

November 23, 2011.

3 Days have passed since the attack on Kerman International Airport. RCT 1 secured the airport after a day of heavy fighting, while RCT 5 and RCT 7 also took their objectives and are positioned north and south of the city. Kerman is now surrounded.

The last 48 hours have seen relative calm. The Iranian war machine in the area now either withdrawn or destroyed - this was brought into stark focus 3 days ago when several columns of military vehicles attempted to withdraw from Kerman and flee northwest towards Iranian lines. A call was put out for all available ground attack aircraft to assist in chasing them down, and it seems none could resist this target rich environment. Over the next 8 hours, over 30 aircraft descended on the dozens and dozens of tanks, IFVs, APCs and supply trucks that attempted to escape the kill zone. None survived, the roads north out of Kerman city now covered in burnt out vehicles. This successful attack caused jubilation back at Juliet when word came down as it has put an end to all conventional military strength in Kerman province.

We rose at first light this morning to begin preflighting our aircraft ahead of today's mission. We were briefed late last night and by my reckoning that means I probably had no more than 3 hours of sleep. Not a great start to the day. But meeting up with Ein-Stein, my wingman for today, we headed to the mess for coffee. As we walked in silence I thought back on the details of the briefing.

The briefing started late in the evening, it was already dark and the briefing room was harshly lit by portable flood lamps, the base's power supply to this room seemingly absent. The room was cold, lacking heating on these cold Iranian November nights. The entire detachment was in attendance as we all have missions today in support of a major push into Kerman City. As we took our positions, Mother invited Captain Parkin to begin with the met brief.

The Captain briefed us on the weather. We were pleased to hear that the clouds were clearing overnight and we were expecting several days of clear skies, although moderately strong winds were a possibility.

With Parkin's weather brief complete. Major Daniels started his intel brief.

The Major began, "Since the Regimental Combat Teams secured the perimeter of Kerman and KIAP, and the destruction of the large Iranian column, we have seen 48 hours of relative calm. This is of course probably an illusion. The Iranian's conventional military power in Kerman is spent - of that we are certain - but as I'm sure you had already guessed, militia forces are most certainly still in Kerman City and preparing for a long, protracted battle".

"So the big question of course is how many Basij are we looking at...and how well armed are they?"

"That would be nice to know!" quipped Chief.

The Major ignored him and carried on, "It's impossible to say reliably, we expect the number of militia fighters to be in the thousands, but that's as accurate as we can be right now. Weapons are a little easier to determine, intel indicates that the militia has thousands of small arms readily available to all who wish to fight, spread across the city in weapons caches, hidden in warehouses, homes, offices and probably mosques as well. The IRGC is believed to have helped set up these caches so we anticipate they will be well stocked and anticipate mortars, explosives and MANPADs to also be held in these weapons caches. Heavier weapons such as large calibre AAA guns and heavy MGs have not been detected through ISR, but of course these could easily be hidden by a tarp or stashed away in any of Kerman's many warehouses".

"Any indication on militia locations Major?", asked Baz, "Are they spread throughout the city, or do we instead expect to see the militia controlling certain parts of the city?"

"Again that is currently unclear" replied Daniels, "Any opinion on that is conjecture at this point so we'll have to park that for the moment".

"What about the will of the local populace to fight?" asked Noble.

Daniels responded, "That we have clearer information on. Iran fought a long, bitter war with Iraq. The fanaticism of some of the Iranian troops to fight and die for their country is not in doubt. We expect the Basij to fight hard, to fight stubbornly and to not back down. Kerman was originally a city of over 800,000, we know a very large number of civilians have evacuated the city, believed to be in the hundreds of thousands. But that also likely still leaves a large number left. Out of those that are left there will certainly be those that can't or just won't leave, but amongst them there will most likely also be some who want to stay and fight with the militia".

"I thought we were coming to liberate these people?" remarked Chief, "Not exactly rolling out the red carpet are they?"

"What would you do if an invading army rolled into your home city Chief?" Mother responded.

Daniels interjected, "There are indications across the country that support for our coalition isn't as widespread as we initially thought it would be. That said, we know that in many places the Iranian regime is also deeply unpopular. Against this backdrop the psychological war is being waged, the winning of hearts and minds if you like. To this effect, we now have an EC-130J psy-ops unit airborne, broadcasting messages to Iranian civilians that they should not fight and that we are here to help".

"And that if you do fight us, we'll bomb the crap out of your city" muttered Chief.

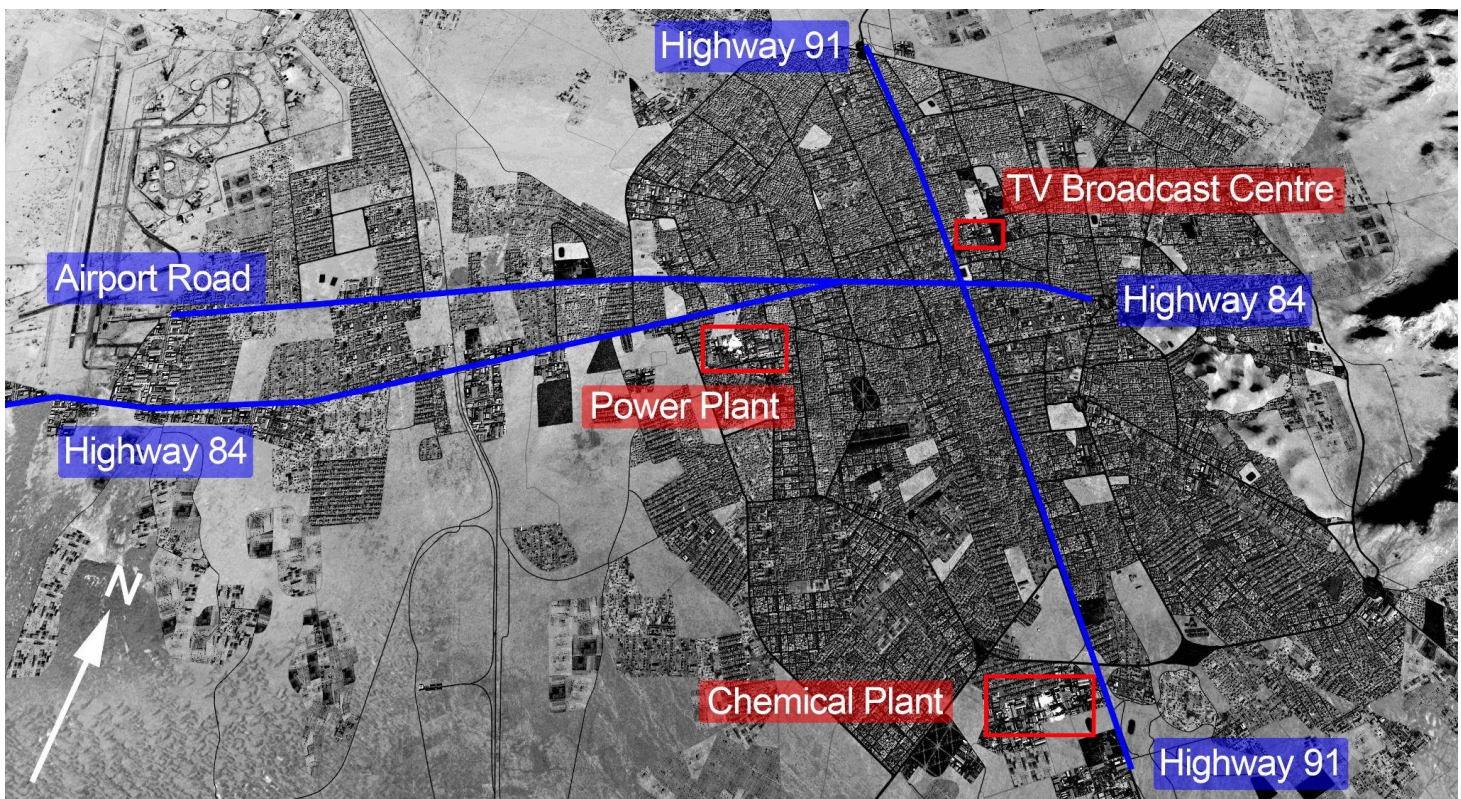
"That's enough Chief," Mother said sternly.

"I do have one last piece of information to share with you" said Daniels, "Earlier today a flight of Marine Hornets located and killed a group of Scuds in the mountain passes north of Kerman, we are hopeful that will put an end to any more attacks on Juliet".

This news was met with a few subtle smiles and nods of heads.

Daniels, having finished his brief, then departed the briefing room and Major Shaw rose to his feet.

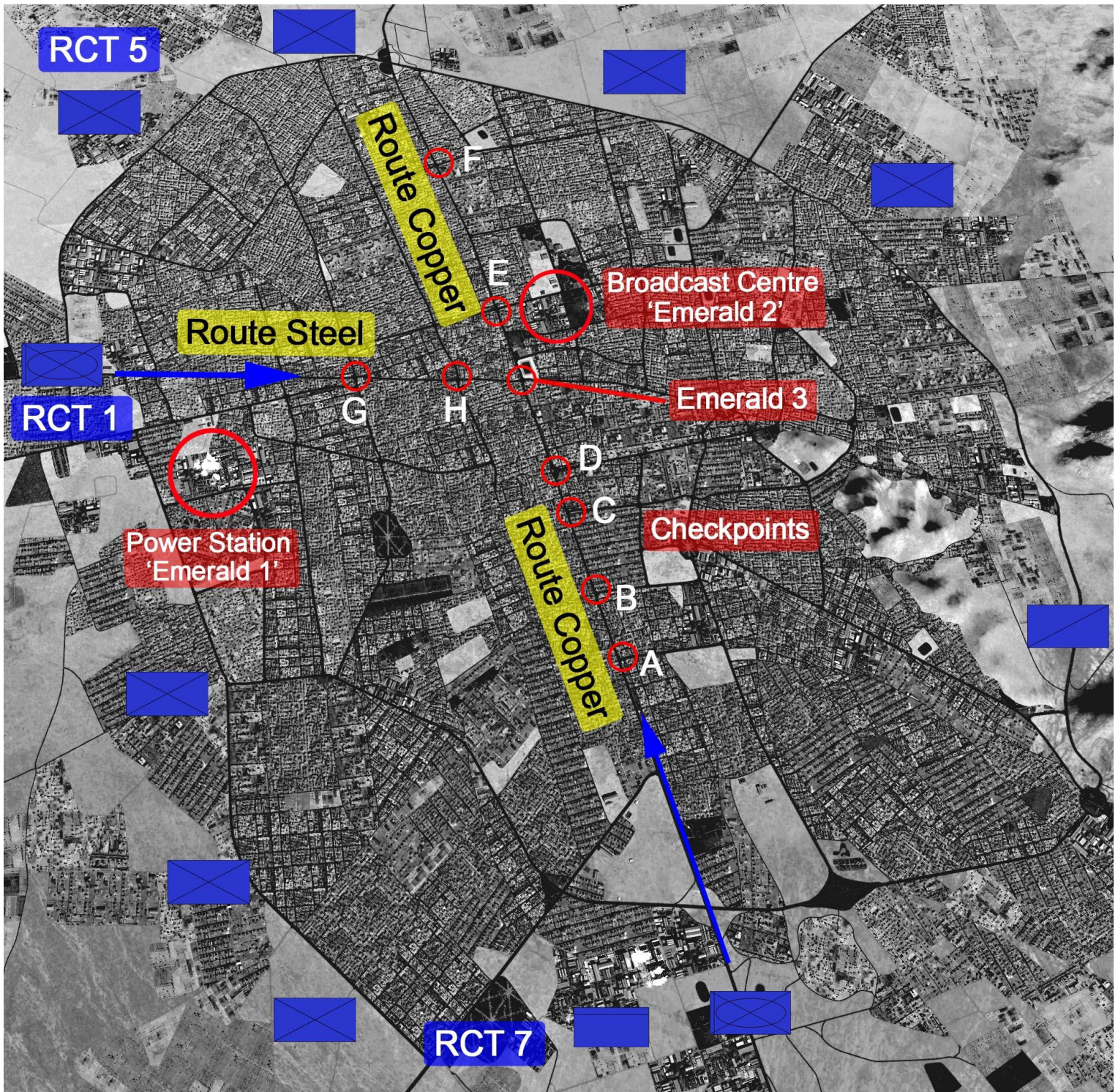
He began, "Tomorrow morning our Marines start moving into Kerman City. The operation to secure the city will likely take many days and this will be a complex and multi-phased plan. In broad strokes, tomorrow we will move into the city in force along the major thoroughfares, Highway 91, which we are calling Route Copper, runs south to north through the heart of the city, and Highway 84, or Route Steel, runs west to east. Along these routes we will be establishing a series of armed checkpoints, the goal being to break up the city into districts which if necessary, we can contain and clear of militia one at a time, while stopping militia movement between districts and across the city".



"1st Marine Division's TOC, or Tactical Operations Center has been established at a warehouse near the chemical plant just south of the city. RCT 1 are now occupying the airport, units of which will push into the city along the airport road and onto Highway 84. RCT 5 are holding the northern and eastern perimeter of the city, acting as the anvil to the rest of the division's hammer. RCT 7 will enter the city and push north along Highway 91".

Major Shaw then pulled up a second map on the screen at the front of the room.





"The operation will begin at 07:00 tomorrow morning, the ground forces will enter the city along their assigned routes, securing the road junctions and establishing the checkpoints marked Alpha through Hotel on this map. The intersection of Copper and Steel is designated Emerald 3. Close to both Copper and Steel are two other day 1 objectives, Emerald 1 - the Kerman power plant, and Emerald 2 - the TV Broadcast centre. Both are key strategic objectives, brass wants to make sure the power stays on and not give the remaining population any more reasons to hate us. The broadcast centre, as well as being useful in delivering our hearts and minds message also presents a threat in the hands of the militias, and could be used to spread anti-US propoganda and possibly coordinate attacks through coded broadcasts".



"Will you be rolling armour into the city?" asked Baz.

"AAVs and some of our M1s will be operating along Copper and Steel" replied Shaw, "But only along these main routes to start with. We will use armour to help establish perimeters around each district, where the wider, open roads give us more room to operate in and clearer lanes of fire. Once a district is isolated in this manner, we will go block by block on foot to clear it".

"Onto the air support plan, we will be maintaining CAS coverage around the clock during this operation. We have multiple Sandman teams embedded with the RCTs and these of course will be your primary contacts on the ground during the operation. Needless to say - but I'll say it anyway - this will be a close urban environment, with friendlies in close proximity to any fighting. So proper control of your attacks is absolutely essential. We will also have Cobras supporting the ground force so listen out for deconfliction instructions from your FACs. Finally we expect to meet heavy resistance so make sure you bring your A game with you, any more questions?"

Shaw was met with shakes of the head, signalling his departure and for Mother to begin briefing the details of our mission.

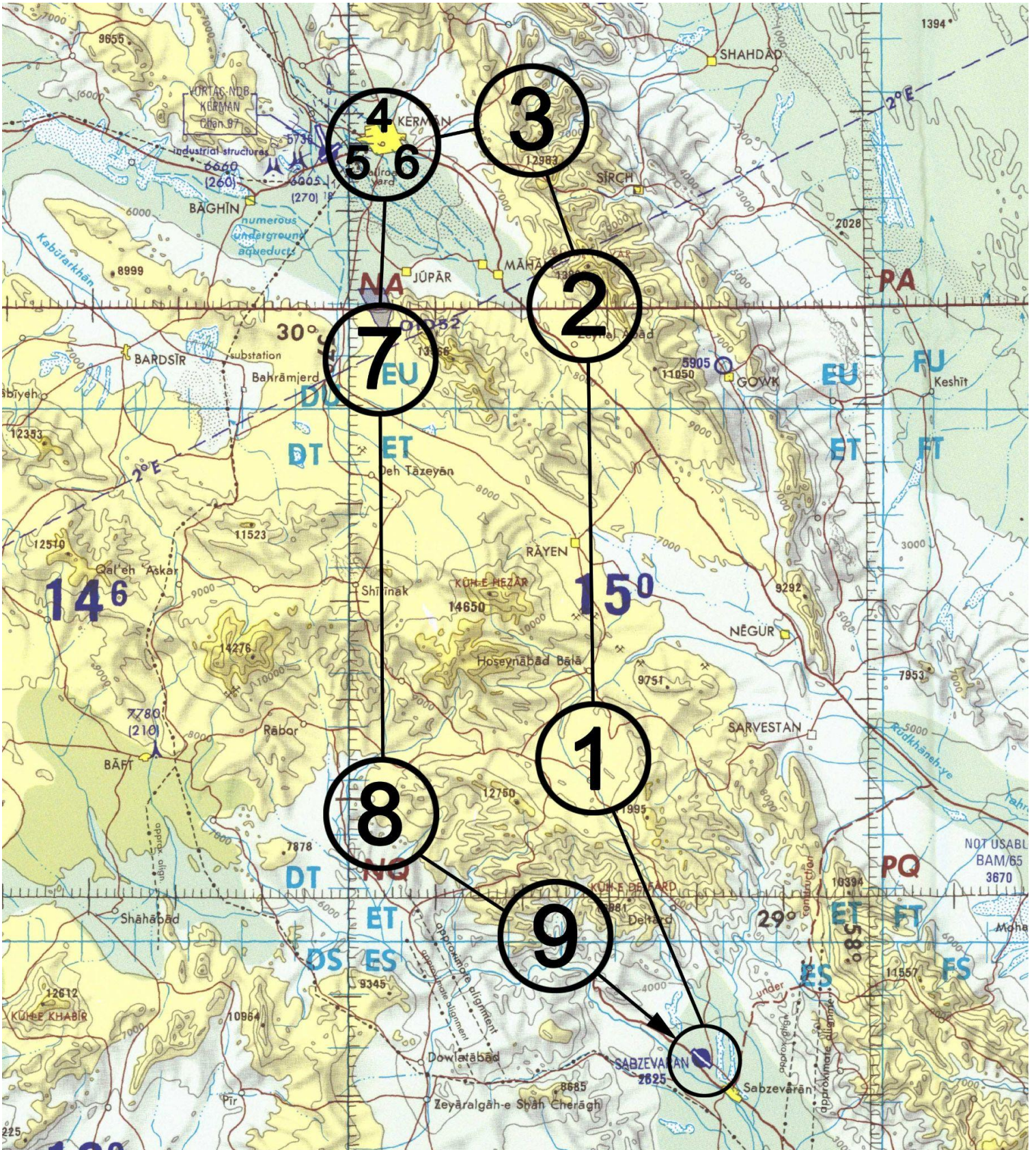
Mother told us we will be operating 3 separate flights of two ships over Kerman during the initial Marine advancement into the city. The first flight will be myself and Ein-Stein, to be relieved in turn by Mother and Noble, then Baz and Chief. Departing Juliet, flights will rendezvous at waypoint 1 before pushing through the flight plan to waypoint 3 - which is the holding stack about 15 miles east of the city. As always Chieftain will be controlling access to this airspace, along with managing CAS requests from the numerous FAC teams on the ground. Once in position at the holding stack, we will follow Chieftain's instructions for the remainder of our mission.

To assist us in getting our bearing over the city a number of waypoints have been set over key landmarks. Waypoint 4 will be set on the Chemical Plant at the south of the city, waypoint 5 on the Power Plant and waypoint 6 on the junction of Routes Copper and Steel - Emerald 3.

The airspace over Kerman will have multiple aircraft within it. UAVs will be operating in the 28,000 feet MSL to 30,000 feet MSL altitude block, Hornets tasked over the city will be assigned the 23k to 27k block. Our Harriers will be operating between 18,000 and 22,000 feet MSL. Down low, we will have Marine rotary assets operating between 6,000 and 9,000 feet MSL.

Bingo fuel is 2,900lb, which means that if we arrive on plan we will have over 6,000 lb of fuel to use over the city. Our loadout will be two external tanks, two GBU-12s, 2 laser Mavs, and as always, the gun - which given its accuracy may well be very useful in this tight urban environment.







Mother wrapped the briefing up by discussing the threats we could face over Kerman. The HAWK battery at KIAP and the SA-6s rooming the area are now completely neutralised, meaning there are no more radar guided SAM threats in the Kerman AOR. All previously identified AAA positions in the city have also been eliminated, although the possibility of well camouflaged or hidden batteries surviving is a possibility we should be alert to. The biggest threat to our aircraft will be MANPADs, and we should assume there will be a high MANPAD threat over the city. It will also be vital to remember that Kerman City is at an elevation of 5700 feet MSL, so MANPADs can reach us all the way up to around 18,000 feet MSL.

We spent several more hours honing the details of the missions, studying the maps of Kerman and committing key landmarks to memory. Eventually, once we felt we had exhausted all possibilities and covered every detail, we made our way out of the briefing room into the crisp, cold Iranian night.

Takeoff time is set for 06:40 so I'll be taking off in the dark, I at least expect to see a nice nice sunrise on the way over.

