

## WARGAME FIRST REVIEW

<b>Littoral Commander</b>	★★★★☆
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<b>Period</b>	Modern	<b>Publisher</b>	Dietz Foundation
<b>Conflict/Battle</b>	US vs China, South China Seas, 2040	<b>Designer</b>	Sebastian Bae
<b>Force Size</b>	Coy-Bn, plus 1-2 SAGs	<b>Date</b>	2023
<b>Mvr Units</b>	Section/Platoon	<b>Grid Size</b>	Hex, 20km
<b>DOWNness</b>	2-3DOWN	<b>Map Size</b>	260 sq km of island and sea (c. 20km x 20km)
<b>Players</b>	2-6	<b>Turn Dur.</b>	~2 hours
<b>Player Roles</b>	Cmdr of MAGTAF Cmdr of PLA Force	<b>Playing Time</b>	~2 hrs on first time for simple Coy scenario

### Introduction

<b>Subject of the game</b>	US vs China, South China Seas, 2040
<b>Scope</b>	A high tactical game to demonstrate new USMC Force Design 2030 concepts at ~Bn level, focussed on littoral engagement
<b>Components</b>	4 x A1 maps of different areas. 48pp rules booklet. 16pp Scenarion Booklet with 6 scenarios. 2xdouble-sided QRS. ~200 counters. A6 Tracker cards for combat unit (~90), ~112 JCC cards per side. ~20 event cards
<b>Presentation</b>	<p><b>Good:</b> Looks nice.</p> <p><b>Bad:</b> Rule book could be clearer – quite dense esp with LRS/Intercepts. Some JCC cards very dense and punctuation of options unclear. White text of pale blue for se labelling poor. Pity it lost the cubes of FMF. Could really do with some sort of flow chart for intercepts. Some useful markers missing – eg Jamming effect. The unit tracker cards would have been better at A7/playing card size as big forces mean huge table tops just for the cards (and attached JCC cards).</p>
<b>Designer's focus/objectives</b>	No designer notes but called a “grand tactical educational wargame”, to be fast-paced, accessible, flexible, fun and competitive. Also described as an “intellectual sandbox” to explore Force Design 2030 and other concepts. At least two Bae interviews on YouTube about it – Brutecast and ACDC.
<b>Overall system description</b>	As well as standard combat units each side has Joint Capability Cards (JCC) which provide the full range of MDO capabilities. Initial JCC allocation is bought at start of game, sometimes with option to supplement. Play is by interleaving Task Force (1/2-1/3 <sup>rd</sup> force) activations form each side. Each TF gets 3 AP to spend on units or JCCs. Focus on missiles/rockets/drones/air and IAD responses creating almost a mini-game within each activation.
<b>Real Battle Notes</b>	Not yet available!

## The Game System

<b>Principal areas of reality represented in the game</b>	MDO effects – incl cyber, UxVs, EW, info war Logistics
<b>Important abstractions</b>	Combat relatively simple – single combat values for close and long range fires and IAMD.
<b>Types of decisions required</b>	What JCC to choose at start. Which order to play TFs How to spend limited APs on mix of unit and JCC actions
<b>Effects of the game system's mechanical requirements on the player's decision making</b>	Alternating activation of TFs can make choices critical Limited to 3AP per TF Non-phasing player at a disadvantage for “whole turn” actions
<b>Likes/Good Elements (inc ease of play; really good below)</b>	Combat simple Good MDO/UxV implementations – but almost overwhelmed by the choice. Nice blend of land and sea, as expected from a littoral game
<b>Contributions to the wargaming state of the art</b>	Probably the fullest MDO implementation yet Ditto UAVs/UGVs (although latter quite abstract) Good logistics model #dice thrown is based on remaining logistics load – can use as much or as little as you want each combat/fire.
<b>Deficiencies</b>	The Intercept/Nullify model can be a bit complex, particularly with the density of some card wordings and could do with better playing aids or some streamlining. But perhaps the point is that future war is almost 3 levels: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Things flying around in the air and trying to hi things on the ground – planes, missiles, rockets, UAVs</li> <li>• The whole MDO/CEMA/C5ISR piece to work out who is where and degrade en C2</li> <li>• And then a very simple battle for the poor grunts!</li> </ul>
<b>Improvements? (beyond fixing above)</b>	No, covers pretty much everything you'd want, but could just be a bit slicker
<b>Evaluation of the system's success at achieving the designer's goals</b>	Certainly “grand tactical educational wargame”, and a good way no doubt to explore USMC and other initiatives – although despite the information on sources and models quoted in interviews it seems a bit too abstracted to be analytical about them – so very much education and probably does deliver on the “intellectual sandbox”. The Intercept bit does slow the fast-paced nature, and probably detracts from the fun side. You'd need to be pretty committed to play a big scenario, and whole extra level of challenge compared to WACN.

## Overall Evaluation

<b>Does the game work? (Veracity)</b>	Yes, if a little confused in some wording and potential to get bogged down in intercepts.
<b>Evaluation of the player's experience</b>	Lots of decisions to make at all stages. Possibly best played with the actual players strictly as the Task Force commanders and leaving minions to run the Intercept game. Ripe for automation – would be awesome then – like a stripped down COMANO.
<b>Replay value</b>	High – particularly given all the maps and scenarios and ability to create your own. Very much a sandbox.
<b>Does it have real world validity?/Insights?</b>	Hard to map to the real situation as targets 2040! It does though seem to (over?) emphasise the high tech and I'd be surprised if real results were as clean cut – infantry units seem particularly brittle.
<b>Is it a good game?</b>	Yes, but could be even better
<b>Who would be most interested in the game?</b>	People with a serious interest in modern combat, littoral and MDO. Not really suited to someone with a general interest in China or wargaming.
<b>Is the game good value?</b>	Depends where you are. ~\$135 in UK, \$85 in USA.

## MECHANICS (relative to Urban/PhD)

(include Intricacy of the system, and the mechanical ease of play)

Aspect	Mechanic
<b>Activation/C&amp;C</b>	Alternative by TF. 3AP per TF for units (typ 3-5) and JCCs (~10). No roll to activate.
<b>Comms</b>	Automatic – although en CEMA cards can deny APs/JCC/unit activations etc
<b>UxV</b>	Yes, JCC cards for UAV types and UGV. UGVs just an enhancement to units, but tactical UAVs have own counter (force ones don't)
<b>CEMA</b>	Yes, whole host of JCC cards. Each side has a Network Centre and degrading this degrades effects of Intercept and Fires.
<b>Other ISR</b>	Counters in Concealed or Revealed states. Blocks were unfortunately dropped between FMF and LC. MILDEC (military deception) counters to act as dummies – can soak up one hit.
<b>Movement</b>	MA per unit, MC per terrain type. Type MA=3.
<b>Damage</b>	Step-loss per hit. Most units only have 2 steps. Doesn't effect combat capability.
<b>Direct Fire</b>	Na, 20km hexes
<b>Assault</b>	Simple throw against ground combat value. But #dice only limited by log state.
<b>Indirect Fire</b>	As Assault but vs LRS fire. Most LRS fire can potentially be intercepted by CAP or IAMD systems
<b>IEDs</b>	Na
<b>Morale</b>	No – assume rolled into the hit capacity
<b>Opinion</b>	Influence meter with JCC cards to effect
<b>Victory Condition</b>	Per scenario – linked to scenario objectives. No VP track.
<b>UTZs</b>	Na
<b>Building Damage</b>	Na
<b>Civilians</b>	Exist in some scenarios. Event card driven mainly, incl “collateral damage”.
<b>Subterranean</b>	Na
<b>Other Urban Specifics/Notable</b>	Na

[Per scenario/run through]

<b>Date</b>	11 Oct 23	<b>Scenario</b>	Introductory scenario
<b>Players</b>	DB	<b>Constraints</b>	None

### SET-UP

As per standard

### HOW IT PLAYED

T1: USMC force UAV detected en front line units and hit with MLRS. CAS takes out AD but fails to kill Inf Pl. PLA tried to use own ship fires, but UAV shot down, and MILDEC took hit intended for MLRS. Forgot to prioritise getting detected inf to safety, so both blown away by DDG in its activation. No PLA combat force left. USMC SOF put on en MLRS, but tactical cyber (again) fails. PLA jamming fails.

- T2: UAV renews PLA detection, MLRS used in CB but fails. BRAVO assaults ALPHA, both cause 1 dmg, but MILDEC protects BRAVO and ALPHA was at 1 so gone. BRAVO at 1SUP.
- T3: USMC ALPHA attacks, UGVs giving +5 and wipes out PLA ALPHA. Attempted anti-ship strikes by each sides CAP fail. No PLA combat forces left. Game over.

### RESULTS

USMC victory

### THOUGHTS (c.f. RL AND URBAN, only for subsequent plays)

na

<b>Date</b>	12 Oct 23	<b>Scenario</b>	Luson Straits
<b>Players</b>	DB	<b>Constraints</b>	None

## SET-UP

As per standard

## HOW IT PLAYED

T1: USMC failed to detect even with sats. PLAN stayed quiet. PLA forgot to bring spare ISR so had to advance. USMC engaged with HIMARS causing cas but not loss, MILDEC soaking one.

- T2: One PLAN SAG unmask, but IAMD stops missiles. CAP detects second SAG and manages to get one hit on a DDG. DDGs running low on IADS and USMC on islands out of longer range HIMARS. Big battle by their airport, 2 PLA PI vs powerful USMC PI. USMC weakened but pulled back. USMC MLRS then took out the lead PLA PI.
- T3: SAG 172 takes out MILDEC of 2-2C, and 2-1C and 2-2C only down to SR missiles. Jamming attack limits TF NY on the islands to only one AP. In fact TF NY now impotent due to ranges (ok messed up a bit and they fired early, but result the same)
- - T4: JCCs updated. Focus on the naval battle. SAG 172 tries to hit remaining USMC in range (4 ALPHA) but all intercepted. SAG 104 at limit of map and range and only 8 hexes from victory. USMC Sat SPI otter SAG104, PLN "blindspot" JCC failed, made submarine attack, ASW spots it and kills it. USMC on Luzon pummelling IADS less PLA with MLRS, wiping out 2 unit.
- T5: JCC resupply. SAG104 on U column, SAG 172 gone dark as no immediate threats. PLA just misses capacity to take out USMC littoral tpt. Xian H-20 stealth bomber evades detection and takes out USMC 1 ALPHA, 1-1 CHARLIE and 1-1 DELTA. PLN EW gives USMC only AP to land littoral. 3-2 CHARLIE immediately tries to engage SAG104 but Satellite blindspot. PLA SOF spot 2 ALPHA. but even with TacNet degraded most incoming defeated. USMC strike back with effective CB.
- T6: SAG104 crosses V column. Out of range of all surface USMC. Mux fails to detect the ships, and CAP blown out of sky so USMC can't launch SU strike or deep air strike. Game over. PLN victory.

## RESULTS

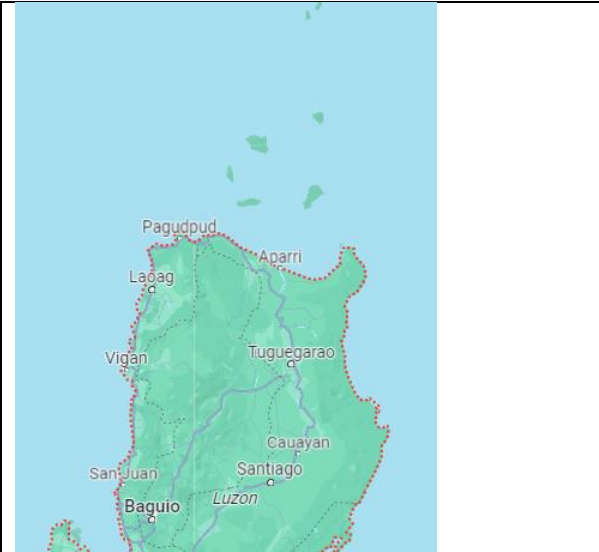





PLN victory

## THOUGHTS (c.f. RL AND URBAN, only for subsequent plays)

Fuller experience than the intro game with one USMC TF trying to counter the PLN ships whilst another has effectively a delaying action (or poss kill action) against the advancing PLA. Getting better at the Detect-Select # salvos – select Intercept wpn and salvos – try and intercept – prosecute attack cycle. Still some doubts about how "realistic" it is, at least in UK terms, for even 2040.

# IMAGES

## Meeting Engagement

	
<p><b>Real terrain</b></p>	<p><b>STARTEX</b></p>
	
<p><b>End Turn 1</b></p>	<p><b>End Turn 2</b></p>
	
<p><b>End Turn 3 - ENDEX</b></p>	<p><b>Whole Table</b></p>