

MarkShot's COTA Battle Planning Checklist

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Purpose

This document represents a checklist of factors a player should take into consideration when performing the initial analysis and planning for a battle. (95% of these factors would also be appropriate for HTTR planning as well.)

The List

1. **Scenario Duration** – You will need this to tailor your plan accordingly.
2. **Briefings** – Read both the general briefing and your side specific briefing. You are looking for information on the OPFOR. Although information on your own side may be interesting. Certainly, it is available in greater detail elsewhere. In particular, see if you can answer the following questions.
 - a. What is the size of the enemy forces?
 - b. What is the condition of the enemy forces (fatigue, ammo, supply)?
 - c. What is the main composition of the enemy forces (armor, mechanized, motorized, on foot)?
 - d. How much artillery and air support does the enemy enjoy?
 - e. When and where may enemy reinforcements enter the battle?
 - f. What type of reinforcements is the enemy expecting?
 - g. The briefing may provide you some clue as to what the enemy considers important. Scenario objectives may be asymmetric between the two sides. For example, both sides may be attempting to exit at the same location. Thus, you would need to both defend this location and exit at the same time.
3. **Objectives** – Review the objectives both from the game map and also from the side panel. Pay attention to the following questions.
 - a. What are the primary objectives? (meaning the ones that if they are achieved you might ignore others)

- b. Are the minor objectives sufficiently numerous that their combined effect could be critical to the scoring?
 - c. What is the nature of the objectives? Are they awarded on scenario completion or as a result of occupation? When do they activate and when do they expire?
 - d. For an exit objective, how many units and of what types are needed to satisfy it?
 - e. For secure or deny crossing objectives are the associated crossing points primed or not?
 - f. How do the position of the objectives relate to one another and the initial forces on the map? Are the primary objectives widely scattered or tightly clustered? Is there a natural progression from one major objective to another?
 - g. What theme is the scenario designer trying to convey with the objectives (as this will help you conceptualize your plan better)? On first glance, the objectives all just show up as points on a map. Sequences of objectives could represent phase lines for a withdrawal or a delaying action. Sequences of objectives could represent the expected progression of an attack. Low valued objectives strung along a road often represent the need to maintain a supply line. Etc...
 - h. What emphasis is placed on destroying the enemy? When the emphasis is high this allows a certain freedom to ignore objectives and work on massing fire power for a kill zone as opposed to distributing it widely.
4. **Enemy Intel OOB** – Although an actual OOB will not be available, the initial intel for the enemy displayed on the map should provide some useful clues. Here are some questions to consider.
- a. What is the size of the enemy forces?
 - b. What is the main composition of the enemy forces (armor, mechanized, motorized, on foot)?
 - c. What is the national identity of the troops?
 - d. Are there any specific unit locations which should be noted? Like engineering units which are securing bridges.

5. **Initial Own OOB** – Review the OOB via the OOB tab, the unit tabs, and the map. Look to answer the following.
 - a. What is the size of your initial forces?
 - b. What is the organization of your initial forces? Neatly balanced battalions or brigades with organic support units? Light battalions or brigades with support units mainly attached at higher levels? Less generic specially constructed battle groups?
 - c. What type of units compose your forces (armor, mechanized, motorized, or on foot)?
 - d. How much arty do you have at your disposal? What is their reach relative to the size of the map, the distance to the objectives, and likely engagement areas?
 - e. How are you set for support weapons such as heavy machine gun, anti-tank artillery, flak, infantry gun, tank destroyer, assault gun units?
 - f. What other specialty units do you have? Engineers and Bridge Building unit?
 - g. What are the strengths and weaknesses of your units and their commanders?
 - h. Are there any explicit recon units included in the OOB? Usually these will be light tank and armored car units.

6. **Own Reinforcements** – Review the reinforcement tab and the map locations which are highlighted when you select them. Questions you should get the answer to include the following.
 - a. When will reinforcements arrive? Group them into rough time segments.
 - b. Is the particular reinforcement a complete force or elements of a larger force all arriving in close proximity of time and space?
 - c. Where will the reinforcements arrive?
 - d. What type of units are arriving (armor, motorized infantry, mechanized infantry, foot infantry, arty, ...)?
 - e. What is the size of the force arriving? Company, Battalion, Brigade, or Division?

* NOTE: Once the reinforcements arrive, you should go back and apply the questions noted in #5 to them.

7. **Terrain and Road Network Analysis** – Study the map and answer the following questions.

- a. What are dominant defensible terrain features that permit control of various sections of the map? Often these are wooded areas and towns.
- b. Are any of the key terrain features further enhanced by being elevated?
- c. What elevated locations permit exceptionally good spotting across sections of the map?
- d. What areas contain dead space (line of sight shadows) which would be appropriate for reverse slope tactics or hide movement?
- e. What terrain features provide natural defensive boundaries? These often include bodies of water. Additionally woods, polder, and steep terrain may serve this purpose when it comes to motorized units.
- f. Where are the bridges, tunnels, and crossing points? What are the capacity of these?
- g. Are any of the bridges, tunnels, or crossing points primed with for demolition?
- h. Where do the roads run?
- i. What are the major road junctures?
- j. Where do the roads pass through impassable bordering terrain like forest or water?
- k. Where do the roads pass through built up areas?

8. **Own Force Disposition** – Use the OOB and map to examine your units via both the tabs and unit info box. Answers to the following will prove to be useful.

- a. Are my units ready to fight? They might not be if they are suffering from exhaustion, low cohesion, low on supplies, etc...
- b. Are my commands widely geographically dispersed or they tightly assembled and ready to begin operations?

- c. Have my units prepared their positions already? Are they dug-in, entrenched or even fortified?

9. **Enemy Intel Force Disposition** – Use the map to examine the enemy units displayed. Look for the following information.

- a. Where is the enemy located?
- b. What is the deployment status of the enemy? Is the enemy on the move or is the enemy in prepared positions?

10. **Strategic Plan Formulation** – Here you put forth your vision to win the battle. It may be a detailed plan which covers the entire battle or it may only be an initial plan which depends on seeing how the situation evolves. However, your plan should answer the following questions.

- a. Have you identified what are the key features of the map that you must control in order to achieve victory? Can you answer why these are the key features?
- b. Have you determined a sequence of actions relative to the key features of the map that will allow you to step from one key feature to the next?
- c. Have you considered what you will do if you turn out to be unable to secure a particular key feature or fail to defend a key feature?
- d. Does your plan take into consideration the particular type of units you have and their specific capabilities? Does it take into consideration the composition of the enemy's force?
- e. Does your plan integrate its orientation toward terrain features with the actual objectives which must be satisfied for victory?
- f. Has your plan incorporated how your reinforcements will feed into it?
- g. Have you identified fire bases for your army?
- h. Have you identified good deployment areas for your support weapons?
- i. Have you foreseen what recon will be necessary so that you will not be operating in the dark?
- j. Does your plan consider what roads you will need and lines of communications for yourself and the enemy?

- k. Are day/night cycles of high and low visibility properly utilized to best advantage?
- l. What specifics should be communicated with your orders? Should an attack be a protracted affair with multiple efforts being made or should everything be committed in a maximal effort?
- m. Have you picked the best units and commanders for the specific tasks to which they are assigned?

11. **Scheduling** – A key aspect of creating a schedule for a plan is that it represents milestones by which certain events need to have been achieved. Failure to stay on schedule is a clear indication that a plan is failing. Some questions to when reviewing your plan are listed below.

- a. Does the schedule allow adequate time for movement of forces?
- b. Does the schedule allow adequate time for order delays?
- c. Does the schedule allow adequate time for the ebb and flow of combat?
- d. Does the schedule allow some slack for the unexpected?
- e. Does the schedule allow adequate time for resupply?
- f. Does the schedule allow adequate time for units to recover from forced marches and combat?
- g. Does the schedule allow adequate time for units in a defensive role to dig-in?

12. **Force and Unit Tasking** – Your plan has been implemented in the game. Have you missed anything?

- a. Are there any units without orders on the map?
- b. Have you assigned your arty to a fire base if you are not leaving them in their organic formations?
- c. Have units performing recon been detached and given separate orders?
- d. Have your supply bases been told to setup in a secure location?
- e. Does each initial aspect in your plan have one or more forces assigned to carry it out?

- f. Did you use the path tools to test various paths to make sure that there will be no surprises?
- g. Did you set parameters for facing, footprints, formation, movement, ROF, and level of effort consistent with your plan?
- h. Have you assigned locations for senior HQs not immediately directing operations such that they are close to the action and also out of immediate danger?

Conclusion

I have put forward a lot of questions to be asked. The main focus of this document is for you as the commander to determine whether you have adequately prepared for the upcoming battle. It is not in the scope of this document to assist you in determining how to respond to the answers to the questions presented here. That has been covered, to some extent, in my mini-guides for HTTR and COTA.

Clearly, if you are losing your battles often and you fail to have answers to many of the Checklist's question, then perhaps further preparation is called for on your part.

Good luck!

Addendum

The following is a relevant perspective on planning as presented by David O'Connor in response to my effort to form a checklist.

This reminds me of when I was studying for my Captains exams and I was somewhat daunted by the factor checklists that were handed out to all the students on the course (volumes of text and diagrams, enough to make tired eyes glaze over I can assure you). Then I was fortunate enough to receive some very good advice from one of the Major instructors. He said the most important thing to do is to sort out the relevant factors from all the data. To do that use the "so what" test - ie if you are looking at a particular factor like enemy has tanks, ask yourself "so what" if the answer is not some concrete task you have to or should not perform (or a condition or trigger for a concrete task) then ignore it.

Eg. The enemy has lots of infantry. So what? I better be careful. This is a motherhood statement not a concrete task. So ignore it.

Eg2. The enemy has lots of infantry and I have only tanks. So what? Then avoid the covered approach to the objective as my tanks will be highly vulnerable there - choose

the open approach where my tanks can use their long range firepower and be less vulnerable. This is a relevant factor because it results in eliminating an option.

The art in operational warfare comes in being able to readily see the wood amongst the forest of trees, to know what factors are relevant in what circumstances. As Markshot says, with experience a good commander learns to recognise the patterns and the required responses.

Oh and one other thing about the "so what" test. You can use it recursively to interrogate and hone in on the relevance of a particular factor. Eg. The enemy has concentrated his forces on the right. So what? He can attack from this sector. So what? I need to reinforce this sector? So What? I don't have any available reserves? So what? I need to create a reserve? So what? The best place to do so would be from the left, where the enemy is weakest. So what? I will task the 2nd Panzer Regt positioned behind Komma to move behind the Sperkhios crossing and prevent the enemy from breaking through. And so on...