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Archives Listing No. 12 will not appear until Hoosier Archives #16 so that the last two articles in Eugene Prosnitz's three-article series can appear complete in this and the following issue.

OUT OF THE ARCHIVES

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ALLIANCE BREAKING, DOUBLE-CROSSING
AND THE BALANCE OF POWER

by

Eugene Prosnitz

One of the most neglected areas in Diplomacy, especially in the postal game, is the art of alliance breaking. A player who is in the process of being conquered by two or more enemies will frequently make no effort to change the power line-up, but will just sit back passively and await the inevitable defeat.

Of course, alliance breaking is not easy, and it's usually wiser for the allies to stick together until they've completed the job, for reasons to be discussed later in this article. However, there are various techniques which can be tried.

First, there is the one-sided offer. Usually agreements between powers should be on a 50-50 basis, or close to it, but when one side has a much better bargaining position this is not so. When you're trying to break an enemy alliance you may take headway by offering one of your foes a deal which is tremendously one-sided in his favor,

and is just too good to turn down. For example, suppose as Turkey is fighting Austria and Russia. I might offer to support Austria into both Vienna and Sevastopol (both belonging to Russia) and ask nothing in return. There's nothing wrong with being very generous with a third party's possessions.

If you are in the unfortunate position of being the victim of a three-way attack (as seems to happen to Austria, for example, very often these days) the three powers will undoubtedly have to fight among themselves after they wipe you out. Try to pick the enemy power which is most likely to end up on the short end of the stick, and detach him from the alliance. For example, if two out of your three enemies are from the same city, and the third is from a different geographical area, the two neighbors are likely to stay allied and this should be pointed out to the third.

Or suppose one of the three aggressors stands to get the smallest portion of your territory. For example, in a three-way attack on France, England usually comes out without too much, i.e., just one supply center, Brest. Work on England to try to get him to shift sides.

Sometimes one of the powers involved in a three-way attack seems highly likely to be "caught in the middle" because of the position on the board. Suppose that France, Germany, and Russia all attack England. Then afterwards Germany is in between France and Russia. England should probably concentrate its effort on detaching Germany from the alliance.

When you are the victim of a two-way alliance, it is often more difficult to convince one of the allies to change sides. For one thing, two powers working in close cooperation are more likely to stick together, even after you're defeated. Also, if they are successful, the rewards are greater; the pie only has to be cut two ways.

With either a two-way or a three-way alliance, things frequently work out so that one ally emerges much stronger than the other(s). If things are pointing in that direction, show the weaker ally how his compatriot is taking advantage of him.

Very often one of the allies will have engaged in double dealing, making a phony agreement with you and at the same time an "honest" agreement with his true ally. Point this out to the other party, and perhaps the two of you can get together against the double dealer.

Suppose all rational methods of persuasion fail. You might try "kamikaze" tactics. This entails concentrating your forces in one direction, as a way of showing one particular enemy that, no matter what happens to you, you are going to make sure he doesn't get any of the spoils, and the lions' share goes to the others. This may convince him that he should make peace with you. Of course, this tactic often means that you leave you rear unguarded and get wiped out even more quickly, so it should be regarded as a last resort.

Closely related to this is the threat to throw the game to one of your enemies if the other does not cooperate with you. I consider this a legitimate tactic, as you're trying to save your own neck, and it's up to the party you're trying to deal with to preserve the balance of power, since he can do so by making concessions to you, or making peace, and still remain in a good position.

What about multiple game alliances? This raises serious ethical

questions. Obviously if someone double-crosses me in one game, or shows himself to be a selfish ally in one game, I'd be less likely to deal with him the next time we cross paths, other things being equal. However, when it gets to the point of saying, "Unless you change sides and join me in Game A, I'll attack you in Game B," I feel this transcends the bounds of proper Diplomacy, for the reason that deals of this type give the players who are in a lot of games an unfair advantage. However, it seems to me that thinking of this type, even if not expressed, will go on at least subconsciously, and is difficult or impossible to curtail.

Turning to the question of when, and how, to double-cross: When contemplating a double-cross, or to put it more euphemistically, a shifting of alliances (which may be a lesser category of backstab), one must weigh the immediate gain against the following considerations: (1) Will you need to deal with the victim again in this game? (2) How will this affect your dealings with him in other games (concurrent or future)? (3) How will this affect the other players' opinion of your trustworthiness?

First, the question of first-move strategy. I've noticed a number of players enter into inconsistent alliances at the beginning of the game, e. g., Austria forms an anti-Turkish alliance with Russia, forms an anti-Russian alliance with Turkey, and breaks one of them. The argument is that if you write to everybody you're more likely to get an ally.

However, this reasoning is somewhat faulty because, in the above example, suppose Austria writes to Russia and gets turned down. Chances are that Russia and Turkey are already allied and a letter to Turkey at this point would do no good.

On the other hand, maybe Austria would have gotten results by writing Turkey right away, before the Turks and Russians got together, so there's no clear answer. I consider the question of what negotiations to enter into at the start of a game, to be the most difficult problem in Diplomacy.

On balance, however, I think the practice of making inconsistent alliance and following them up with first-year (or second-year) double-crosses is unwise. For one thing, once you get a reputation for doing this, players are less likely to deal with you at the beginning of the game, and this can be disastrous. Also, the backstab in this case does not have the effect of knocking your enemy out of commission; you may need his help later in the game, and have a tough time getting it.

In a game in which I'm playing Italy, Austria made alliances with Turkey, Russia, and Italy on the first move, and immediately double-crossed both Russia and Italy. He gained a tempo, i. e., he acquired Galicia and kept Italy out of Tyrolia, which he could not have done had his intentions been known in advance. However, this compensation was nowhere near sufficient when compared with the price he paid, regarding his future dealings with the Russian and Italian players. The result, which could have been foreseen, was that shortly thereafter Austria made what he thought was a deal with Russia. However, Russia, feeling that one good turn deserved another, double-crossed Austria, who was then virtually completely destroyed in short order.

Another point: If you enter into inconsistent alliances, the players may let each other know about your double dealing. Or, worse yet, they may prove it by sending each other copies of your letters. (This is one of the reasons why a telephone game figures to be the dirtiest game of all.)

In my opinion, the best time to double-cross another player is when it's not a question of a small gain, but when, on the other hand,

the bracketed will cripple him beyond repair. Here, you won't have to worry about whether this player will ever trust you again in this game, because you won't need to deal with him any more. If your ally is foolish enough to leave himself wide open for this sort of thing, it's his own funeral.

On the other hand, it's best to be fairly scrupulously honest in the small scale promises and deals that go on all the time between allies. If you lie to an ally or friendly neutral in a small scale way, where you don't actually intend to declare war on him, you're sowing seeds of mistrust without gaining any great benefits. My philosophy is to be completely truthful in about 95% of my dealings and correspondence, and to hope other players become aware of this. However, the other 5% of the time they'll get hit with everything but the kitchen sink.

Similarly, it is unwise, in my opinion, to offer false promises to an enemy who is trying to make a deal with you, and who is already on the ropes, if you can defeat him by straightforward play.

As for the principle of balance of power: This is mentioned because of the disturbing tendency I have noted, in many postal games, for a player to ally with a strong neighbor against a weak neighbor, instead of the other way around.

My understanding has always been that the object of the game is to win (or tie), or if you can't do that, to prevent someone else from winning. If you permit another power to conquer Europe, you should get no credit for finishing second.

However, this does not seem to be universally accepted. For example, consider 1966B (Diplophobia game 2BA), where Russia has 17 supply centers, yet the other six powers are all squabbling among themselves.

The situation where two allies attack a third, and continue the attack until the victim is obliterated, is quite common. And if the two allies expand at equal strength, it is quite feasible. However, where one of the allies is getting much the better of it, the logical thing is for the other ally to switch sides, to prevent the first party from winning, or gaining a significant edge.

When one country becomes significantly strong, all his neighbors should rally against him. This often leads to a situation where each power is protesting, "I'm not so strong; he's really in better shape."

Sometimes a single expeditionary force can help restore the balance of power. In a recent game over the board, in which France was doing quite well while Italy, principally engaged on the eastern front, was not fighting France, Italy sent a solitary fleet to the Mid-Atlantic. This maneuver did not help Italy much in the short term sense, but by harassing France considerably it helped restore the balance of power in western Europe.

I've noticed that in postal games Turkey almost always does tremendously well, as contrasted to many of our over-the-board games, where Turkey has turned out to be one of the weaker powers. This is because the players realize that Turkey, once it gets off the ground, grows into a Frankenstein monster, and must be stopped at the outset of the game. Usually, in our games, nobody wants to play Turkey because of the difficulty of getting allies.

(I can see that this article will probably bounce back in my face the first time I get Turkey in a postal game.)

Many players feel that they can wait until a power obtains 14 or 15 supply centers before uniting against it. However, this often proves fallacious, because difficulties of communication and coordination, as well as lack of trust, usually result in giving the front runner an easy victory at this point.