

May 1987 - Iranian offensive against Basra-Other land battles-Air attacks Attacks-on shipping and oil installations Weapons-supplies and mediation efforts

Other land battles in central and northern sectors

Clashes broke out in the northern sector in the Haj Omran heights in early September, and on the night of Oct. 10-11, 1986, Iranian forces, supported by Iraqi Kurdish fighters opposed to the Baghdad regime, mounted an assault on the Kirkuk oilfields in north-eastern Iraq. Iranian claims that the oil installations had been destroyed were soon discounted, but Iraq's denial that any attack had taken place was also treated with scepticism by Western observers. In mid-October Iranian units seized Iraqi hilltop positions in the central sector, on the Iraqi side of the border opposite the abandoned Iranian town of Mehran (which Iraq had held briefly earlier in the year— see page [34516](#)).

Iranian regular troops staged a successful assault in early March 1987 on Iraqi positions in the Gerdmand Hills, in the Haj Omran region, some 30 km inside Iraqi territory. The operation brought the strategically important Rawandiz road within the range of Iranian artillery.

Iraqi air attacks on Iranian oil installations

The Iraqi Air Force continued to mount frequent raids on Iran's oil export facilities during late 1986 and early 1987, and foreign observers commented that these were noticeably more effective than those of 1984-85 [see pages 33560; [34514](#)].

Although Iraq carried out raids against refineries in Isfahan, Tabriz and Tehran, its principal targets were coastal installations at Kharg, Sirri and Larak. Oil industry sources reported in August 1986 that at least half of Iran's fleet of coastal shuttle oil tankers had been crippled in Iraqi attacks. (The shuttle tankers were used to ferry oil supplies from Kharg island to the supposedly less vulnerable terminals at Sirri and Larak which lay over 800 km distant from Iraqi territory, at the southern end of the Gulf; foreign tankers loading Iranian oil would also be less vulnerable, having a shorter distance to travel up the Gulf. On Aug. 12, Iraqi aircraft attacked tankers lying off Sirri, prompting Iranian accusations that another Arab Gulf state had allowed the aircraft to land in order to refuel. Earlier reports had however suggested that Iraq had acquired the capability to refuel in mid-air Mirage F-1 aircraft of the type used in the raid. Particularly heavy raids on Kharg terminal were mounted on Sept. 16 and Oct. 6. On Nov. 14, Iraqi aircraft destroyed an oil platform at Sassan island, north-west of Sirri. At the end of October Western experts claimed that Iraqi attacks on refineries had effectively halved Iran's refined oil output, and forced it to import up to 300,000 barrels per day. The pilots of Iraqi F-1 and MiG-21 strike aircraft were reportedly scoring greater successes by adopting low-altitude bombing techniques, involving repeated passes over the target, in contrast to their earlier preference for high-level attacks *ibid.*, which, while minimizing the likelihood of being hit by ground fire, also reduced the potential for precision bombing.

According to a report in *Jane's Defence Weekly* of March 20, 1987, Iraq had lost approximately 50 aircraft, equivalent to 10 per cent of its Air Force strength, since the beginning of the year, partly as a result of the large number of operations using the low-altitude bombing techniques staged during the attacks on Basra. The report also stated that the Soviet Union had agreed to supply advanced MiG-27 and MiG-29 aircraft to replace those lost.

Attacks on platforms off Abu Dhabi

Unidentified aircraft bombed the Abu al Bakhoush oil platform off Abu Dhabi (United Arab Emirates) on Nov. 25, nine days after Iraqi aircraft, ostensibly as a result of a navigational error, had raided the Dutch-owned Maersk Victory platform. The Iranian government strongly denied responsibility for the Nov. 25 attack, offering to help repair the platform on Dec. 4. Some commentators subsequently portrayed the raid as an Iraqi warning to the UAE not to co-operate with Iran concerning oil exports.

Also on Nov. 25 Iraqi aircraft for the first time bombed the terminal at Larak, leading to speculation by Western defence experts that one of Iraq's Arab allies, probably Saudi Arabia, had allowed the aircraft to land and refuel.

Attacks on international shipping

Both sides continued to attack oil tankers and other merchant shipping suspected of providing supplies to the enemy. By mid-October, 1986, at least 80 ships had been attacked since the beginning of the year, with a total of over 240 reported strikes having taken place since the start of the war [see page [34514](#)] for figures for 1984 and 1985]. The majority of Iraqi attacks were mounted by aircraft; the Iranians used aircraft and helicopter gunships, and, from October onwards, frigates, to carry out their strikes.

Aircraft of other Arab Gulf states were on occasion scrambled to challenge intruding Iranian planes; on Oct. 25 the Kuwaiti Air Force reported that its fighters had shot down a "hostile aircraft" over Kobbar island, 30 km east of the Kuwaiti mainland. In an effort to deter attacks, patrols were carried out by the French, British and US navies, particularly in Omani waters in the Strait of Hormuz, the southern entrance to the Gulf, which the Iranian authorities periodically threatened to close in retaliation for Iraqi attacks on their oil installations.

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