



29/06/2013, 20:00.

Syria has turned hot, and I'm not talking about the weather. Events over the last two days have taken a dramatic turn, although I have to say I'm not completely surprised - the Syrians have finally jumped the fence and launched an attack into the no fly zone.

Needless to say this will not be allowed to stand.

This evening I once again found myself in the briefing room at Incirlik, attending a briefing on tomorrow's operation. The events of the last couple of days have hastened a rapid change of priorities in the CAOC and have finally prompted a well organised attack against the SAM network covering Sierra.

Things kicked off with the intelligence briefing, delivered today by the imposing bulk of Major Colvyn. The Major briefed us that in the last 48 hours the Syrians have made three incursions into no fly Sierra, resulting in three confirmed attacks on SDF positions in Homs. Each incursion was responded to by JSTF aircraft but on each occasion the Syrian SAM network near Homs forced us onto the defensive and except for one SU-24 downed by a JSTF F-16 we have been unable to stop the Syrians breaking through to bomb Homs.

Thankfully none of our aircraft were hit by these SAMs.

Given the success the Syrian Air Force has enjoyed so far over the city and their tactical requirements to strike the SDF, Major Colvyn considered it highly likely that unless we reassert control over Sierra we will continue to see more of these attacks by Syria.

The intel brief revealed that the Russians have opted to stay out of these attacks and appear to have temporarily stepped down operations in favour of a major maintenance push on their aircraft. It is likely that the Russians are playing it smart here by making sure they were out of the way before the Syrians did anything to provoke a JSTF reaction. The general feeling in the briefing room was relief that the Russians would be out the way for the immediate future - one less complication in an already complex situation.

Homs is currently seeing very heavy fighting, with the SyAAF strikes coinciding with the Syrian Arab Army launching a major offensive on the south of the city. It is clear that this is part of a coordinated plan to support the push into Homs. The air strikes made by the Syrians over the last 48 hours have caused significant damage to not just SDF positions but civilian areas and it is vital that we secure the airspace over Homs as quickly as possible.

During the intel brief the question was asked about how secure the airspace would be once the Russians returned, at this point no-one had an answer for that question...we will just have to be satisfied they are standing down for now.

Away from the no fly zones, Operation Jackal continues at pace with the SDF and YPG having made more progress towards Raqqa. Newt and mine's mission to strike Saad Abdullah Sajid was a success, SIGINT has since confirmed the former Iraqi general was killed in the strike and this will hopefully have a major impact on the military leadership ability within the SIA. The SIA still remains a potent threat however, shooting down an A-10 with a MANPAD two days ago.

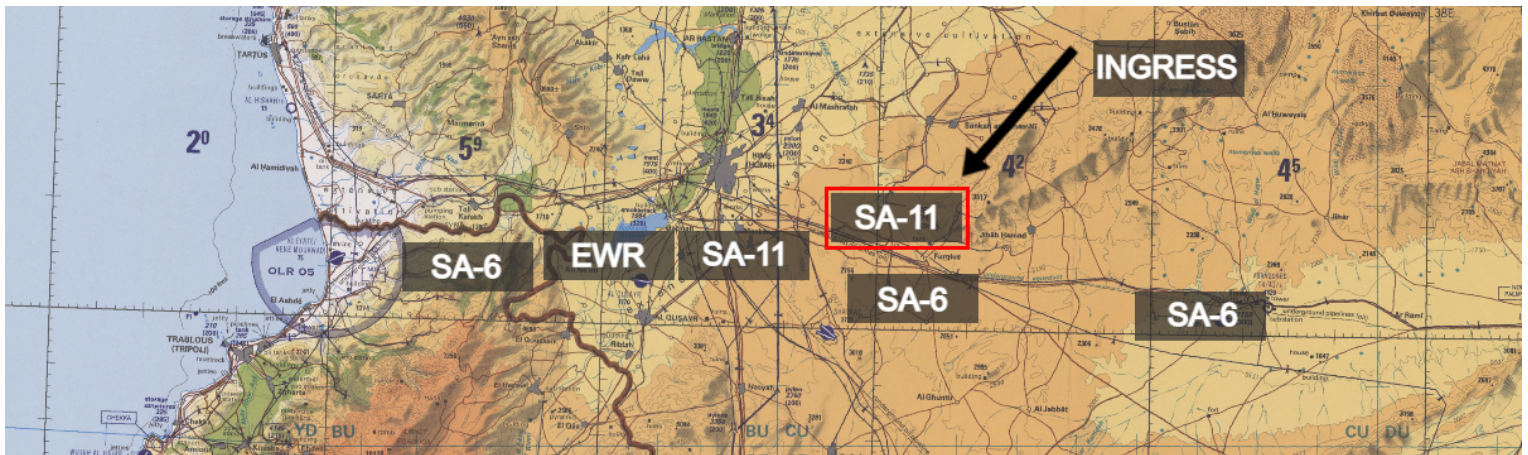


SATINT showed a solid hit on Sajids residence.

Captain Edwards stepped up next to deliver the met brief, we're looking at extensive cloud cover from around 8,000 feet but no rain forecast. We will however see moderate winds over Syria.

Lt. Colonel Lincoln then took to the podium and started briefing tomorrow's mission. The Red Devils will be participating in a coordinated attack on the Syrian IADS around Homs - the goal will be to degrade the potency of the IADS in this area and better enable JSTF aircraft to operate in no fly Sierra. Our flight will be involved in the first attack, targeting the destruction of an SA-11 site east of Homs. Further attacks on other SAM positions will follow once we have created a hole in the Syrian air defence network.

The attacks will begin at 07:00. The USS Sampson will set things off by launching Tomahawk land attack missiles, their target will be the early warning radar south of Homs - codenamed Metro Blue.



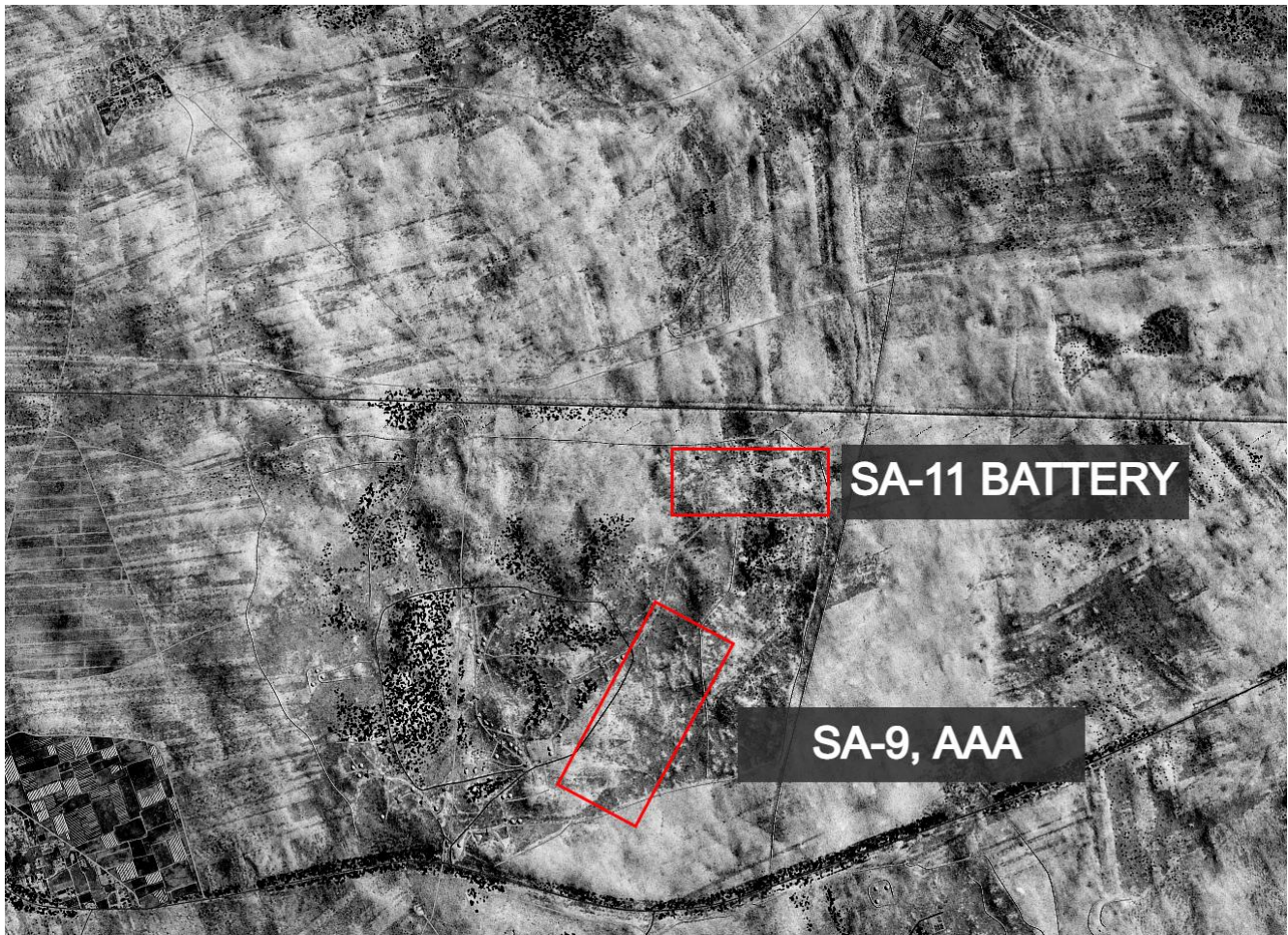
Whilst the Tomahawks are enroute our flight will get airborne, the roster today is for a four ship, led by Poodle and accompanied by myself, E-Boy and Woody. We will conduct a standard departure from Incirlik and transition into Syria, mimicking a standard ingress so as not to alert the Syrians to any unusual activity. The Tomahawks are due to impact before our flight hits it's marshall point, which is waypoint 3 - located at Portal. Once Metro Blue is offline we will push south at low level, descending as rapidly as possible from 25,000 feet MSL to 150 feet AGL. We will be leaving 30 seconds between pushes to ensure adequate deconfliction of aircraft once we reach the target.

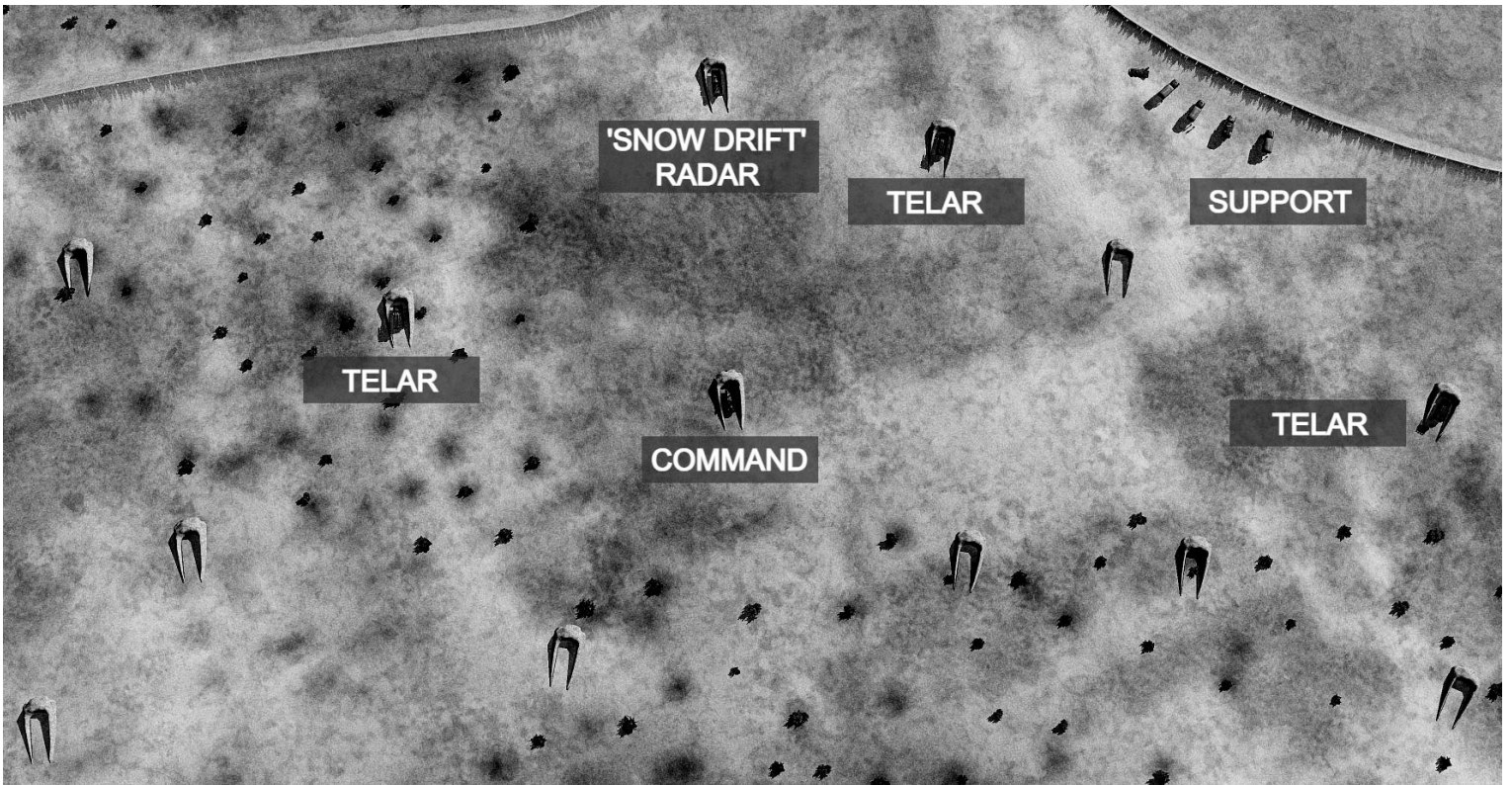
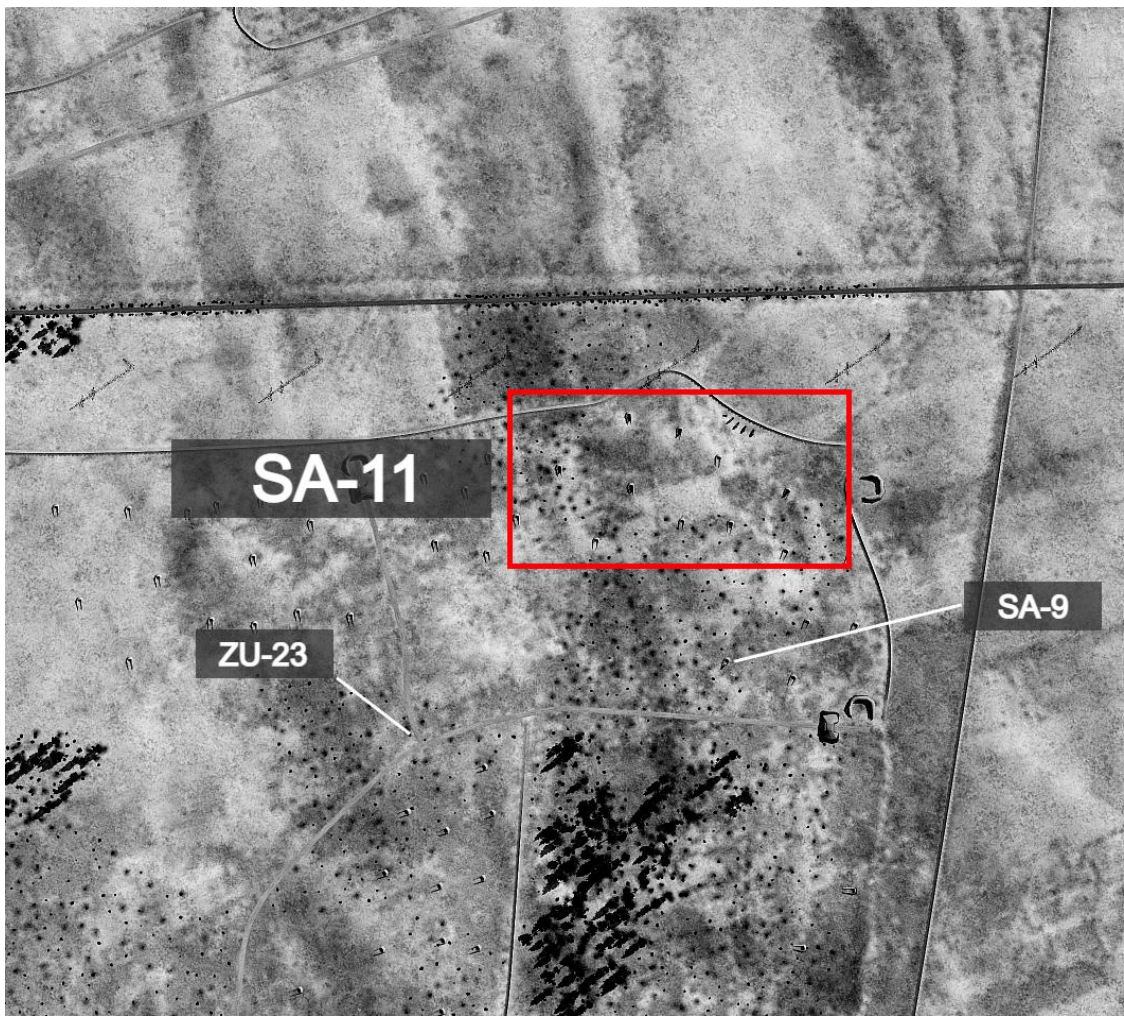
We will ingress the 67 miles to the target at 150 feet to avoid detection for as long as possible, terrain masking from the Nusayriyah mountains to the west should shield us from any long range surveillance radars in the Russian quarter. As we ingress on the target USAF F16's (Cobra 2-6) and Navy EA-18's (Spartan 3-1) will carry out suppression of the SAM systems around Homs. The SAM radars to be suppressed are Metro Red and Metro Orange (SA-11s) and Metro Green (SA-6). SEAD, combined with our terrain masking should hopefully keep the Syrians blind to our approach until we appear over the target. Once the order to push to low level is given we will maintain radio silence until we appear over the target.

Our primary objective is the destruction of the SA-11 battery located 3 miles northeast of the SAA 312th Brigade HQ. The battery is located at N 34°36'57" E 37°00'13" and is designated **Metro Orange**. The SA-11 is a highly mobile system and easily repositioned, up to now the Syrians have usually moved them once every 24 hours, the intel used in this briefing was hot off the press and it is expected that the battery will still be present in the briefed location at the time of our raid tomorrow. Precise targeting coordinates are included in the briefing pack. Careful adherence to our flight plan will be required to ensure we avoid known threats in the area.

Waypoint 7 is our designated IP - 4 miles short of the target and at this point we should pop up and release our weapons. Our primary attack will be carried out using 1000lb GBU-32 JDAMs, we covered the attack profile in detail in the briefing - the reason for using JDAMs is to allow us to accurately attack the target using toss bombing, helping us to keep our distance from AAA and any point defence SAM systems in the vicinity of the battery. To carry out this attack I will need to ensure I keep my speed up as per the fragged flight plan (M0.8) and then pull up at the IP until the JDAM release zone is in range, I will quickly pickle the weapons and roll away from the target location. It will of course be important to make sure I have correctly set my JDAMs up prior to approaching the target.

The SA-11 vehicles are located in revetments so to increase the probability of kill we are advised to release both JDAMs in the attack.



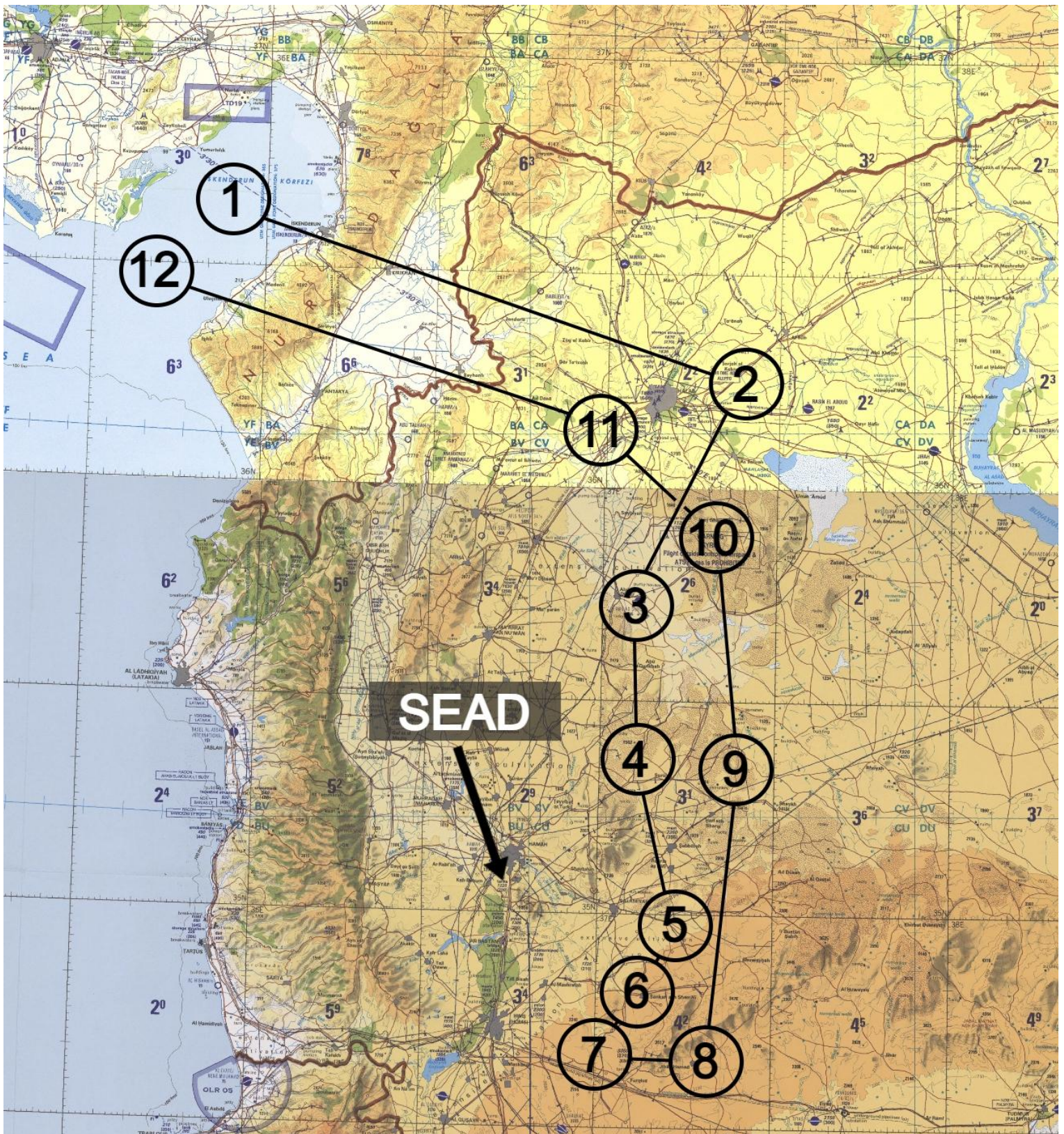


My target will be the SA-11 command vehicle, the radar will be targeted by the HARM shooters and the three launchers by the rest of our flight. The battery's support vehicles are our secondary target and if the opportunity presents itself to attack these units then we are also carrying 2 rocket cluster bombs. The CO however did stress that this should only be considered a target of opportunity and given the threats in the area we should not go looking for extra targets.



Our egress route will be east away from the target, ducking behind the ridge line and following it north back out of Sierra. Care should be taken not to stray too far east and end up in range of the SA-6 that I met back on my first sortie on OCN.

Once back in friendly territory we will return to a cruising altitude and head back to Incirlik.

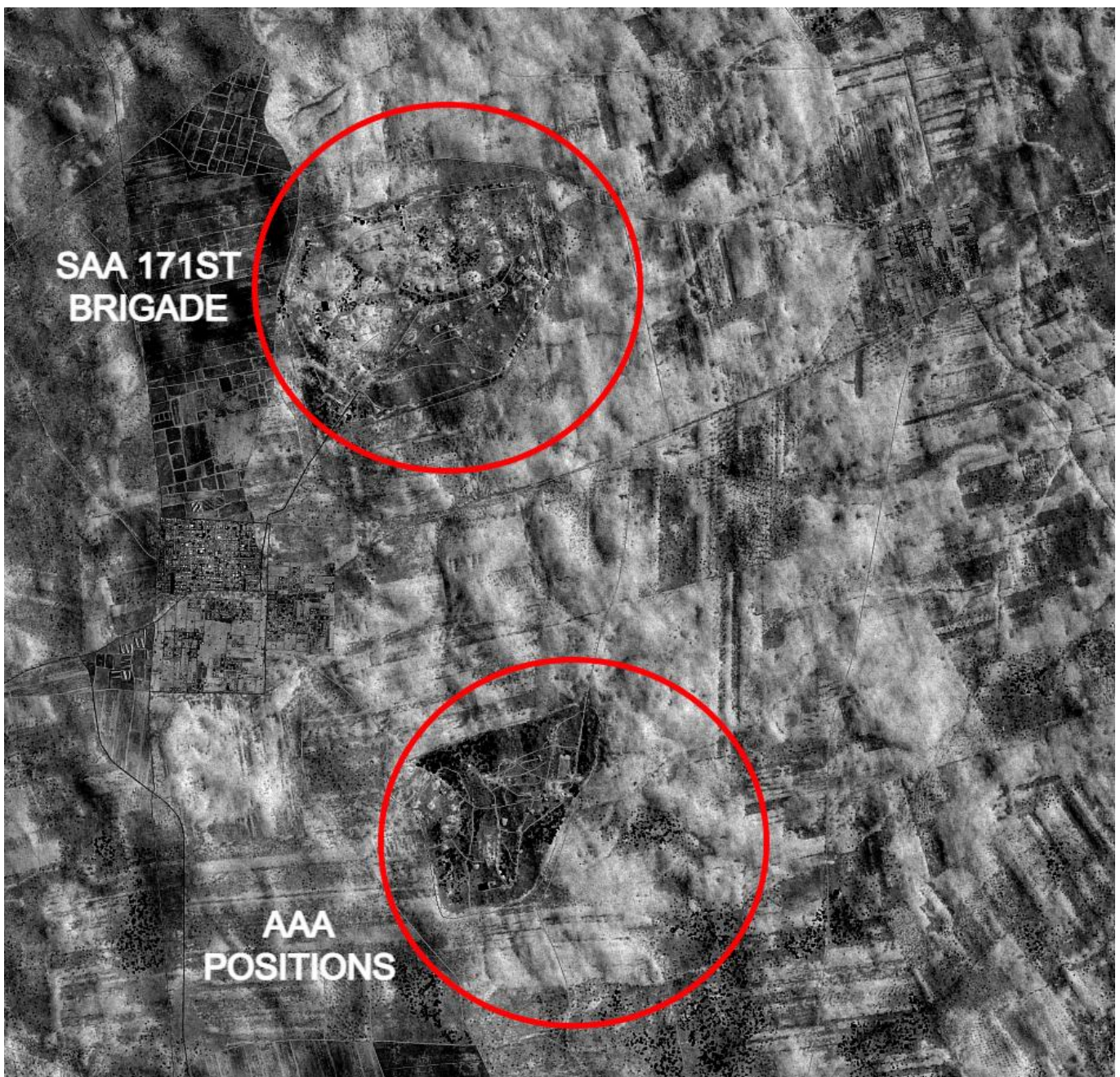


Given our high speed, low level route, fuel will be a vital consideration. We have a bit of fuel to play with over the target should it be needed, about 2 minutes worth at full afterburner, bingo is 5934 lb.

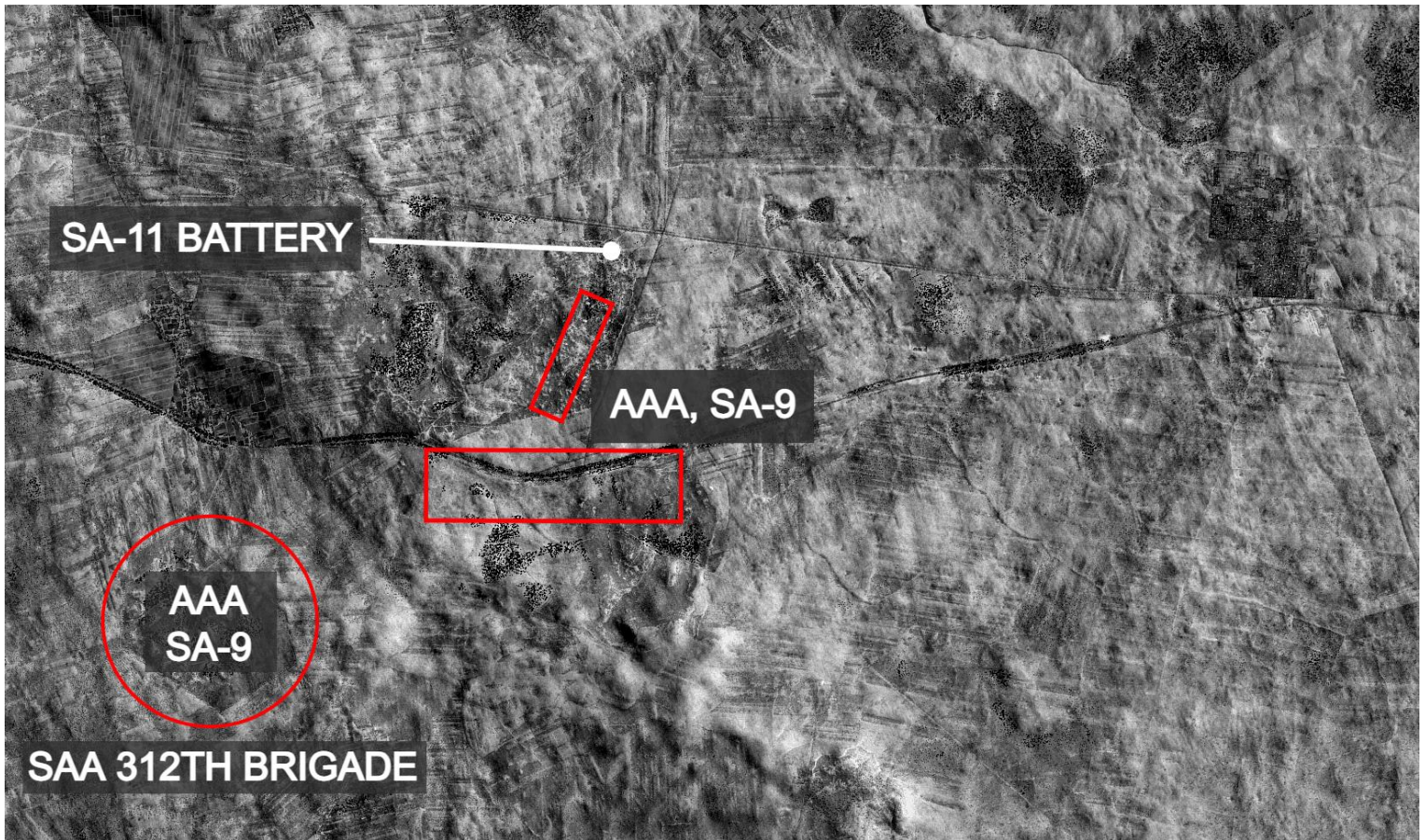
The final part of the briefing laid out the threat we may face over the target. Link sure didn't sugar coat it - we're flying into the mouth of the beast today, but with a solid plan and cautious approach we can still minimise the danger to our flight.

The main threat is obviously the SAM batteries surrounding Homs, these should be neutralised by the SEAD flights but we should take nothing for granted and strict adherence to the low level route will be essential. The SA-11 TELAR also contains the Fire Dome tracking radar and can still engage without the Snow Drift radar being active so again I should take care not to needlessly expose myself to the TELARS before they are neutralised.

The SAA 171st Brigade HQ also lies west of our approach route between waypoints 5 and 7, a heavy AAA presence has been sighted in this area so again it will be important that I stay on flight plan.



The Metro Orange site contains numerous pieces of AAA along with SA-9 Gaskin IR SAMs. AAA and SA-9s have also been sighted south of the road running east to west behind the target as well as in the SAA 312th Brigade HQ. It's pretty clear that overflying the target will be very risky. The AAA is made up primarily of a mixture of ZU-23, ZU-57 and S-60 systems but at least two highly dangerous ZSU-23-4s have been detected in the vicinity of the 312th brigade.



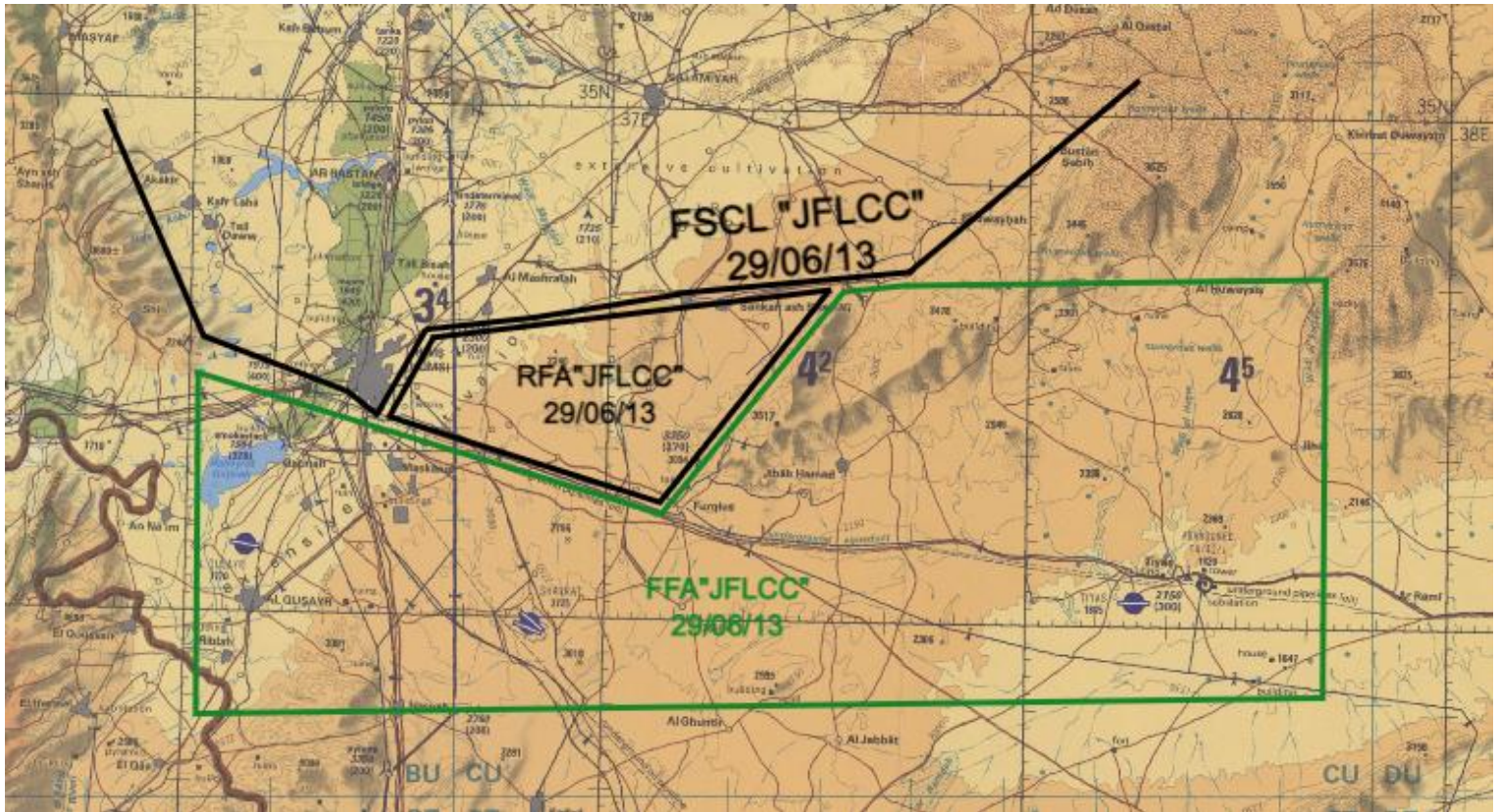
Shayrat airbase lies south of the target area, if I end up anywhere near it then things have gone badly wrong but it's worth noting it's location as it will certainly have short range air defences in its vicinity. Tiyas airbase also lies to the east of our egress route and contains an SA-6 battery.

Our attack plan should ensure we remain undetected until the last possible moment when we pop up and any short range point defense radar systems burn through the jamming screen. We will clearly be at our most vulnerable during the pop up so heavy use of chaff, flares and jamming should be employed, along with a rapid egress from the target.

Unfortunately I am number four in the formation so will be hitting the target once the rest of the flight has already alerted the Syrians, although if all goes to plan the whole formation will be in and out in less than 2 minutes and before the Syrians can react.

No air to air threats are expected, but should any Syrian aircraft try to interfere a flight of F15s on CAP are ready to respond.

On to ROE, a Free Fire Area has been established south of Homs and east of the ridge line, meaning that providing theatre ROEs are met we are able to engage additional targets of opportunity. The area north of the target and east of Homs is a Restricted Fire Area.



With the briefing over we filed out of the theatre, the mood was sombre but tinged with excitement. We know we're flying into harm's way tomorrow but the mission carries significant value to future JSTF operations, simply put there's no way we're going to allow the Syrians to continue to throw up a screen of SAMs everytime they want to bomb Homs. It might be by far the riskiest mission yet undertaken in OCN but I can tell the rest of the flight is looking forward to it, as long as we remember our training and follow the plan we'll get the job done and come home in one piece.