



19/08/2013, 20:15.

Poodle is dead.

Killed when his aircraft was hit by an SA-18 shoulder mounted SAM. The squadron is still in a state of shock, we all know and accept the risks of flying military jets, especially on combat operations...but no-one foresaw this happening within just a mile of Incirlik.

It appears that an SIA cell managed to infiltrate Turkey, most likely having recently crossed the border disguised as refugees. The cell was quickly neutralized by the base's defence forces, none were taken alive.

The investigation into how the SIA got so close to the base and how they got into Turkey with such weapons is now underway, we don't have any answers yet but one thing's for sure, no-one feels particularly safe at Incirlik anymore

The loss of Poodle is not just a personal loss to us all, but a real professional loss to the squadron. He had little tolerance for poor performance and could be quick to criticise, but at the end of the day Poodle had a wealth of talent and experience and was committed to improving the squadron and it's pilots. However, the void left by Poodle must still be filled and our mission must continue, with that in mind I was flattered and honoured when Lt. Col. Lincoln asked me to temporarily step in as acting XO.

I attended my first briefing as acting XO this evening, this was held in Incirlik's small briefing room, although it was crammed to capacity with aircrews from a number of squadrons and nationalities. The briefing opened with the intel update, delivered today by Major Colvyn.

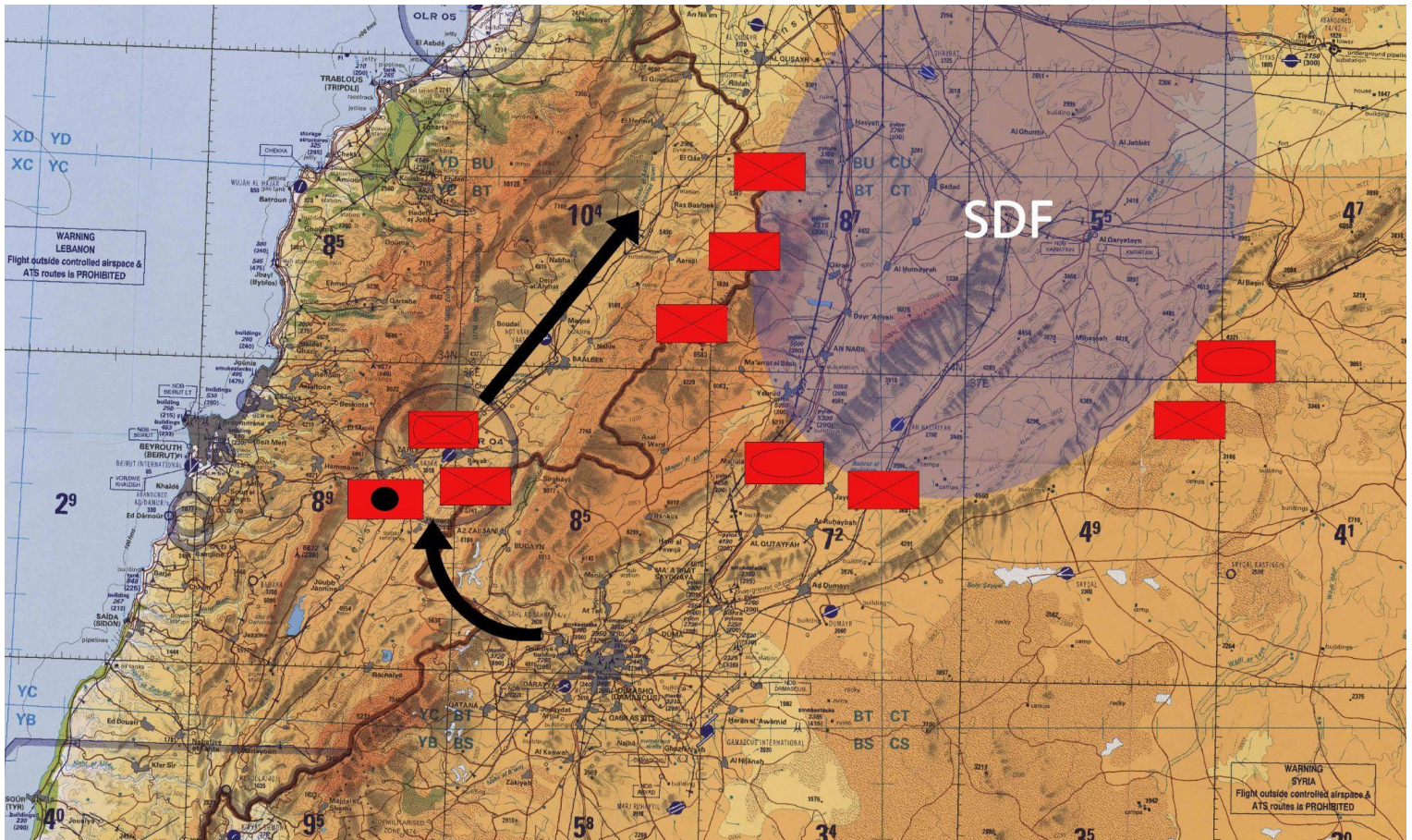
Starting with the situation close to home, Major Colvyn told us that the investigation into the SIA infiltration is ongoing. It's fair to say the assembled crowd had a few questions for him; did we suspect there could be more SIA? How did the SIA get weapons like the SA-18 that close to Incirlik? Did they have support in doing so? Colvyn at this point had few answers...but what he could tell us was that additional security measures were being put in place for the foreseeable.

Moving further south, Colvyn updated us on the situation in Syria and Lebanon. The Russian airlift continues and supplies continue to flow into Syria, enabling the Syrians to continue their resurgence in the south of the country. Most concerning, the Syrians have now begun to use the Bekaa Valley as a means to move their forces north. The Hezbollah forces holding the valley have made sure the SAA has free movement through the area, the Lebanese military simply does not have the strength to stop neither Hezbollah nor Syria from operating in these areas. SAA intentions in the valley are, at this point, difficult to determine, the valley allows the SAA a route north, free of SDF interference. A further

factor is the recent clearance of JSTF aircraft to operate within the valley as aircraft using this route at low level enjoy the benefits of terrain masking from the Syrian SAM network around Damascus. In short, there are clear strategic reasons for the Syrians to want to hold onto the Bekaa Valley - however given their history in Lebanon, the UN stance and the threat of Israeli intervention, if they choose to do so remains to be seen.

The SAA forces in the Bekaa Valley, believed to be the 7th Division (BMP-1), 158th Brigade (Infantry) and 100th Artillery Regiment (SP Akatsia), appear to be marshalling their strength ahead of an expected push and have yet to engage the SDF in any meaningful way. Hezbollah forces on the other hand continue to attack the SDF flanks along the Homs road and are only being held back currently by JSTF air support.

Outside of the Bekaa Valley the SAA offensive continues with the 65th and 20th Brigades continuing to push onto SDF positions at An Nasiriyah. In addition to this the 156th Brigade (Infantry), supported by elements of the 78th Brigade are thrusting north further east in an attempt to envelop the SDF near An Nasiriyah. Assessments are that, with air support, the SDF appear to be holding the line, however the SAA forces in the Bekaa Valley pose a real threat to the SDF positions.



Moving on to the Syrian airforce, Major Colvyn talked about a resurgent threat. The Syrians now appear determined to take the airspace back and we are seeing a greatly increased Syrian presence in the air, no doubt aided by the timely Russian resupply. The advantage still lies with the JSTF and we still maintain air superiority, we're just now having to work a lot more for it.



The Russians were discussed next. As well as the continuing airlift the Russians are maintaining their defensive stance in the 'Russian Quarter'. The Russian AWACS remains active around the clock and it would appear is working in conjunction with the Syrian Air Force. Russian fighters and attack aircraft are currently staying confined close to home and appear unwilling to risk any further potential clashes with JSTF forces. Link asked Colvyn if there was any indication of truth to the rumours that Russian PMC's were operating on the ground in Syria, Colvyn responded that they were still reviewing those reports.

Colvyn concluded his briefing and handed over to Captain Edwards for our met brief, today's weather is looking like scattered clouds at around 10,000 feet alongside relatively light winds.

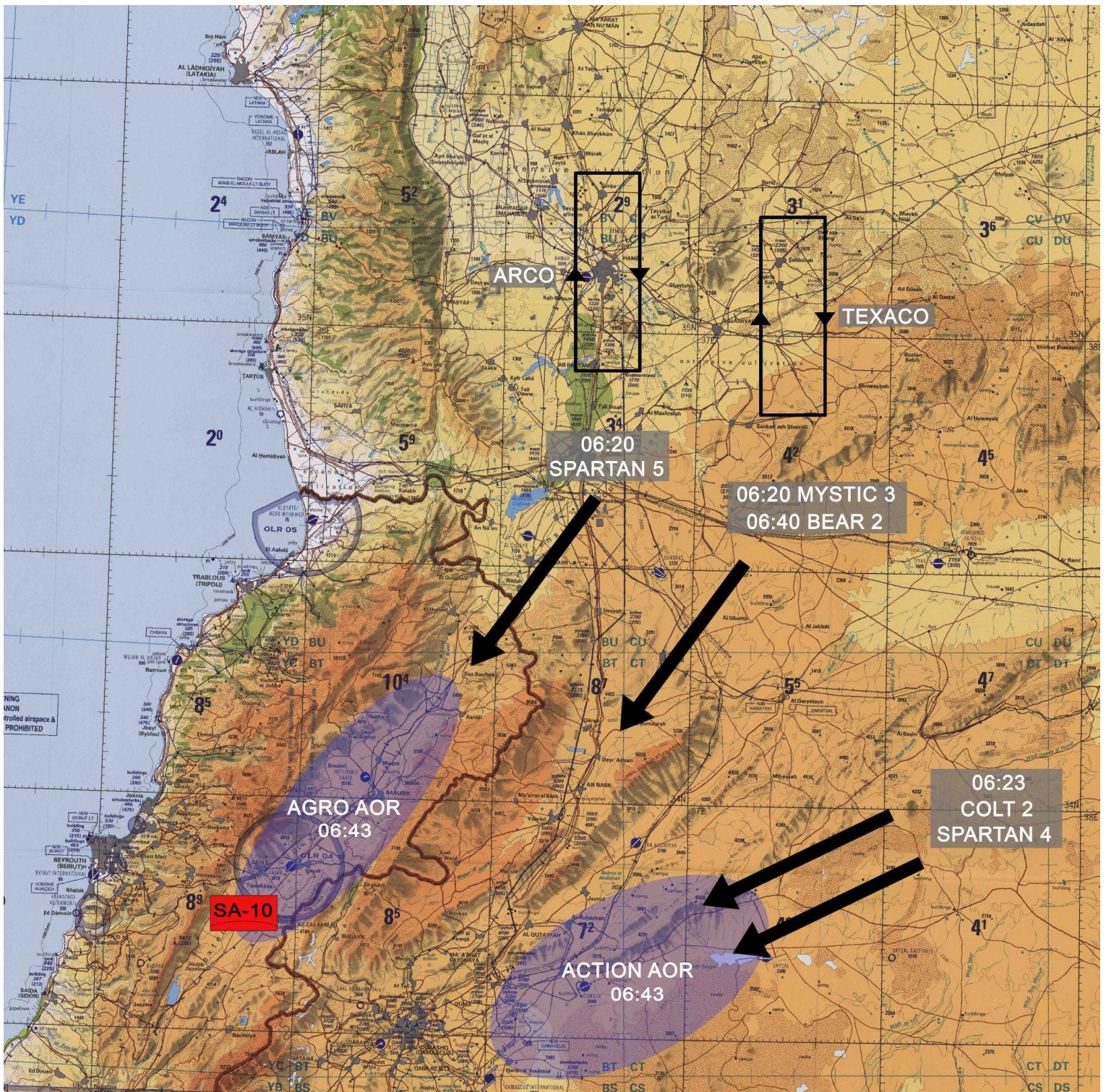
As Captain Edwards stepped aside, a USAF Colonel, a short, squat man named Rawls, stepped up to provide an overview of tomorrow's operations. He told us that in light of the recent developments in Syria, the JSTF were once again stepping away from a defensive posture and going back on the offensive, our targets tomorrow - Syrian and Hezbollah forces within the Bekaa Valley and Syrian forces north of Damascus. The primary objective of the operation will be the interdiction of enemy forces moving towards the front line - although the Red Devil's task in this will not be as the primary strikers, instead we will be supporting the operation in a SEAD/DEAD role, specifically we are tasked with the destruction of a newly deployed SA-10 battery.

The role of the Red Devils, USAF F-16s and Navy E/A-18s will be to suppress and destroy Syrian SAMS ahead of the interdiction package, this package will consist of 4 flights of RAF and Luftwaffe Tornados. This task has of course been rendered a lot more challenging in recent days due to the significant reinforcements the Syrians have received. USAF F-15s and French M-2000s will also be supporting with offensive counter air.

Arco and Texaco will be providing AAR to all flights before they push south towards their targets. The SEAD/DEAD and EW flights will push from the AAR tracks at 06:10. The F-16 SEAD (Colt 2) flight will then begin suppressing SAMS near Damascus, supported by a flight of Growlers (Spartan 4), whilst a second flight of Growlers (Spartan 5) begins an electronic attack along the Bekaa Valley - where our target is located. These attacks will commence at 06:20 (Spartan 5) and 06:23 (Spartan 4). As these attacks begin, the Tornado flights (Action 1, Action 2, Agro 2 and Agro 4) will begin refuelling, the Tornados will push from the tankers at 06:35 with a TOT of 06:43 - the SAMS in the target areas will need to be taken offline ahead of this time.

Two fighter Sweeps will commence shortly after the start of the SEAD phase and ahead of the Tornados, with Mystic 3 (M-2000) beginning their sweep at 06:20 and Bear 2 (F-15C) sweeping at 06:40. Due to the SAM threat the fighters will not be able to hold a CAP over the target area, the sweeps will instead aim to sanitize the airspace during the critical moments of the operation.





Colonel Rawls ended his briefing with one final warning, we are not permitted to operate in Lebanon west of the Bekaa Valley, in other words on the Beirut side of the valley wall, this region is under direct control of the Lebanese military and is off limits to the JSTF. After asking a few questions the air crews filtered out the room and broke off into smaller groups to go over their individual assignments in more detail. I next found myself in a room with Link and Woody as we began to plan our mission. The loss of Poodle was keenly felt here, usually he would take a major role in mission planning, but now this responsibility falls to me. Link said he would be advising and guiding me but ultimately it will be me who decided the attack profile.



As Colonel Rawls stated, our target today is a recently deployed SA-10 battery, located 7 miles southwest of Rayak Airfield in the Bekaa Valley. This SAM position will interfere with JSTF attempts to stop the SAA using the Bekaa to flank the SDF, as well as preventing us from using the Bekaa as a route to strike against forces in the Damascus region. Simply put it is vital that this SA-10 be put out of action. That we were being tasked against an SA-10 came as an initial shock, Woody was quick to express his incredulity at the suggestion, surely there were better platforms for such a high value target than our Hornets? "Maybe" Link replied, "but there are no better pilots, and you've proven yourself again and again so far in Syria". And he had a point, already feeling myself stepping into Poodle's shoes, I reasoned that we had the capability and the experience to do what's being asked...and if we utilise the available support effectively, there should be no reason we cannot get the job done and return home. Woody grudgingly agreed.

With that debate out of the way we started to discuss the mission flow. We will depart Incirlik at 05:25 - it will still be dark at this time, a security measure to help protect us against any potential further SIA attacks. Additional security forces have also been deployed around the base and we're taking no chances, armed helicopter patrols will also be airborne up to 5 miles out from Incirlik - these will be operating between 2000 and 3000 feet AGL so it will be extremely important we stay below our 1500 foot AGL ceiling during our departure phase until ordered to climb out by RAPCON.

TuAF F-16s are also maintaining a permanent high cover above the base, however these will be at a minimum of 16,000 feet and should not interfere with base operations.

Once clear of Incirlik's airspace we will perform a standard ingress into Syrian airspace through the Gold corridor, rendezvousing as ever at waypoint 1.

When we have cleared the Gold Corridor we will turn south for waypoint 3, where we are due to take on fuel from Texaco at approximately 06:00. Once AAR is complete we will push from the tanker towards our target. Dawn should be breaking as we depart the tanker, meaning we will be looking to hit the target in daylight so Link has instructed that we take the JHMCS over NVGs for this mission.

As briefed by Colonel Rawls, Spartan 5 will begin their electronic attack within the Bekaa Valley at 06:20, they have a vul time of 20 minutes and will be on station until 06:40. They will be carrying out jamming against the SA-10 site from the northeast so for our flight to benefit from this protection we will need to approach the target through the valley.

Colt 2 and Spartan 4 will begin attacking the air defences around Damascus at 06:23, here the electronic attack will be directed from the northeast, again with a vul time of 20 minutes.

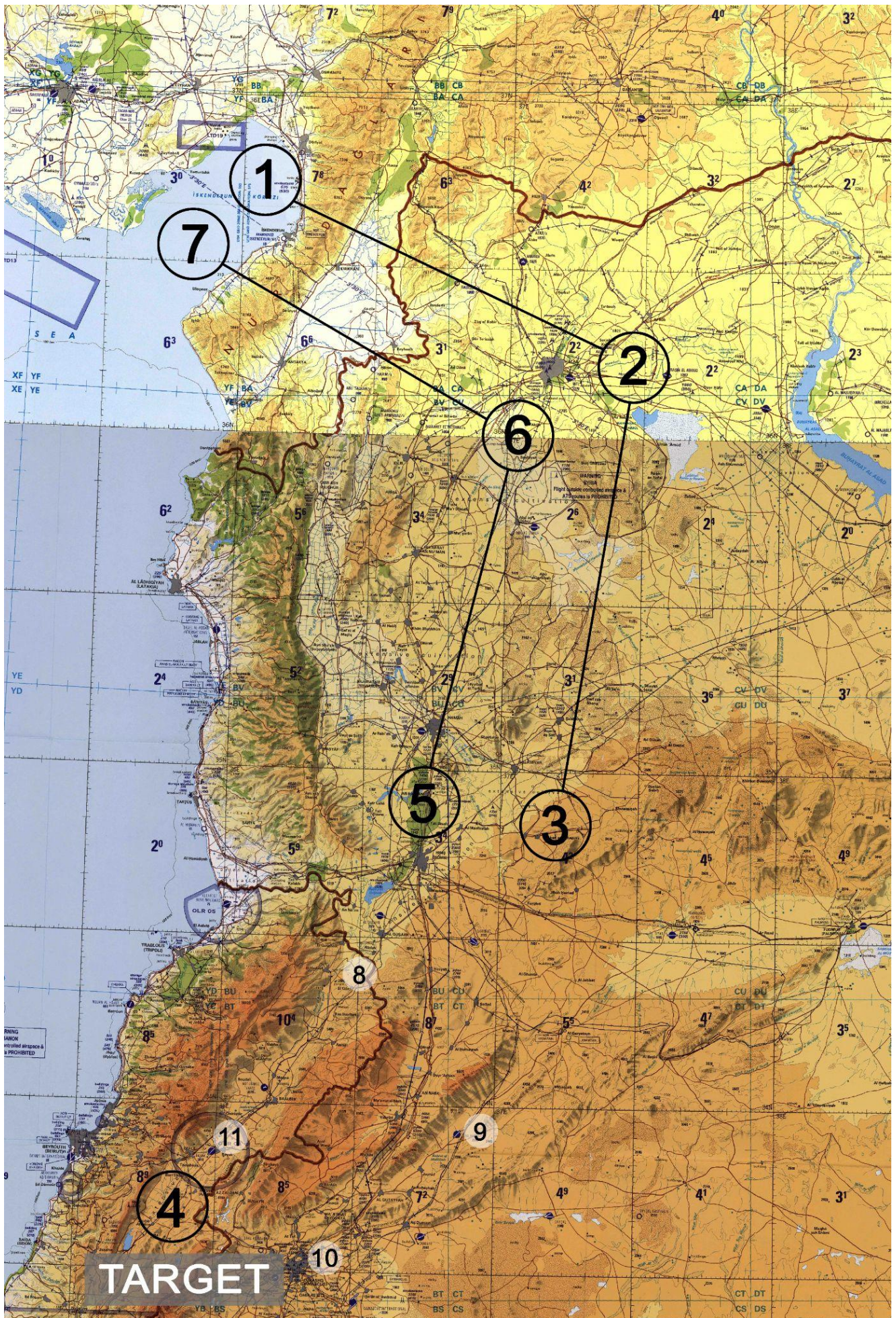
Mystic 3 will sweep through the Damascus area behind the SEAD/EW flight at 06:20, ensuring that any air to air threats are removed from the area. Just as the EW/SEAD support departs and ahead of the Tornados TOT, Bear 2 will follow in with a further sweep at 06:40. It will be important to note that these OCA flights will push into and out of the Damascus area quickly, they are not expected to be in contested airspace for more than 10 minutes.

The German Tornados (Agro) will be targeting SAA armour and the Hezbollah drone command facilities within the Bekaa Valley, their TOT in the valley is 06:43, it will be essential the SA-10 is offline at this time or Agro's mission will need to be aborted.

The SA-10 battery is located at waypoint 4.

Navigation points have also been included in the flight plan as waypoints 8, 9, 10 and 11. Details of these can be found in my mission planning documents.





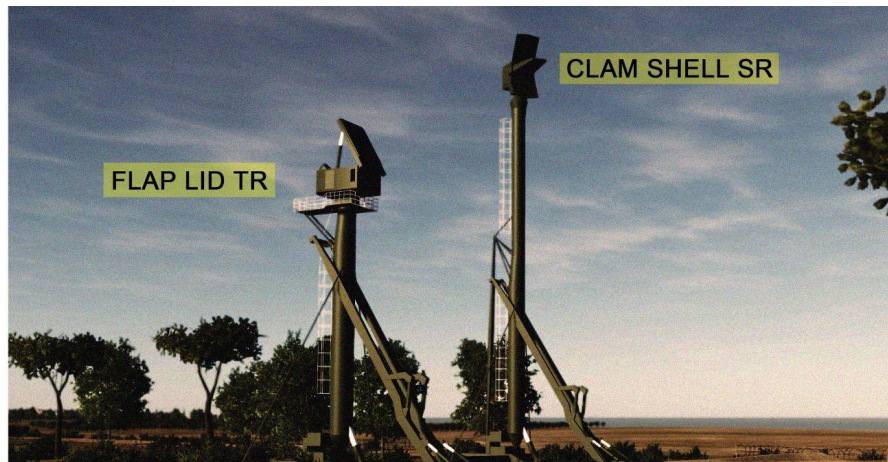
TARGET



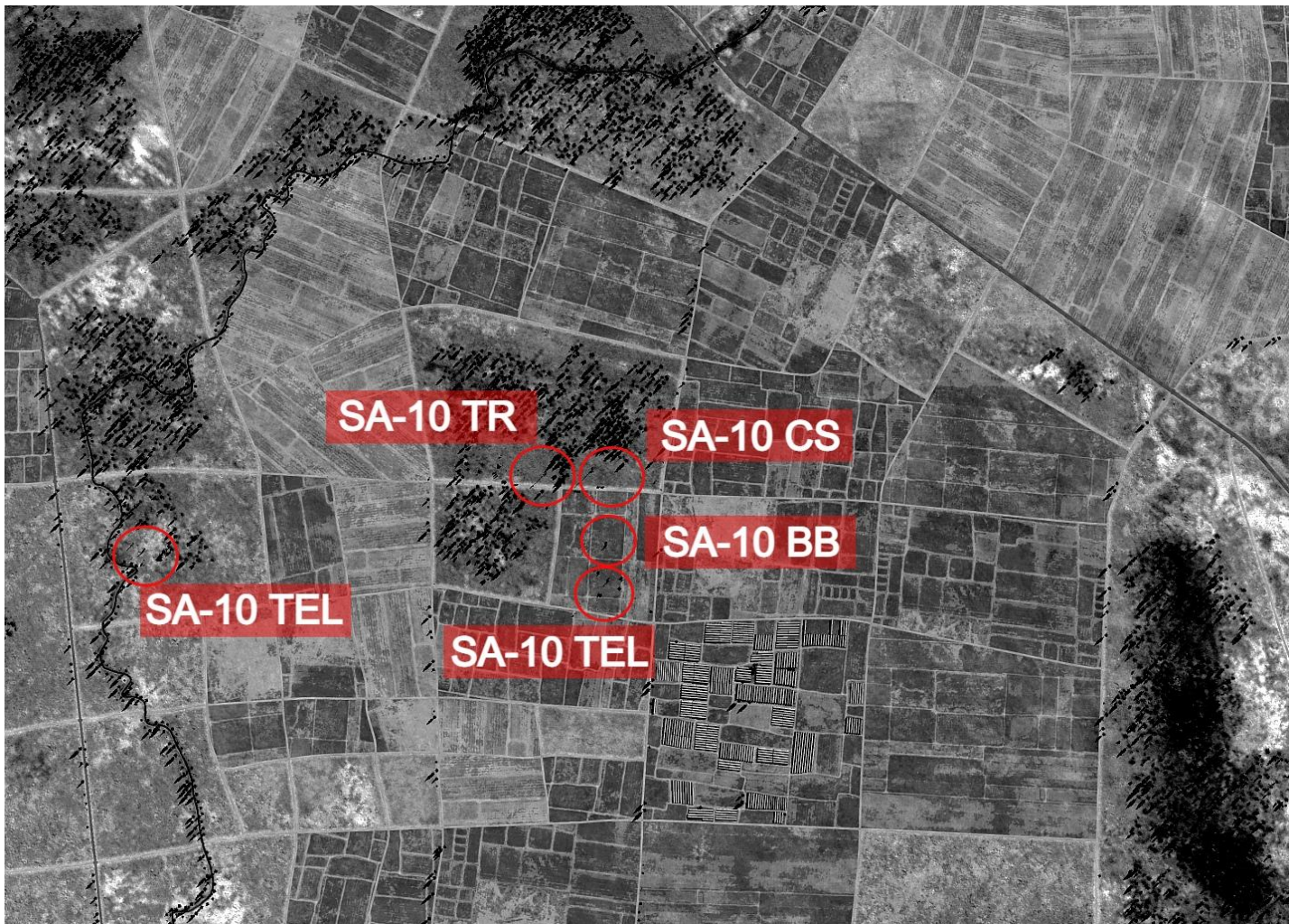
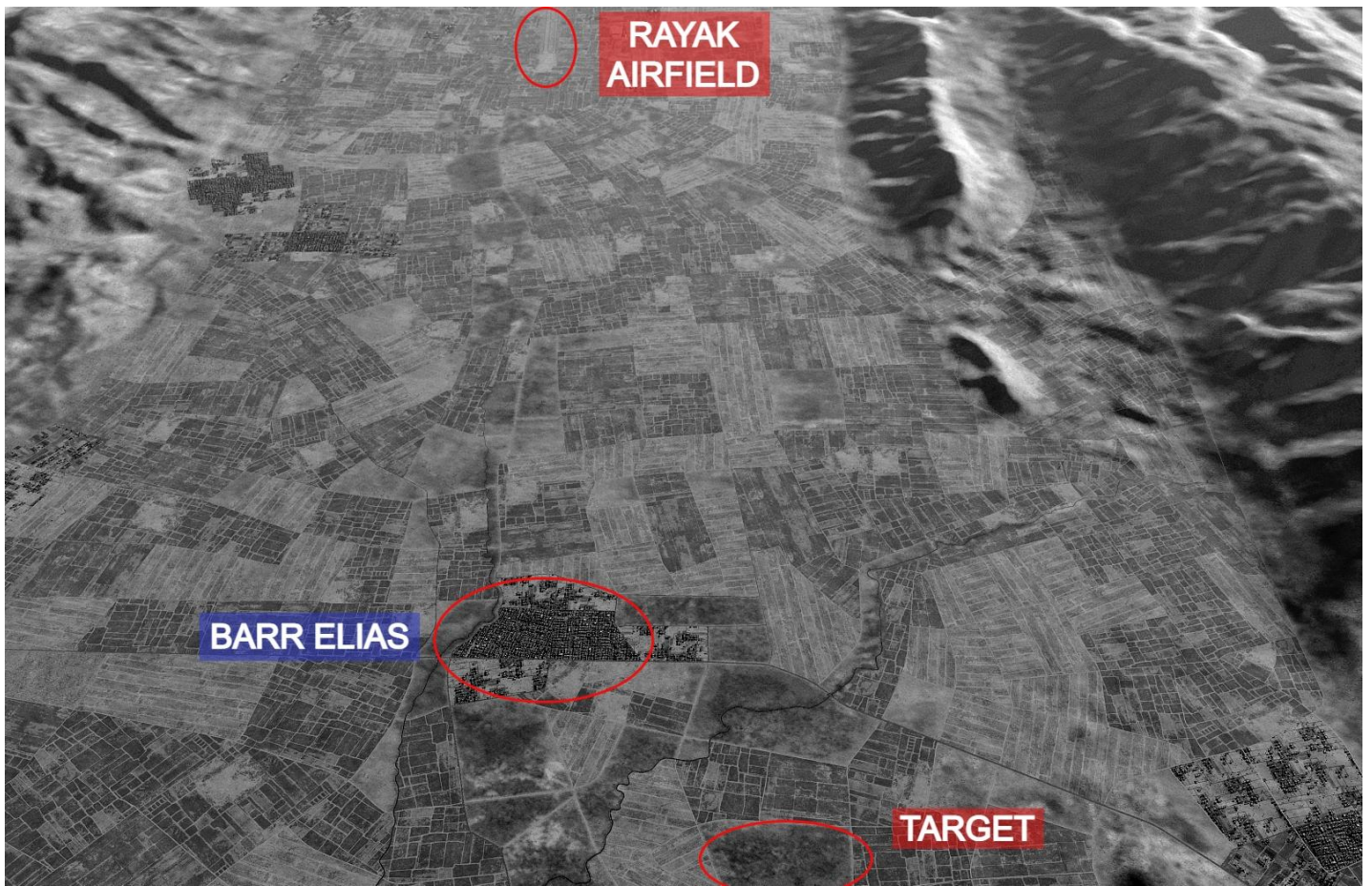
The SA-10 battery is located 7 miles southwest of Rayak airfield, which is controlled by Hezbollah. The battery consists of a command post, 1 'Clam Shell' search radar, 1 'Big Bird' search radar, 1 'Flap Lid' tracking radar and 4 Transporter Erector Launchers (TELs). The precise coordinates for each battery element are included in my kneeboards.

The battery is defended by ZU-57 AAA and SA-18 MANPADs, an SA-15 has also been identified between the battery and Rayak airfield, providing point defence along the expected attack axis from the northeast.

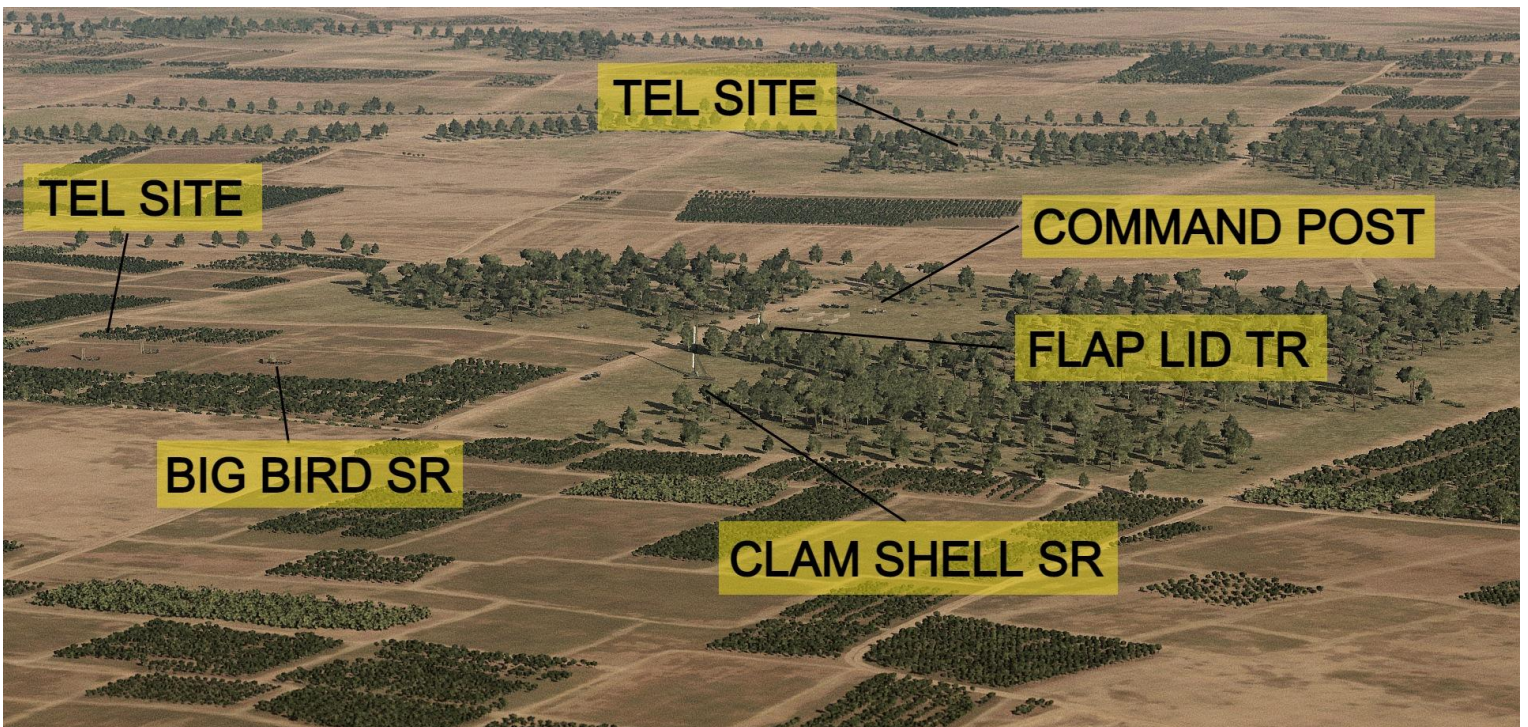
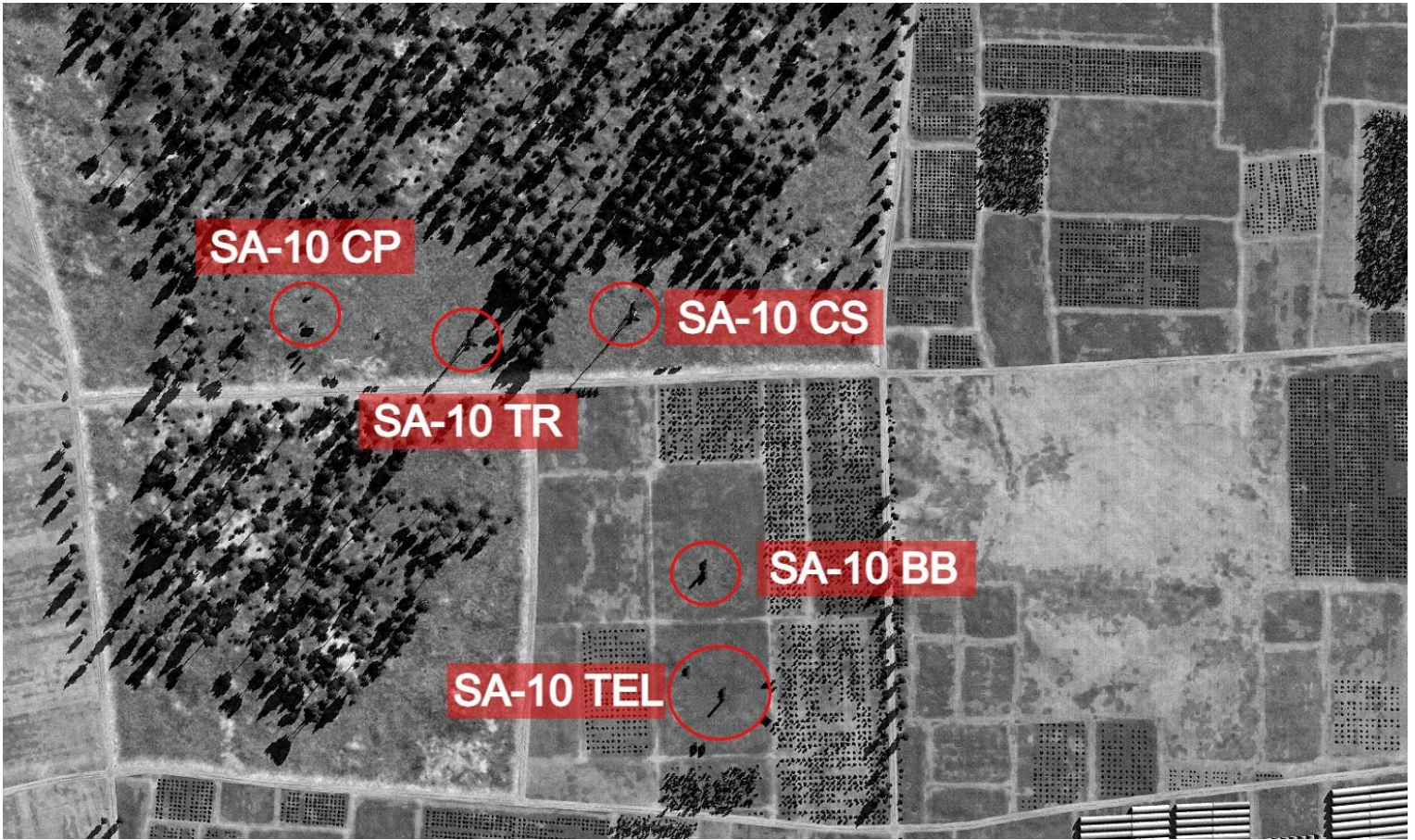
The destruction of the tracking radar and the command post is our primary objective, with the 2 search radars and 4 TELs our secondary objectives. Command wants this battery eliminating, not suppressing, it's presence here is too much of a threat to operations in the area.



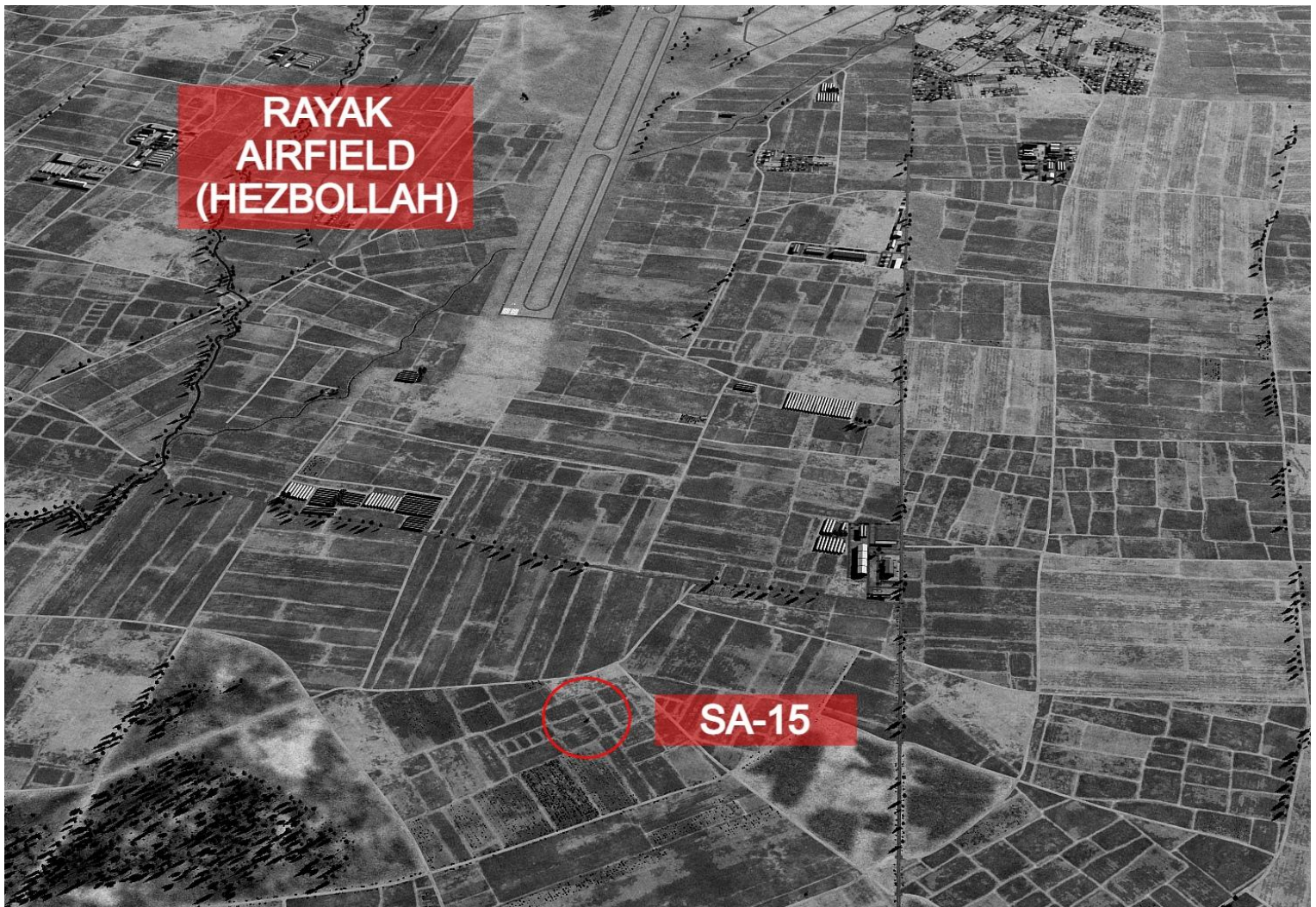












I will be leading Woody on this strike, and after the slim pickings in the weapons department in recent times we've finally been given better access to more advanced weapons again. We will be carrying a mixed loadout between us, with Woody hauling 2 HARMS and two GBU-31s to the target and myself a formidable load of 4 AGM-154As and 2 GBU-32s. This will allow us the potential for a considerable standoff ability against the site, with some added bombs (and cannon) in case we need to get in closer and finish the job.

This is going to be a complex target to attack, especially with just two aircraft. Link had intended for a four ship to be carrying out this mission but the pressure of the ATO has not made this possible, so I guess me and Woody will have to work our socks off to get the job done. It's a hell of a responsibility planning a mission of this complexity and there's a lot of things to consider.

My first consideration will be the direction of attack. The most obvious route will be to attack through the Bekaa Valley, protected from the SA-10 by the jamming escort (at least until we get too close and it burns through the jamming). However the jammers will make it obvious we are coming and the SA-10 and SA-15s will be looking for and trying to engage us, and importantly, are also capable of intercepting our HARMS and JSOWs. If attacking by this route we will be offered decent protection from the SA-10 at standoff range but will have a tougher time overwhelming the battery defences and getting our weapons through.



The SA-15 poses an additional obstacle to overcome and one which should be given serious consideration. The Bekaa Valley is also heavily defended by Hezbollah AAA sites, meaning a significant threat also exists at low level in the valley, some pilots have taken to calling it 'the trench run' which tells you everything you need to know. Alternatively I could use the Growlers as a decoy, drawing the SAM gaze to the northeast while I find another route to the target, should I choose to do this, I'll have to pay careful attention to the many threats in the region and choose the place and time of my ingress wisely. The lack of jamming protection will make this choice considerably more risky with regards to the SA-10.

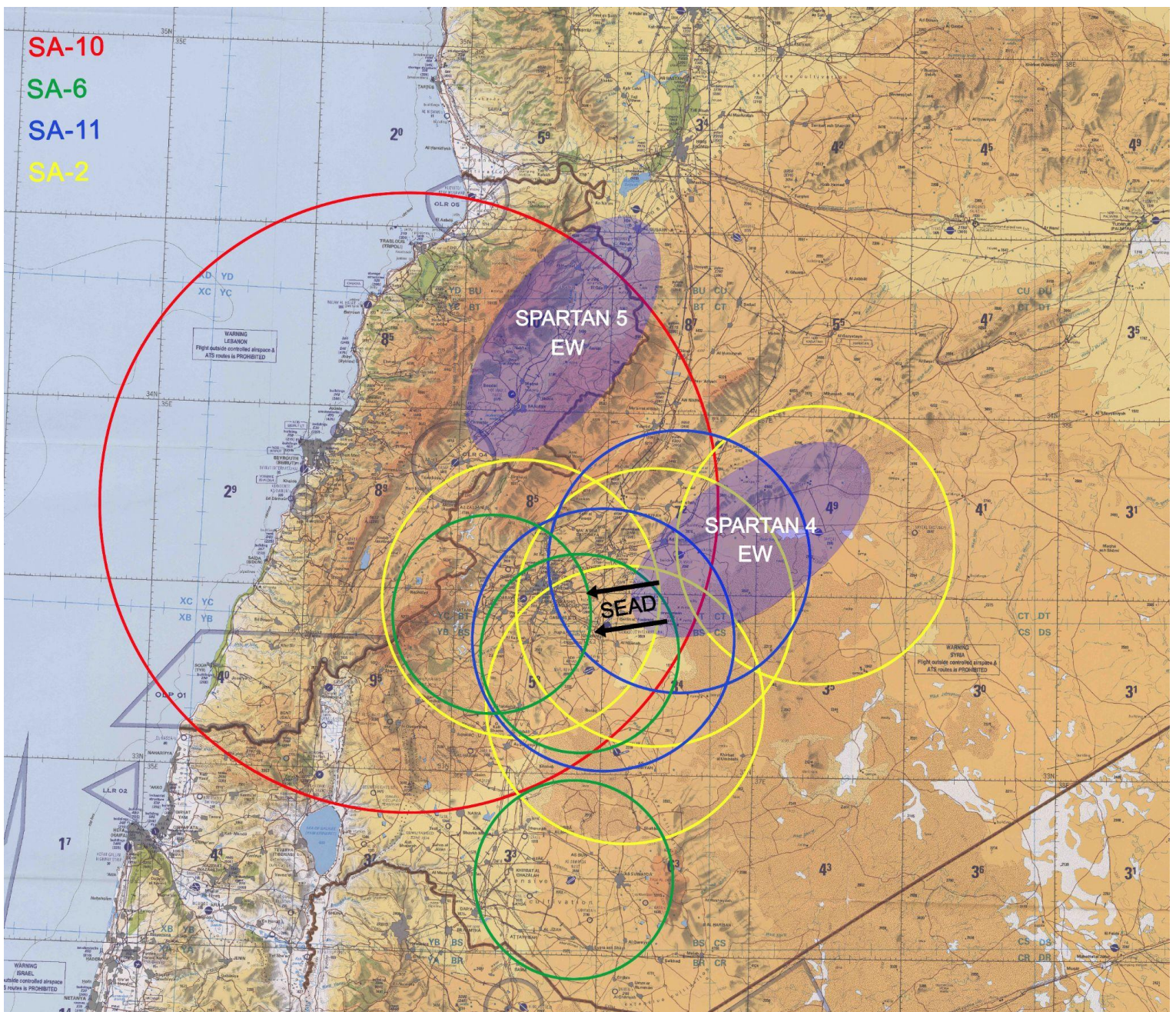
It's also important that I remember some important principles when going up against SAM sites like this. First, our jamming screen isn't a super weapon, it will prevent SAM systems engaging us at range but will lose effectiveness if I get too close to a SAM site or get too far from the jamming aircraft. Second, HARMs are a useful weapon for *suppressing* a SAM site, even if the HARM does not kill the SAM it may well force it offline for a while, giving us the opportunity to kill it with other weapons. This opens up a number of possibilities related to the timing of mine and Woody's attacks. Third, SAMs can't shoot what they can't see on radar - terrain masking may therefore have a part to play - but that of course comes with the trade off of burning more fuel, less range on our weapons and a bigger threat from ground fire from AAA and IR SAMs.

Bingo for this mission is 5900lb, however we have calculated this very tight and it will eat into our reserve fuel. If I hit bingo I should look to gain as much altitude as possible for the flight back.

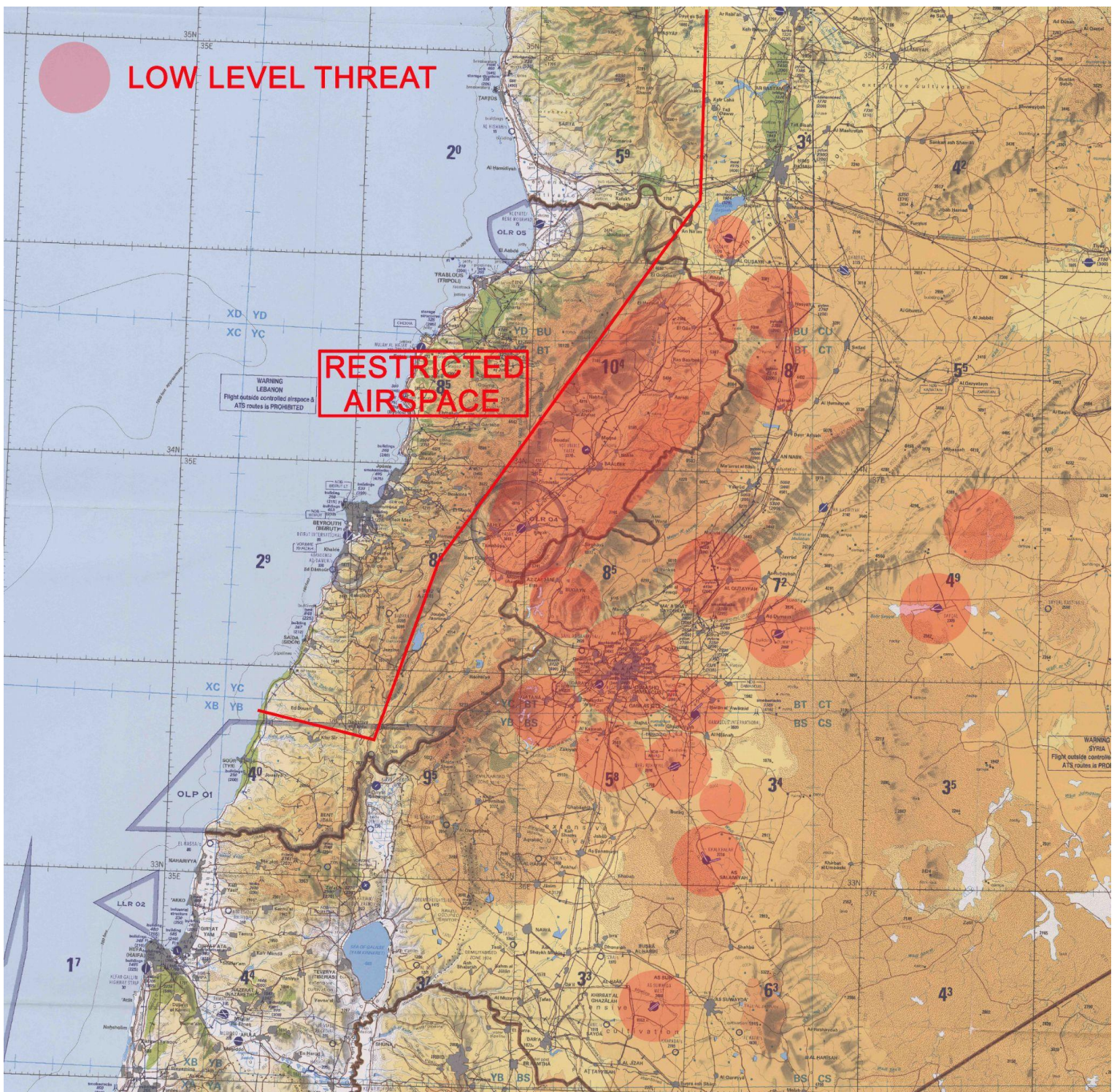
A major part of the planning process is the threat analysis, which is what Link and I ended the briefing discussing, and it's fair to see it took some time.

Starting with the SAM network we looked at coverage in southern Syria, greatly enhanced thanks to the Russian efforts. Our Rivet Joint flights have been on overtime mapping out these new emitters, along with the SA-10 in the Bekaa Valley, two new SA-11 positions have been deployed near Damascus and have significantly beefed up the defence of the capital. These are in addition to at least 4 SA-2 batteries, 2 SA-3 sites (not marked) and 2 SA-6 sites, not to mention any SA-8s present at the various airbases in the area.









The SA-10 site itself is a high value target and contains additional defences, recon flights and SATINT have sighted at least two ZU-57 SP AAA and several MANPAD teams. An SA-15 is providing point defence against attacks from the north.

Finally we discussed the threat from the Syrian Air Force, which is making a timely resurgence. Our OCA flights will hopefully keep any Syrian air to air threats at bay but we should be prepared to face any of the main Syrian fighters - Mig-21, Mig-23 and Mig-29.



With the threat analysis completed we closed the briefing, I walked silently back to my room, contemplating the mission ahead and my responsibility in planning it. I've planned strikes before, most recently the attack on the air defence command bunker at Shayrat all those weeks ago. But this...this is an order of magnitude more complex, I'm going to have to give this some serious thought, I have fuel considerations, threats to mitigate for and TOT's to observe. Lost in these thoughts I retired for the evening and buried my head in the planning documents.

Take off is 05:25.

\*\*\* NOTES FOR PLAYER \*\*\*

This mission will again take place in two parts, broken up by air to air refuelling. Do not spend time programming weapons in part 1, this will not carry over to part 2.

This mission is designed to be planned by you the player, however please note you cannot change the loadout as your selection would not carry over to part two of the mission.

A planning document is provided in the campaign document folder to assist with your mission planning. This can be used as thoroughly or as lightly as you desire and includes maps that you can print and annotate if you wish.