



National Defence

Défense nationale

IR 14/86 - IRAN/IRAQ:
Military Trends and Political
Motives

FILE No.
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SECRET

| SCHEDULE AUTHORITY YEAR(S) | PÉRIODE DE CONSERVATION |
|----------------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1 | 1970-1979 |
| 2 | 1980-1989 |
| 3 | 1990-1999 |
| 4 | 2000-2009 |
| 5 | 2010-2019 |
| 6 | 2020-2029 |
| 7 | 2030-2039 |
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| 14 | 2100-2109 |
| 15 | 2110-2119 |
| 16 | 2120-2129 |
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| 20 | 2160-2169 |
| 21 | 2170-2179 |
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| 23 | 2190-2199 |
| 24 | 2200-2209 |
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| 27 | 2230-2239 |
| 28 | 2240-2249 |
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| 31 | 2270-2279 |
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| 123 | 3190-3199 |
| 124 | 3200-3209 |
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IRAN/IRAQ: Military Trends and Political Motives

IRAN/IRAQ: Évolution de la situation militaire et motifs politiques

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IRAN/IRAQ: Évolution de la situation militaire et motifs politiques

Résumé

L'Iran a massé des troupes dans le secteur sud de la frontière irano-iraquienne. L'Iraq a réagi en prenant une série de mesures défensives, dont le recours accru à sa force aérienne. Si elle est lancée, l'offensive se traduira probablement par des pertes élevées et des gains minimes sur le terrain. L'objectif de l'Iraq est de mettre fin aussi vite que possible à la guerre qui, si elle se poursuit, mettra en danger, à la longue, l'actuel gouvernement de Saddam Hussein. Le gouvernement iranien paraît peu intéressé à négocier un accord mettant fin aux hostilités qui ne satisferait pas au moins à ses conditions de longue date, à savoir la destitution de Saddam Hussein, la désignation de l'Iraq comme l'agresseur, la paiement de réparations et le retour aux frontières d'avant la guerre. Ils sont peut-être quelques-uns en Iran à douter du bien-fondé de la guerre, mais aucun des candidats à la succession de Khomeiny ne va probablement modifier la présente ligne de conduite à court terme.

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IRAN/IRAQ: Military Trends and Political Motives

Summary

1. Iran has been massing ground forces in the southern Iraq/Iran border area. Iraq has responded by implementing a series of defensive measures, including the increased use of its airforce. The offensive, if launched, will likely result in high casualty rates and little geographic gain. Iraq's objective is to end the war as quickly as possible since its continuation, will in time, threaten the position of the current government of Saddam Hussein. The Iranian government appears uninterested in negotiating an end to the war on anything less than its longstanding terms; namely the dismissal of Saddam Hussein, the designation of Iraq as the aggressor, the payment of reparations and a return to pre-war frontiers. While some in Iran may doubt the wisdom of the war, none of those who may succeed Khomeini are likely to change this policy in the short term.

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Military Situation

2. Iranian regular army and Revolutionary Guard formations have been concentrating in the Hawizah Marsh and Majnoon Island area since November 1985 (see map). This build-up, coupled with route improvements and road construction, indicates preparations for a possible offensive in the area. Any attack will likely be preceded by a prolonged artillery bombardment of the Iraqi positions and a major increase in communications activity. The Iranians will probably launch costly frontal attacks and any Iranians that do break through the Iraqi front line defences will face well placed mobile armour reserves and would probably meet determined resistance.

(SECRET/WNINTEL)

3. The marshy terrain of the Hawizah will restrict mobility and complicate logistics support of the Iranian Forces in any potential offensive operations, thus Iranian objectives will have to be limited and realistic. The severing of the Baghdad-Basrah Highway would be considered a moral victory for Iran, and therefore is the likely objective of any offensive.

(SECRET/WNINTEL)

4. Iraq has closely monitored the Iranian build-up and has shown a marked concern over the direction of future Iranian military operations in the Hawizah Marsh. In the past, Iraqi airpower has been sparingly committed to combat operations, but since early December 1985 the Iraqi airforce has flown a large number of sorties aimed at Iranian troop and equipment concentrations in the Hawizah area. On the ground, Iraqi formations have carried out major improvements to their defensive positions. Iraqi armour formations and

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elite units have been assigned to key defensive positions in the Hawizah. (SECRET/WNINTEL)

5. Although Iranian preparations have most probably been disrupted by Iraqi airpower, the Iranians will continue to mass in the Hawizah until Iran's leadership decides that the time is right for an attack. (SECRET/WNINTEL)

Political Considerations

6. Iraq's objective is to end the war as quickly as possible since its continuation will, in time, threaten the position of the current government. Relatively high casualties over the course of the war and the current three year stalemate has produced a war weariness among the civilians. While the military remains confident of their ability to defend against future attacks, they are aware of the danger that even a temporary setback on the central or southern and Hawizah March fronts would pose to the regime. In pursuit of this policy, the Baghdad government continually urges its interlocutors to attempt to mediate in this conflict. In December 1985, President Hussein asked his chief military supplier, the USSR, to pressure its allies to end military shipments to Iran. Most recently, Iraq has tried to involve African states in mediation efforts. (CONFIDENTIAL)

7. Iran's chief advantage in the conflict is manpower. It will continue to try to keep Iraq guessing about the timing, venue and size of future offensives. It remains unlikely that the economic impact of the war will undermine support for the regime among the mass of the Iranian population. Despite criticism of the regime's

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handling of the war, which is exacerbated by economic stringency, economic problems will neither precipitate a new offensive nor a quick settlement. As well, the government has been notably successful in reducing the vulnerability of its petroleum export facilities in the aftermath of Iraq's August and September 1985 attacks on Kharg Island.

(CONFIDENTIAL)

8. Despite its need to end the war relatively quickly, Iraq has so far not launched the type of concentrated and continuous attacks necessary to damage Iran's war making capacity fatally. Iraqis rationalize this reluctance, stating that the destruction of Iran's infrastructure would create enduring bitterness that would outlast the war. It seems clear, however, that Iraq hopes that the Tehran regime will abandon the war once Khomeini dies and that this will occur before Iraq suffers a major setback on the battlefield. The Iranian government is uninterested in negotiating an end to the war on anything less than its longstanding terms; namely the dismissal of Saddam Hussein, the designation of Iraq as the aggressor and payment of reparations and a return to pre-war frontiers. For Iran, the continuation of the war is a national duty to avenge Iraqi aggression and to extend the Islamic revolution. While some in Iran may doubt the wisdom of the war, none of those who may succeed Khomeini, as temporal or spiritual leaders of the country, are likely to change this policy in the short term.

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IRANIAN BUILD UP
IN
SOUTHERN BATTLEFIELD AREA



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