

Areas of Operations

Introduction

Areas of Operations (AOs) is a mechanism which restricts the area in which a formation can operate. Since each formation has its own AO, it will be to your advantage to finalize your formations and OB before embarking on the creation of AOs. In creating your AOs, you should be guided by the historical outcome of the battle. Which formations had which objectives? In what time frame were they expected to achieve these objectives, and what consequences followed if they did achieve them?

One important point to note. A formation can have multiple AOs which vary according to time and/or objectives. This makes sense, because although formations might start a battle with clearly defined objectives these might well alter as the battle progresses. If an AO becomes valid, because conditions about objectives are met, then those conditions are never checked again. For example, in Kharkov the Russian 21st Tank Corps gets a much larger AO if the Russians capture two objectives. Once the AO becomes valid it won't be negated if the Germans happen to retake the objectives.

It's also true that different armies had different abilities and objectives. The Russian formations at Kharkov are more restricted in their movements because the Russian command system was much less flexible and their formations were given much less latitude than the Germans.

Each formation can have up to 6 AOs per variant. Since there is one Historic scenario and up to ten further variants, that is a lot potential variability to deal with. You can use Editor functions to cut and paste AOs but it you will be saving yourself a lot of trouble if you don't embark on the task of creating variants until your Historic scenario has been totally tested and tweaked.

If you are creating a scenario on your own then it will be hard to get the volume of testing that you need until the scenario has been released to the public. We would strongly suggest that you do a historical scenario, and only contemplate variants once the historical scenario has had a significant public release. Don't worry about the reception, people will be very grateful that you have put in all the hard work to do a scenario at all and variants should be seen as bonus, on a user created scenario.

What do AOs achieve?

The AO system sets out to provide realistic constraints on the deployment of military units, and to model the effects of higher level considerations that aren't directly reflected by the game system. Some of these are listed below, with examples from Kharkov, so you can get an idea of how and why AOs should be employed.

To reflect logistical realities

The preparations for the Soviet offensive on Kharkov were extensive. New supply roads were constructed and large amounts of supplies were stockpiled. Given this extensive preparation, before the actual start of the scenario, it would simply not be militarily feasible for the Russian player to move all of the Kharkov forces north to Belgorod as soon as the scenario starts and kick off an offensive there. The AOs in place at Kharkov ensure that the Russian player must use the designated forces in the only area where they would have had sufficient logistical support to mount an offensive.

To reflect high level command decisions

Kharkov is an unusual battle with both sides deciding to conduct major offensives in more or less the same place and time. However, the nature of the battle would have been completely altered if the German offensive had started at the same time as the Soviet. The German forces in the south were not due to start their offensive until the 5th day of the offensive. The AO system allows us to restrict their movement until the nominated time, making sure that human players don't jump the gun.

To reflect different operational capabilities

The Red Army had systemic command and control problems throughout the war, though they did make significant improvements as the war progressed. However, they were always more rigid in their approach and this is reflected in the AOs in Kharkov, where German formations are typically given more latitude, in the form of larger AOs, than their Soviet opponents.

To reflect off map realities

The Red Army had large forces just to the north of Belgorod, and therefore just off the map. They took no part in the Kharkov offensive, though perhaps they should have been more active. Regardless of that, their very existence means that the German high command would never order all of the troops in or around Belgorod to move to Kharkov, so an AO which prevents this from happening makes a lot of sense.

Summary

The basic idea behind the AOs is pretty simple, and your AO structure should reflect this. Start out with a few simple structures that embody the critical elements of the battle. You can always elaborate on them later.

AO Editor Screen

Although it looks somewhat complicated, most of the display on the AO screen is there purely for information. Remember that an AO only applies to a formation, so make sure that you have the right Formation selected from the list on the right hand side of the screen.

Area Variant – [Historic, Variant1...Variant10] choose the variant that this AO will apply to for the current formation. If you don't specify any AOs for a particular variant then the system will use the Historical AOs. Therefore, every scenario must at least have AOs defined for the Historical scenario. Making variant scenarios is optional so if you start out with a single Historical scenario you won't have to use this feature.

HQ Evolve Decrease – Specify the numbers of turns early the HQ for the selected formation will change in this variant. To see this in action, select 1st Panzer Army and then choose Variant 4. You will see that the HQ Evolve Decrease is set to 2. This means that in Variant 4, the HQ for the 1st Panzer Army, which would normally evolve on Turn 5, will now evolve on Turn 3. This is the variant in which the German southern offensive can start two turns early, so the relevant HQs, including 1st Panzer Army must change early to enable this. This setting is only used if HQs are evolving during the scenario.

Start Stop – All AOs must have a start turn and stop turn. The AO can only be valid within those turns, although there may be other conditions which also need to be satisfied for the AO to come into effect.

Type – [Inclusion, Exclusion, None] Choose how the AO is to be defined on the edit map screen. Normally you would paint the hexes to be included in the AO, but for a very large AO it may be more convenient to paint the area to be excluded instead. You must choose either Inclusion or Exclusion for the AO to be active.

Priority – This is an important setting. It is quite common to have two or more AOs current on a particular turn. The Priority setting decides which AO will actually be in effect, with the AO with the highest priority number taking effect.

Enemy Objective Friendly Objective – These are conditional factors for an AO. The AO will only be valid if the nominated objectives are either Friendly or Enemy held.

Painting an AO

The actual AOs are painted onto the map. Use the Create/Modify Region button to go to the map and create or change an AO. The Paint Area button will add hexes to the AO, the Remove Elements button will remove them.

The Fill Area button doesn't actually fill within boundaries, but adds hexes according to the map using the Fill OPs number and move type. This fill will tend to stop at terrain features like rivers which will make creating a large area more convenient.

The Copy and Paste regions button work as you expect, letting you use one region as the basis for the next.



AO screen Examples

In order to better explain how things work, let's consider a real example. Make sure you are looking at the Historic scenario, and choose the Russian 21st Tank Corps from the formation list on the right.

At the top of the screen is a series of informational displays. The formation name and patches show which formation you are dealing with. The word 'Historic' and the numbers #4, #6 and #9 show that the formation has an AO defined in the Historic scenario and in variants 4, 6 and 9. As mentioned earlier, if an AO is not defined in a variant then the Historic AO will be used.

At the top left of our example you will see a series of numbers 6 28 39 40 -1 -1 which is a list of the AO numbers used by the current formation in the selected variant. There are four defined so far and two unused, so you see four integers and two entries of -1 to indicate an unused AO. You don't need to worry about the numbers themselves as the system handles all the details. It is useful as a quick reminder of how many AOs have been defined.

The screen shot below shows the section of the screen under discussion.

	Formation Name	21 Tank Corps	Historic
Superior Patch	6		#1 #6
Patch			#2 #7
			#3 #8
			#4 #9
			#5 #10
6 28 39 40 -1 -1			

Selecting an AO

Each formation, in each variant, can have up to six AOs. These are selected by the buttons at the bottom of the screen. Examine the screen shot below.



The 1 Button takes you to the map to paint the regions, which will be explained later. The buttons 4, 5, 6 and 7 point to the four AOs that have been defined for the formation in this variant. Note that there is no 'New AO' button, there is a limit of six AOs for each formation (for each variant) and you use these buttons to select them.

The Editor button will show the map in a view only mode. The 3 button, which is only active in Variants and not in the Historic scenario, will copy all the Historic AOs to the currently selected variant. This is a short cut to provide a basis for further editing.

AO Conditions Illustrated

The essence of the AO system is the conditions under which they change. Using our 21st Tank Corps example, use the 4 button to check out the first AO and the 5 button to check out the second.

There are two changes. The most obvious is that the second AO is only valid if two objectives 21 TC Release and 23 TC Release are Friendly. Both AO are valid from Turn 1 to 4, but the second AO has a Priority of 1 which is higher than the value of None entered for the first AO. Check out the screen shot below to see the details of the second AO.

Area Variant	Historic		
HQ Evolve Decrease	0		
	Start	Stop	Type
#2 (473)	1	4	Inclusion
Priority	Priority 1		
Enemy Objective			
<input type="checkbox"/>			
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			
<input type="checkbox"/>			
Friendly Objective			
49: 21 TC Release			
50: 23 TC Release			
<input type="checkbox"/>			

How it all works together:

In the first four turns, two AOs are potentially valid for the 21st Tank Corps (in the Historic variant). The first AO is always valid for the nominated turns. Selecting that AO and hitting the 1 button will take you to the AO painting function. You should see the picture shown in the screen shot below, with the AO confined to a very small region, indicated by the blue overlay.



The second AO is conditionally valid. If the Russians take the two objectives indicated in the Friendly section then the second will also be valid, and having a Priority setting, will take precedence. Selecting the second AO and hitting the 1 button will show you a much enlarged AO for the Tank Corps as shown below.



So if the Russians capture those objectives in the first four turns, the Tank Corps is let off the leash and allowed a much larger AO. If you check out the third AO you'll see that it runs from turns 5-16, so even if the TC Release objectives aren't taken, the Tank Corps will be given a new AO on Turn 5 anyway.

Checking out the fourth and final AO will show it runs from Turns 1 to 16 and has a Priority 2, has the largest AO extending much further east than the others, but depends on Izyum being in enemy hands. So any time Izyum falls, the Tank Corps will be allowed to react and either counter attack or just try and flee from the pocket.

With a combination of turn based and objective based conditions, you can configure the AO system to be very dynamic, providing sensible restraints to formations while still allowing a flexible reaction to changing circumstances.