants will include the Greeks and Americans from Souda, tankers from distant Sigonella, some Turkish F-4s with LGBs, and, of course, the combined strike power of my surface ships and SSNs, under the cover of fighters from Akrotiri. The F-16s at Incirlik, my best fighter planes, are to stand down. With the exception of one flight left as emergency intercept reserve, the remainder will ready to load HARMs for the upcoming strike. That will give me 14 HARM-carrying aircraft, which won’t be enough to shut down the defences on their own, but should be enough to make a strong contribution. In the meantime their air defence role will need to be taken up by the Turkish F-4s and the planes operating out of Akrotiri. Fortunately, the F-18s which flew in the previous evening will soon be completely re-armed and ready to take up base defence duties. Timelines are finalized and sent to participating bases. Now all we have to do is wait.

**FEB 14 – SMALL HOURS OF THE MORNING – AIR WAR**

As the calendar ticks over to the 14th, radar operators begin to note a shift in Syrian air activity. Single fighters, typically MiG-21s and occasionally MiG-25s, start making probing flights towards my Turkish bases along the Syrian border, over the Latakia area and towards support planes operating off the tip of Cyprus, and in the direction of my ships coming along the south side of the island. Individually they’re no threat at all, and with AWACs I have plenty of time to meet them and kill them before they can do anything useful. The problem comes when they show up as I’m trying to deal with a Syrian raid, or maneuver to get at the Russian support aircraft. I can’t just ignore them, or they’ll run up and shoot my aircraft in the stern, and I often have to divert resources from more important tasks to deal with them. Still, I have to wonder if its worth the effort, since none of them go home again. Would they have had more effect if they were saved up and used as strike escorts?

Speaking of which, the Syrians launch an extensive series of night strikes towards my ships. They may not have radar contact with them any more, but it seems like my jamming signals are more than enough to give away my location. The British F-4s out of Akrotiri manage to deal with an eight-plane strike, mostly of old Albatross trainers, and then another six shortly after that. How these basic trainers, with no night vision equipment at all, hoped to make attacks at blacked out ships on a dark sea, is a mystery. As the F-4s advance to deal with the second strike they get fired on by a new SAM near the Latakia airport. As the Phantoms dive to avoid the missiles they radio back a warning that the Russians have three SA-10s, not two…. (Latakia, incidentally, is absolutely crammed with aircraft. Analysts poring over U-2 imagery can see dozens of MiG-23MLDs and Su-24s there in open parking, poised for a strike. Far far more than intelligence had initially estimated.)

The next Syrian attack is massive. AWACS reports nearly a dozen MiG-23s flying out of Shayrat to a muster point, to be met by eight MiG-29s, and four other strike planes of some sort. (Plus another MiG-21 leaker up north, delaying the arrival of a flight of Turkish F-4s who have to turn aside to pry it off my EP-3.) As this wave comes pouring in my Akrotiri fighters rush to engage it with long-range SARH missiles, hoping to force back the MiG-29s and let the MiG-23s (presumably carrying bombs?) carry on to be tackled by the Harriers closer to my ships. That’s when the flight leaders realize that all the MiG-23s are maneuvering like fighters – that’s 19 escorts for 4 strikers! My fighters are badly outnumbered, and the Harriers are certainly outclassed. My ships turn on their radars and try long-range SAM shots to break up the formations, but they have minimal effect, and my Sparrow shots aren’t going to kill enough of them before they close with me. My planes keep having to turn and run, as the relentless wave advances.

Suddenly, two of the attack planes open fire before I can get a shot at them. Vampires! But they’re not headed for my ships. They’re headed for the center of Cyprus, where I have a land based radar cheerfully emitting, helping the AWACs keep tabs on the local air traffic. The crew chop the circuit breakers and run desperately for the slit trenches, as the missiles hurtle towards them, then past them, to burst against the hills beyond. Fortunately, the Syrians only had older AS-11s, which don’t have target memory function. If this had been the Russians, the radar would be gone.

Then the entire Syrian strike turns around and starts returning to base, even though the other two attack planes (which we’ve figured out are Su-24s) haven’t taken a shot yet. This is a huge relief for my fleeing planes, who were about to be overwhelmed. So far they’d only managed to knock a piece off an Su-24, and kill two Fulcrums and four Floggers, which still left over a dozen angry Syrian fighters with plenty of missiles. Once the retreat is confirmed, and the enemy is all pointing east again, my faster planes wheel about and pursue them, cutting down four more out of the rear of the formation (and another MiG-21 which came hurrying in).

After that major effort, the Syrians continue messing things up with their probe flights, while they revert to uncoordinated unescorted attacks. Four lone Fencers are easily handled by the Harriers when the attackers have no guardians, and the next four do no better when they’re pounced on by Turkish F-4s. Over the next few hours Harriers get four more Fitters, British Phantoms claim the next four, and similar deadly results face lone flights of four, and two.

The Syrians try escorting a couple more times. A raid of four Fitters is escorted by four each Fulcrums and Floggers, which is significant, but this fight goes better than the last escorted raid. This time the escorts peel off to face my fighters, and I manage to keep my distance from them and engage at range while the strikers are dealt with separately. The final Syrian strike is four attackers and four escorts, but that isn’t enough to get by the fighter screen, and then the air is empty.

Could it be that the Syrians have given up their attacks? Even the MiG-21s seem to have given up for now. And a good thing too, since I’ve got very little left in terms of ready aircraft, and I need to give my pilots some rest while ground crews work to do vital maintenance before the Latakia strike at dawn.

**FEB 14 – SMALL HOURS OF THE MORNING – AT SEA**

Meanwhile, in the waters below, the Iowa group has maintained its steady progress along the south coast of Cyprus, heading for its appointment with the enemy. The Russian surface group fires two more missiles in its direction, but once again they’re firing at sensor ghosts, and the missiles are wasted.

The three SSNs are screening ahead of the task group, slowing occasionally to listen above and below the layer. Shortly after 01:00 hrs the crew of the HMS Torbay picks up an anomalous sonar signal, and after a few minutes of careful listening they determine it’s an SSK. Presumably this is the second of the Syrian Kilos, and it’s reasonably close to the path of the Iowa group. The Torbay gently ascends to periscope depth, raises a radio mast, and sends word to our ships. It doesn’t take long for a ready Seahawk to spin-up its rotors and head for the contact, finding and sinking it with a well-placed Mk46. The Torbay hears the satisfying boom, and descends again to resume her patrol.

Closer to Latakia, the Russian ASW helicopters start having a very hard time, as F-18s flying out of Akrotiri start hunting them, coming in low under the shore-based SA-10 radar, and taking long-ranged Sparrow shots without getting deep into the Sovremenny’s SAM envelope. The F-18s make more attacks on the Su-24 jammers too, trying to get to extremely close range while the Su-24s are at their furthest point from the ship and shore-based SAMs. It takes multiple runs (and much SAM and MiG-21 dodging) before they manage to get burn-through, but when they do the celebration in the CIC is immediate. Those jammers would have given much good cover to any enemy planes opposing my strike.

Although they’re not aware of the activity, the crew of the little Turkish sub Dolunay is benefitting from the destruction of the ASW helicopters. As predicted the Russian task group is back, and this time the creeping Dolunay is poised to meet them. Coming in from the west, the little sub is passed by the first line of escorts about a mile away, and then it accelerates some towards the expected center of the group. At the predicted time speed is reduced as much as possible, only keeping steerage, and the Dolunay ascends to periscope depth. There they are, all the big ships in the core of the fleet. The Slava is too fast, and the short ranged torps will never catch it, but the nearby Kara is definitely in range, and the Moskva CVH might just be achievable. Four torpedoes are assigned to each, and the shots are away!

The Russians detect the shots almost immediately, and radars and sonars flick on as the ships turn to run at best speed. Two torpedoes hit the Kara, sinking it, and the four chasing the Moskva hissed off into the distance, their fuel supplies dwindling rapidly. Then, within half a mile of expected loss of control, 1, 2, 3, and 4 explosions happen on the bearing to the Moskva! But there is no one to hear the breakup sounds of the sinking ship. The little Dolunay had turned and ducked into the layer again, hoping to clear the area and escape, but little SSKs are slower than SS-N-14s. The Dolunay was already dead.

**FEB 14 – PRE DAWN**

In the pre-dawn hours, the initial stages of the Latakia strike began to get underway. First to fly were the tankers from distant Sigonella, the Harpoon-carrying P-3s from Souda, and then the EA-6s, heading for duty stations off the east coast of Cyprus and the Turkish coast south of Incirlik. Next were the tankers from closer bases, a fresh AWACS, and a U-2 up on surveillance. When those were well underway the Greek A-7s began lifting off, the first FLIR-equipped flights carrying iron bombs and cluster bombs, the following ones equipped with LGBs. The SSNs were on-station between Cyprus and Latakia. The Iowa group had tightened up its formation, and was just east of Cyprus, paralleling the Soviet surface group on a heading SSE, at a distance of 60 nm. The Syrians were still quiet in the air, with routine patrols over their bases, but no strike activity.

My strike planes got closer, with the front flights of bomb-carriers pausing to tank while the LGB carriers caught up. Turkish F-4s and F-16s took off on CAP, the F-16 HARM carriers began to muster over Incirlik, and F-18s with Harpoon headed NE from Akrotiri, along with their fighter cover. All was quiet. Then, as the A-7s neared the east end of Cyprus, the Syrians attacked.

Swarms of Mig-23MLs with a few BNs thrown in (I stopped counting after 16 – it was much larger), came surging towards the Iowa group, so every available fighter I had out of Akrotiri came burnering in for the intercept. It was obvious I’d been fully spotted, so there was no need for subtlety any more, and the Iowa group lit up in a blast of radar energy, and began flinging SAMs at anything within range. I had already sent a group of fighters headed south of Latakia Airport, hoping to distract the CAP that was flying there and drag it away from the strike, so they were the first into the fray. With the jammers on the Iowa group and an EA-6 behind them, my planes had the radar advantage, and went into the fight with determination, killing and falling back to kill again.

Soon my planes were heavily engaged, but I couldn’t devote them all to the fight because numerous vampires were spotted launching from the coast in the Latakia area and further south. U-2 reconnaissance had spotted some small units in the area but hadn’t been able to ID them. The presumption was that they were probably flak, but evidently, they were shore batteries instead. Now they’re incoming missiles, and some of my planes are diverted to attack them. But, once again, it seems the Syrians are shooting at sensor ghosts. These missiles turn out to be Styxes, and they’re still well out of range, and they fall harmlessly into the water after I’ve wasted a bunch of missiles shooting them down. Despite the distraction, the enemy strike was shattered and driven back, and it didn’t get to the ships, but only because I literally had everything from Akrotiri in the air, except the old F-5s which couldn’t see in the dark.

**FEB 14 – THE LATAKIA STRIKE**

The first offensive action is a TLAM strike from the LA class SSN, aimed four-each at the two closely spaced SA-3 batteries about five miles north of Latakia. The missiles are sent looping around to approach from the north, hiding in the radar shadow of the little headland there to protect them from the SA-10s as long as possible. They pop over the headland, smash the first battery, and then, although they are engaged, they heavily damage the second one, knocking out its radar.

The next attack is the big one, with a salvo of all TLAMs from the Iowa group, headed straight for the densely packed planes of the Latakia airfield. I had considered looping these cruise missiles around into the Syrian interior, coming over the mountains from behind, but I want these missiles to be seen. They are as much decoys as attack munitions. They are closely followed by a salvo of every Harpoon I have, from the F-18s, the P-3s, the Iowa group, and my SSNs. The majority are aimed at the Soviet task group, with a handful headed for the Syrian patrol boats near the port. Between Harpoons and TLAMs, I have 170 missiles on the way in. Now that's saturation!

The stream of TLAMs draws fire from the surface ships, before their attention gets diverted to the incoming Harpoons. The ships fight hard, shooting down numerous Harpoons with SAMs and guns, and decoying and jamming others, but there are simply too many to withstand. One hit usually isn’t enough to finish them, and the ships keep fighting despite the battering, but in the end, they succumb to the wave of missiles and are sunk. The remaining Harpoons, almost 20 of them, fly off towards the Syrian coast, spreading out and causing confusion amid the CAP, which has been trying to intercept them.

In the meantime, the TLAMs have been heading for Latakia, and the SA-10 there lights up as expected, followed by two SA-17s (which I had not spotted) and two SA-15s (which I had not spotted either). My watching planes see a flowing stream of fiery points accelerating west out of Latakia airfield, popping in little flashbulb bursts where they meet the procession of invisible TLAMs. The stream of lights gets shorter, and the flashes keep getting closer and closer to the airfield, and as it does I’m starting to wonder whether the TLAMs will run out before the SAMs do. The flashes are almost on the airfield when they finally stop, as the SAM magazines are exhausted, and then the broader flashes of warhead impacts and fuel fires spread across the base. The densely packed aircraft are wrecked by shattering blasts as the last of the TLAMs hit their parking areas, and the final ten missiles slam five apiece into the runways, wrecking one and severely damaging the other.

Further up the coast, one of the SA-10s opens fire on approaching aircraft, and the F-16s immediately respond with a salvo of 16 HARMs, all at the one SA-10 radar. The other F-16s continue to close in, waiting for the other SA-10 to illuminate, but it doesn’t yet. The two SA-17s do, however, trying to engage the incoming HARMS, and the remaining F-16s have no choice but to fire at them, six missiles each, before turning back. HARMs are a much tougher target than TLAMs, and some of them get through the intense defensive fire, damaging the active SA-10, and destroying both the SA-17s. Most importantly, the surviving SAMs have run out of missiles, and there is a very brief window in which I can attack. That’s when the Greeks arrive.

Corsairs come rushing in at low level from the west, passing over the shattered wrecks of the two TLAM-ed SA-3 sites, only 120 feet up and flying on FLIR. They turn sharply south, splitting into two groups, and pull up to lay a barrage of 500lb bombs across each of the SA-10 sites, destroying them both. Backlit by the flames, they dive to the deck and streak across Latakia and out to sea again. Moments later more flights of A-7s, this time armed with cluster bombs, appear out of the darkness, destroying or crippling two SA-2s, and two SA-3s. The last flight heads inland towards the airbase and drops its payload on the last of the SA-10s, destroying it in a storm of fragmentation damage, before curving out to sea (strafing an SA-17 as it goes).

This was a tremendous success, far better than I had hoped. The Corsairs took some fire from the SA-3s they were attacking, but all of the advanced SAM firepower in their path was reloading, and couldn’t fire a shot. The only thing that harmed them was a decrepit SA-7 attached to a SA-3 site, which managed to destroy a Corsair as it flew overhead. With all the high-altitude air defence destroyed or reloading, it only remained for the Corsairs and F-4s with LGBs to hurry in and hit the two surviving SA-17s at the airbase before they could get more missiles on the rails. After that, with a combination of buddy lasing and self designation, my attackers were able to destroy the port facilities, all the remaining SAM facilities, SSM launch sites, and the one Su-24 which was still sitting forlornly on its pad at the airbase.

The Syrian CAP and interceptors haven’t been idle, and they try to interfere with my operations, but all those F-16 HARM shooters carry a pair of AMRAAMs each, so I have plenty of CAP of my own. I’m trying to hold the air after my strikers have departed, since I’ve got a helicopter on the way for my ejected A-7 pilot, and I can’t have MiGs pouncing on it as it makes its way in. The MiG-29s coming from the Aleppo area are the biggest problem, while the MiG-21s coming from Hama are less of an issue, until they suddenly launch some MiG-29s there too. My pilots hold their own, but I have to wonder how long my missiles will last before I’m forced to retire. The helicopter’s only half-way across the water at this point, and I’ve got little else to call as reinforcements. Unfortunately, the crackling messages from the downed pilot aren’t good. Angry enemy troops have surrounded the area and are closing in. His last call says he’s about to be captured, and there are no further transmissions. The helicopter is waved off, and my planes fall back and fly home. The Syrian CAP reforms, and returns to loiter over the smoking ruins of the Latakia airbase.

**FEB 14 – REST OF DAY**

As my strike makes its way back home, celebrating the success of their mission, my ships and subs move to new duty stations. The Iowa group gathers up the Turkish MEKO frigate, and then turns to cruise for Akrotiri, to cover the amphibs which are anchored there. The SSNs move north of Cyprus and south and south-east of Cyprus, to guard against any Soviet subs coming from those directions.

Syrian activity during the day is extremely limited. One lone Albatross, and one lone Su-24 make an appearance, but that is the extent of their offensive action. Patrols continue over the mainland, as expected.

My next attack falls on Aleppo, and is an SEAD attack, intended to get rid of the high-altitude SAMs in the area. F-16s with HARM shut down the SA-3 radars, while Turkish F-104s and F-16s come in beneath the SA-2 radar to destroy those sites, and then finish off the damaged SA-3s. There are multiple airbases in the area, and numerous MiG-21s try and intercept the attackers. As with Latakia, those aren’t so bad, but the pop-up MiG-29s are much more dangerous. Nonetheless, we manage to fend them off and extract our strike force.

**CONCLUSION**

As operations conclude, we are reasonably well positioned. The Soviet surface presence in this corner of the Med is gone, as are the known enemy subs, and their air-forces based in Latakia and Damascus (the Badgers). Air defences in the Aleppo area have also been reduced, and those bases are vulnerable to subsequent high-altitude LGB attack. Our ships are intact and gathered at Akrotiri awaiting deployment orders.

We are essentially black on anti-shipping ordnance. I've got a reserve of 5 Harpoons on the Iowa, four more for the P-3s at Souda, a couple of Exocets and some Sea Skuas. We have nothing else to face further surface threats except SAMs in surface mode, and gunfire. TLAMs have been completely expended. It will take months for industry to rebuild what we have used today. Aircraft losses have been modest, and AAM stockpiles are probably acceptable for several days of further containment operations against Syria, provided we are not called on to make heavy strikes. Short-ranged SAMs are in good supply, although stocks of long-range missiles are starting to be a concern, particularly on the Leahy.

**PLAY OBSERVATIONS**

Wow! This one’s great. Tons of action, from frantic self defence, to sneaky subs, to massive hammering blows of surface group missile barrages. I think the Med works really well, because the quarters are so confined that you can’t just vanish into the cold dark Atlantic where the AI can’t find you. They’ve got you spotted, and they can actually bring blows to bear. I enjoyed it immensely.

The presence of Israel and Jordan on the bottom of the map was an interesting touch. I was always worried that some sort of political event was going to crop up, forcing me to intervene and divert forces. After the initial air threat had passed, I always kept some Turks with LGBs and bombs in reserve, along with the RF-4s and British recce Canberras, in case I had to go Scud-hunting in the Syrian interior to keep Israel out of the war.

If the Latakia strike had gone poorly, I was contemplating closing in for a battleship bombardment of known SAM sites. Wouldn’t that have been exciting! (It’s a shame runways aren’t a valid target for 16” guns.)

The uncoordinated small Syrian attacks and probes were certainly infuriating, forcing me to repeatedly divert away from what I wanted to do, but the cost in Syrian pilots was appalling. It may be a good representation of disorganised hasty attacks and poor internal communications, but I have to wonder if the Syrians would have called them off after strike after strike stopped coming home? (Just musing, but it may have partly been because I left my jammers on after the initial attack, so they always knew approximately where I was, even after the Badgers died. Thus, the planes launched immediately after they readied. Perhaps if I had ‘vanished’ completely, there would have been a much bigger strike saved up when I reappeared?)

I never did send the U-2s over Syria. The SA-2 proved the U-2 was meat on the table in 1962. Facing a foe well equipped with SA-2s, SA-5s, and SA-10s, I kept it well off shore.