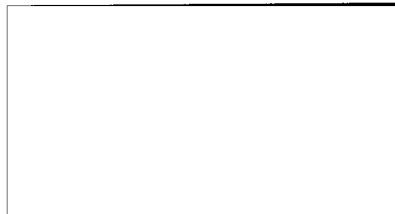




Directorate of Intelligence

Top Secret

MASTER FILE COPY
DO NOT GIVE OUT
OR MARK ON



70

Near East and South Asia Review



25X1

Supplement
3 January 1986

Top Secret

NESA NESAR 86-001J

3 January 1986

Copy 259

25X1



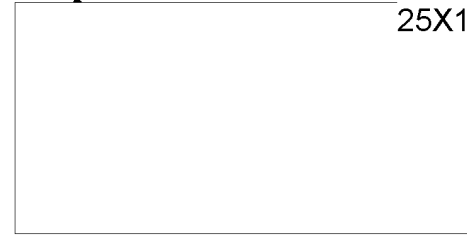
Directorate of
Intelligence

Top Secret

25X1

MASTER FILE COPY

**DO NOT GIVE OUT
OR MARK ON**



70

**Near East and
South Asia Review**



25X1

Supplement
3 January 1986

Top Secret

NESA NESAR 86-001J

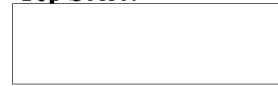
3 January 1986

Copy **259**

25X1

Page Denied

Top Secret



25X1

Near East and South Asia Review

25X1

Supplement

3 January 1986

Page

Articles

Iran-Iraq: Prospects for an Iranian Offensive in the South

1

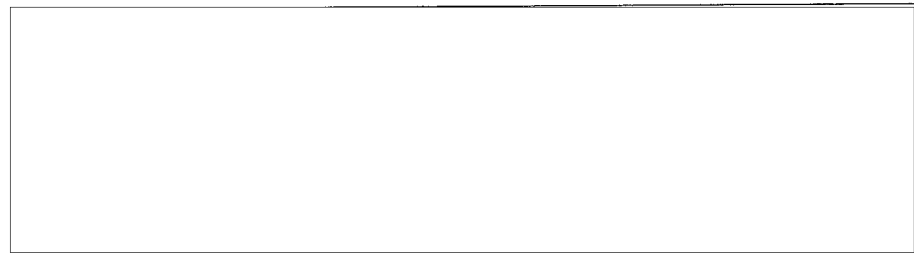
25X1



25X1

The buildup of men and materiel in Iran's southern sector indicates Tehran is contemplating a major offensive around Al Basrah, but there is a less-than-even chance it can succeed in reaching its objectives.

25X1



25X1

Some articles are preliminary views of a subject or speculative, but the contents normally will be coordinated as appropriate with other offices within CIA. Occasionally an article will represent the views of a single analyst; these items will be designated as noncoordinated views.

25X1



25X1



Top Secret

NESA NESAR 86-001J

3 January 1986

25X1

25X1

Top Secret





25X1

Articles


Iran-Iraq: Prospects for an Iranian Offensive in the South 

25X1


The buildup of men and materiel in Iran's southern sector indicates Tehran is contemplating a major offensive around Al Basrah. If Iran should launch such an attack in the near future, we believe there is a less-than-even chance it can succeed in reaching its objectives. Weaknesses in Iraq's leadership and its defensive posture, however, could give the Iranians an opportunity to achieve a breakthrough. 

Iran has launched major offensives in the marshes in each of the past two years. In the late winter of 1984, after a series of brigade-size feints in the central sector, Iranian forces attacked from the far eastern side of the marshes. Uncoordinated and insufficiently supported Iranian assaults and Iraq's use of chemical warfare led to Iran's defeat, although the Iranians captured the northern Majnoon Island. In March 1985, Iran used this island as a starting point to attack again and established a bridgehead on the western side of the marshes before being pushed back. Only the lack of cooperation between Revolutionary Guard and Army forces and Iraq's use of chemical weapons prevented an Iraqi defeat. 

25X1

The southern front offers advantages to Iran largely because the terrain and weather in the area limit Iraq's capabilities more than Iran's. The marshes and rivers in the south slow and sometimes stop the movement of the mechanized vehicles Iraq depends upon for its counterattacks. Also, if Iran attacks during the spring (as it has in the past), the rain, wind, and low cloud ceilings normal for that region and season will hinder Iraqi air support. The open plain of the central region, on the other hand, offers Iran's infantry no immediate objective or protection from counterattacks by Iraqi armor. The mountainous terrain in the north aids Iraq's defense, although it gives some advantage to infantry—the mainstay of Iran's forces—over armor. 


Iranian Preparations


Iran has been preparing since October 1985 for an offensive north of Al Basrah. As of early December the Iranians had concentrated six regular Army divisions and at least 11 Revolutionary Guard divisions in the area. Iran also is stockpiling the equipment needed for an offensive. 

25X1

25X1

Iran's Objectives

Iran's strategic objective would be to capture enough territory and inflict enough casualties to break Iraqi morale, achieve a psychological victory, and sustain domestic Iranian support for the war. Iran's minimum tactical objective would be to establish a foothold and then quickly expand it to the Tigris River, capturing the strip of land between Al Qurnah and Qalat Salih. After consolidating its positions in preparation for Iraqi counterattacks, Iran could cut the main highway to Al Basrah through direct and indirect fire from the east bank of the Tigris. 

The Iranians are in good positions from which to attack. Numerous small attacks since May 1985 have gradually given Iran almost total control of the Al Hawizah marsh. Iran's lines are much closer to the Iraqi defenses than they were at the start of its failed offensive in March 1985. Iran now can move men more quickly across the marsh. 

25X1

25X1

25X1

25X1



Top Secret

NESA NESAR 86-001J

3 January 1986

25X1

25X1

Top Secret

[Redacted]

25X1

Iran claims to be deploying to the front large numbers of the Basij, the lightly trained reserve force attached to the Revolutionary Guard. Since October 1985 there have been regular announcements on the mobilization of reserve units. The Basij units would be essential for an Iranian offensive. [Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

**Estimated Manpower and Equipment—
Southern Front, December 1985**

	Iraq	Iran
Armored vehicles ^a	2,200	500
Artillery	1,050	200
Personnel	250,000 to 300,000	300,000 to 400,000 ^b

^a Operational vehicles only.

^b Includes irregular forces currently being mobilized, estimated to be between 100,000 and 150,000 troops.

[Redacted]

25X1

25X1

25X1

25X1

along the Tigris River precludes the Iraqis from concentrating many of their forces and heavy weapons there. [Redacted]

25X1

Iranian Problems

Iran has many shortcomings that reduce its chances for success. In particular, logistic problems and poor coordination between Army and Revolutionary Guard units limit the Iranians' ability to conduct sustained operations with sufficient fire support. [Redacted]

25X1

[Redacted] Iran's medium-size offensive in the northern sector in September 1985, which was jointly planned by the Army and Revolutionary Guard, quickly fell apart because of ineffective air and artillery support. Despite over six months of preparations, the Iranians could not coordinate their fire control or mass their forces at critical points. [Redacted]

25X1

25X1

25X1

25X1

[Redacted] Desertions increased as losses mounted, suggesting poor morale and bad leadership. Iranian efforts to reorganize the Revolutionary Guard and eventually merge it with the regular military will not significantly alleviate these problems for at least the next several months. [Redacted]

25X1

25X1

[Redacted] Iranian troops doing without uniforms, fuel, and many other supplies. Iran particularly suffers from a shortage of heavy equipment. [Redacted]

25X1

25X1

Tehran has lost over 20 percent of its heavy weapons to battle losses and equipment failures during the past

Balance of Forces

Iraq has a significant advantage in firepower on the southern front. Baghdad has many more tanks and artillery pieces as well as large stocks of ammunition. Iraq also has a proven chemical warfare capability, which it has used successfully in the past against massed Iranian forces. [Redacted]

Much of Iraq's apparent superiority, however, is negated by the tactical requirements of fighting in the south. Baghdad must spread its units along the entire front, while Iran can mass its forces to achieve local superiority. Additionally, the narrowness of the area

Top Secret

[Redacted]

25X1

Top Secret

[Redacted]

25X1

25X1

year. Although much of this equipment would not be necessary for a southern offensive, the lack of artillery and other heavy weapons would inhibit Iran's ability to exploit the opportunities provided by its infantry. If Iran established a bridgehead, it would have to move this type of equipment forward to defeat what would certainly be a heavily armed Iraqi counterattack. [Redacted]

Iran probably will not be able to replace the past year's losses until the middle of 1986. This, however, will not necessarily prevent Tehran from taking advantage of the rainy season in the south (November through April). Iran has attacked in the past despite shortages of critical equipment. It would, however, make a breakthrough less likely. [Redacted]

Iraqi Weaknesses

Political interference in military operations is Iraq's biggest handicap. Iraqi commanders, wary of criticism from Baghdad, probably will continue to react cautiously to Iranian actions. Iraq's unwillingness to take casualties or lose equipment (particularly warplanes) has been evident as Baghdad, after ceding most of the marsh to Iran, has been slow to stop or harass the Iranian buildup. Despite its air superiority, Iraq has not made full use of its airpower to bomb enemy concentrations, causeways, or bridges. Baghdad's timidity could provide the Iranians with an opportunity to push forward quickly and consolidate their gains before an Iraqi counterattack. [Redacted]

The Iraqis also will have to contend with Iranian activities on other fronts, even though Iranian forces in these areas are insufficient to threaten Iraq seriously. In particular, brigade-size attacks in the central sector similar to those of 1984 and Kurdish attacks in the north could draw Iraqi units from the south or at least distract Baghdad's attention from the Al Basrah area. [Redacted]

Finally, Iraqi morale is fragile. Even limited Iranian success in the early part of a battle, particularly if it resulted in high Iraqi casualties, might be enough to demoralize frontline Iraqi troops. [Redacted]

Timing

In our judgment, Tehran probably will not attempt a major offensive before March 1986. Despite public

pronouncements of an impending operation, we believe that the Iranian leadership, aware of Iran's weaknesses and the risks involved, will wait until it has replaced more of its losses and conducted additional training. [Redacted] the current mobilization may be only an exercise to improve training, maintain fervor, and heighten Iraqi anxiety. In the meantime, the Iranians probably will launch occasional battalion-size attacks to improve their position and contribute to Iraqi war weariness. Preparations could be completed sooner, however, and Iran has sufficient forces in the south to start an attack with little warning. [Redacted]

Outcome of an Offensive

We believe Iran has a significant, but less than even, chance to secure the narrow strip of land along the Tigris between Al Qurnah and Qalat Salih and to cut the main Baghdad-Al Basrah highway. Such a victory, however, would depend at least as much on Iraqi mistakes and failures as on Iranian efforts. [Redacted]

Iran would increase the likelihood of success if it:

- Took advantage of inclement weather that impedes Iraqi air operations and counterattacks. 25X1
 - Expanded its bridgehead from the edge of the marshes across the highway within the first 48 hours of the operation.
 - Brought its available heavy equipment across the marsh before the Iraqi counterattack.
- Iraq would contribute to the odds of an Iranian success if it:
- Failed to block Iran's concentration of forces or their movement across the marshes. 25X1
 - Failed to mount a timely counterattack.
 - Did not use its chemical warfare capability. [Redacted] 25X1

Baghdad's defenses are such that Iran will suffer heavy casualties. If Iran consolidated its initial position along the Tigris, Iraq would also suffer major losses in any attempt to push back the Iranians. [Redacted] 25X1

Iraqi morale would become a critical factor if the Iranians succeeded in gaining a solid foothold on the Tigris. The Iraqis probably would go into a limited 25X1

Top Secret

[Redacted]

25X1

Top Secret

[Redacted]

25X1

retreat before counterattacking, and they might not counterattack at all if the Iranians established defensive berms around their position. [Redacted]

25X1

If Iraq did not drive the Iranians back into the marshes, support for President Saddam Husayn's regime would erode, while Tehran's resolve to continue the war would be strengthened. In desperation, Iraq might act on its threats to increase air and missile attacks against Iranian cities and economic targets. [Redacted]

25X1

In our judgment, the most likely outcome of an Iranian offensive is another Iranian failure similar to the one in March 1985. Although Iran probably would gain a foothold in the Iraqi lines, we believe that Iraqi forces, if they respond quickly, could push the Iranians back within a few days. An Iranian debacle would almost certainly follow if:

- Iran could not reach its objectives quickly.
- Iraqi warplanes vigorously attacked Iranian bridges and causeways, preventing heavy equipment from reaching the bridgehead.
- Iraq brought all of its weapons (including chemical munitions) to bear on the Iranian position. [Redacted]

25X1

Under these circumstances, an Iranian defeat in conjunction with a stepped-up Iraqi propaganda campaign could lead to demonstrations in Iran similar to those in March 1985. As long as Ayatollah Khomeini is alive, however, Iran will almost certainly continue the war. [Redacted]

25X1

25X1

[Redacted]

Top Secret

[Redacted]

25X1

Page Denied

Next 3 Page(s) In Document Denied

Top Secret

25X1

0

88

Top Secret