



18/07/2013, 17:15.

Things here in Syria just keep heating up...inch by inch we seem to be creeping towards a line where events will just descend into total chaos. We're not there yet but we seem to be getting sucked further and further south towards Damascus and it's formidable air defences. Frankly I think the thought strikes a lot of fear into the squadron...although no one is yet to admit it.

Yesterday's mission saw me leading Woody, Eboy and Newt on a mission against the air defences at An Nasiriyah airbase. Our role was to escort a flight of 8 British Tornados on an attack against the airbase's runways. It was great to be in the air again with those beauties, I've been away from the RAF too long.

The Tornados succeeded in hitting the runways at An Nasiriyah, and the follow up waves all found their mark...wreaking havoc on the airbase's shelters and ramps. Looks like An Nasiriyah is going to be out of action for some time.

This mission was the furthest south the JSTF has been so far in Cerberus North, we have now begun to brush up against the 'Damascus Super MEZ', which is what we have dubbed the heavy belt of SAMs surrounding the city. Thankfully so far the EW and SEAD support has been excellent, giving us enough time and space to do our jobs. However as we push further south we know the threat is only going to get more serious - yesterday's mission also brought the JSTF into contact with Syrian Mig-29s for the first time.

So onto tomorrow's mission. We knew command had something major prepared when Poodle and I were instructed to report to Incirlik's large briefing theatre at 13:00 hours today. We were amongst the last to arrive, and when we did we saw dozens of personnel from both the Marines and USAF, along with a few US Navy representatives who had evidently flown in for the briefing. The first thing we noticed was a nervous energy in the room as the flight crews caught sight of the map on the screen at the front. Poodle and I took our seats and shortly after the briefing began.

Major Colvyn was the officer leading today's intelligence brief, which he opened by filling us in on the activity in the STO over the last 48 hours. Despite our intervention at An Nasiriyah the Syrians are still attacking Yabrud with real intent, with additional ground forces from the SAA 20th and 65th Brigades being pushed north to join the fighting.

The Syrians have also been reinforcing their air defences north of Damascus, with additional SA-6 batteries being deployed to pre-prepared sites near Sayqal. It is believed these SAM systems are being bought out of the storage facilities at the 150th Air Defence Regiment.

The biggest development however has been the deployment of Syrian SS-1C SCUD B ballistic missiles to the field. Major Colvyn informed us that the Scuds were first spotted around 36 hours ago via SATINT, in transit at night to Khalkhalah Airbase in southern Syria. They have since been confirmed as present at this location.

To the west Hezbollah drones have continued to harass the SDF supply line from Homs to Yabrud, it is strongly suspected that Hezbollah are feeding the Syrians intel on SDF movements down the Homs road and on SDF positions in and around Yabrud.

We are also starting to see the first reports filter through of large numbers of civilians fleeing from towns in the Damascus area, it is believed that these refugees are primarily from Sunni areas and although not yet confirmed it is strongly suspected that Shiite militias are behind these attacks, supported by the military. The displaced Sunnis are mostly arriving at the Jordanian border.

Finally the Russians. Following the attacks on An Nasiriyah, Syria and Russia have released statements strongly objecting to interference in internal Syrian affairs. This is the first public condemnation that Russia has issued and although intelligence assessments state that Russia will not directly interfere with JSTF operations the change in tone has been noted by command. In the last 24 hours we have also seen Russian airstrikes resume with a flight of SU-34's attacking targets near Yabrud.

With the intelligence briefing over, Major Colvyn stepped aside and allowed Captain Edwards to brief the weather for the next 24 hours. We can expect scattered clouds at 8000-9000 feet and calm winds across the area.

And then it was time for Major General Forster to take to the podium and brief the main event.

Drawing our attention to the map we had all noted as we entered the auditorium Forster began to talk in a calm and measured tone. He told us the Syrians have continued to attack civilian targets in Yabrud, and despite warnings from the JSTF that there would be consequences if they continued to do so these warnings have not been heeded. In fact, if anything the Syrian attacks have intensified and as they've done so we've seen the Syrians reinforce their positions, be it by the deployment of additional ground forces to Yabrud or by bringing more SAM systems out of storage to bolster their air defences. As Major Colvyn noted we've also seen a battery of Scud surface to surface ballistic missiles deployed to Khalkhalah Airbase.

Major General Forster continued by explaining that we've been watching these Scuds carefully and that by analysing SATINT, photos from reconnaissance flights and HUMINT we have determined that these Scuds are being fuelled and prepared for use and that the Syrian government has every intention of using them very soon.

The reconnaissance photos show the Scud transporter erector launchers (TELs) being armed and prepared by the battery support vehicles:



SS-1C SCUD B TELs - Picture from a pre-war Syrian military parade:



Forster continued, telling us these weapons possess the capability to inflict enormous damage on their targets, be it SDF facilities in the north or even a population centre such as Homs or Aleppo. Given the Scuds inherent, indiscriminate inaccuracy we consider these missiles to be terror weapons and they must be eliminated.

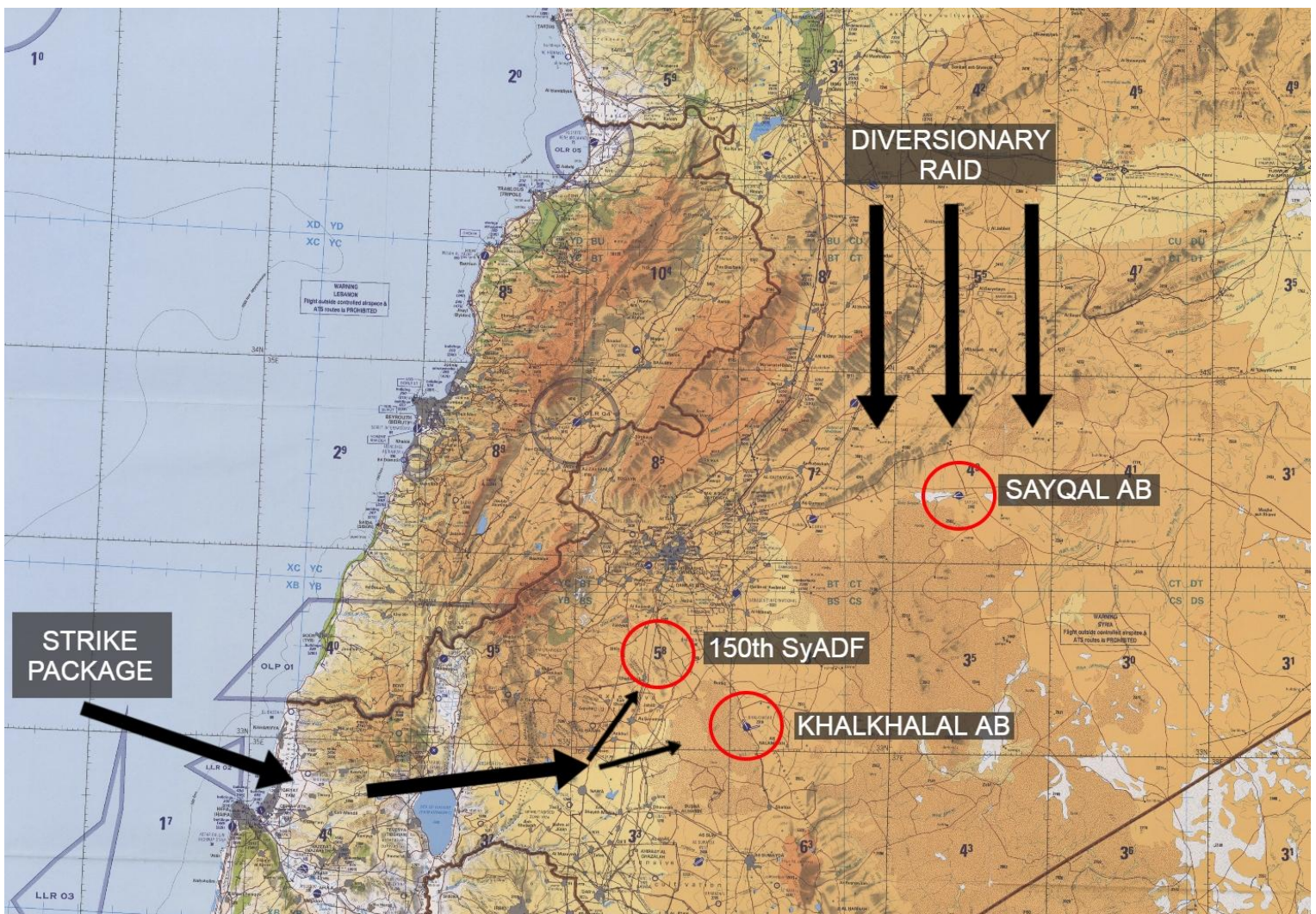
The General then paused for just a moment, letting those words hang in the air briefly, before continuing. The focus of tomorrow's mission will therefore be the destruction of the Scud launching positions and storage facility at Khalkhalal airbase.

At this point everyone's attention was fixed firmly on the map showing the airbase location. Khalkhalal airbase is located deep in the south of Syria, just 25 miles southeast of Damascus. It is by far the most southern and heavily defended location in Syria we've targeted so far.

Forster informed us that the primary targets would be the two Scud launch locations located within the base along with the missile storage site located close by. These targets are assigned to the Red Devils for destruction - it seems we're gaining a reputation for getting the job done. As we are hitting the Scud positions, another flight in the package will be hitting the SAM storage bunkers located at the 150th Air Defence Regiment. We will of course have heavy support from SEAD and EW assets and the JSTF will also be carrying out a diversionary raid on the new SAM positions further north.

Even with the promise of heavy SEAD and EW support there was a sense of apprehension in the theatre, we were after all going to be pushing deep into Syria's SAM network and the distance we would need to travel gives the Syrian fighter cover ample time and space to detect and intercept our flights. Picking up on the mood in the room, General Forster played his ace. The package will be taking an unconventional route into Syria....via Israel.

We were all stunned into silence. Forster continued by outlining the route the package would be taking. Rendezvousing over the sea west of Israel the package will refuel and begin the push towards their targets. The package will consist of 4 F-15E's (Hammer 3) who will be targeting the 150th Air Defence Regiments bunkers, 2 EA-18G Growlers (Spartan 4) as EW support, 4 F-16s (Cobra 1) to suppress the SAMs that may threaten us, 4 F-15Cs (Flash 3) on OCA and finally myself and Poodle targeting the Scuds. The package will go feet dry north of Haifa at 2000 feet MSL, from there we will continue at that altitude over the Sea of Galilee, this will allow us to use the bulky mass of the Golan Heights to shield us from the longer range SAM systems around Damascus. Once clear of the Golan Heights and inside Syrian territory, the package will split into it's attack elements and continue onto it's individual targets.



Forster concluded by reinforcing the message that the destruction of the Scuds is vital to ensure these weapons are not used by the Syrians to cause mass civilian casualties. As Forster was wrapping up a USAF Lt. Colonel asked about the potential fallout for Israel for allowing a US led raid to use it's airspace. Forsters' initial reply was blunt and to the point...Israel knows it will piss off Syria but it doesn't care. Expanding, he explained that except for Russia, Syria has isolated itself internationally and cannot rely on the support of the other Arab nations as it once did. Israel therefore does not fear any significant recrimination for this decision, it might well draw a response from Syria but given the strength of the IDF and IAF, and the relative weakness of the Syrian military this doesn't concern Israel too much. As a result at the time of our attack we should expect to see Israeli forces on high alert across it's border.

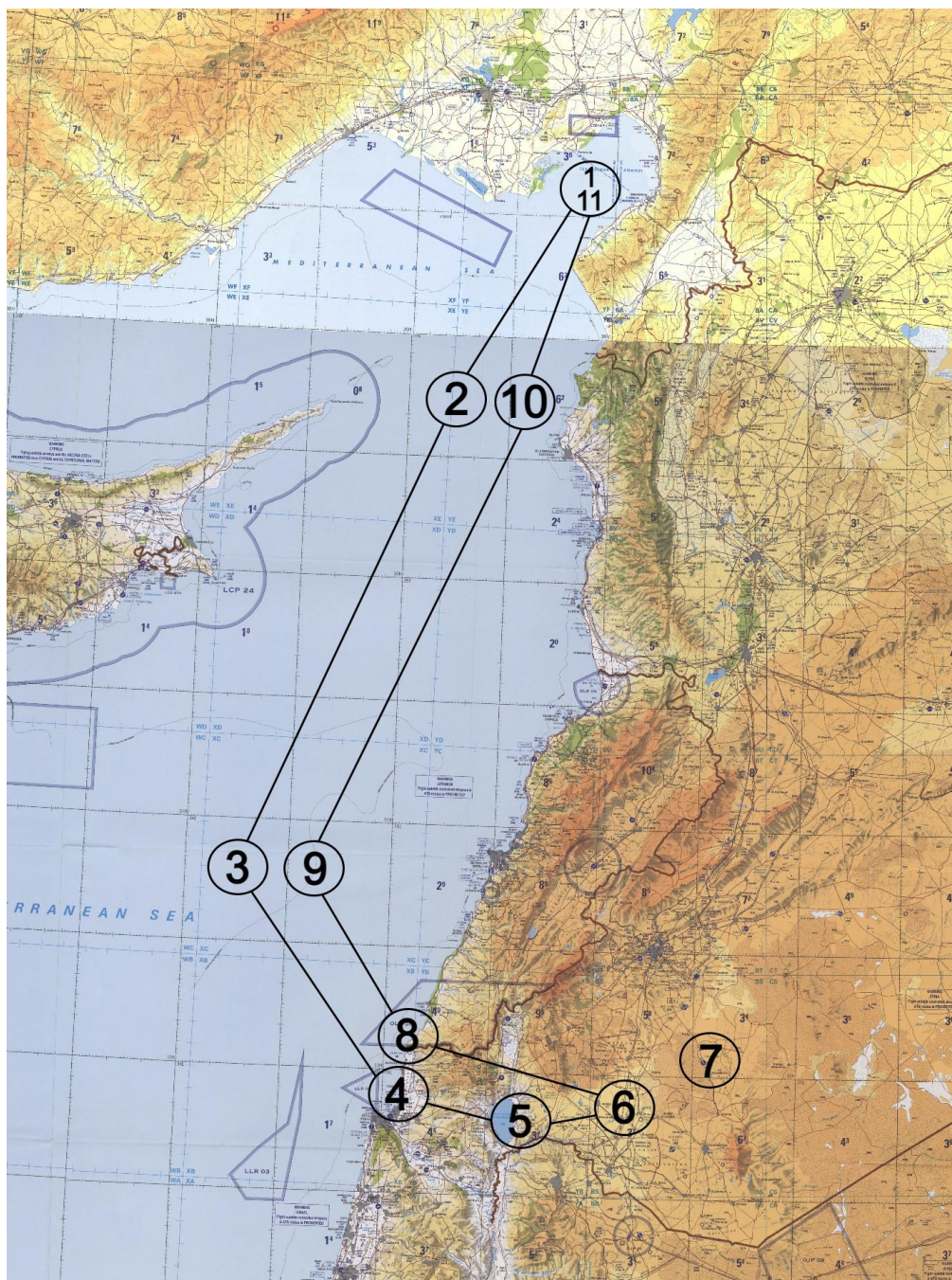
With Forsters briefing over, Poodle and I retired to a smaller briefing room and began to go over the operational details of the mission.

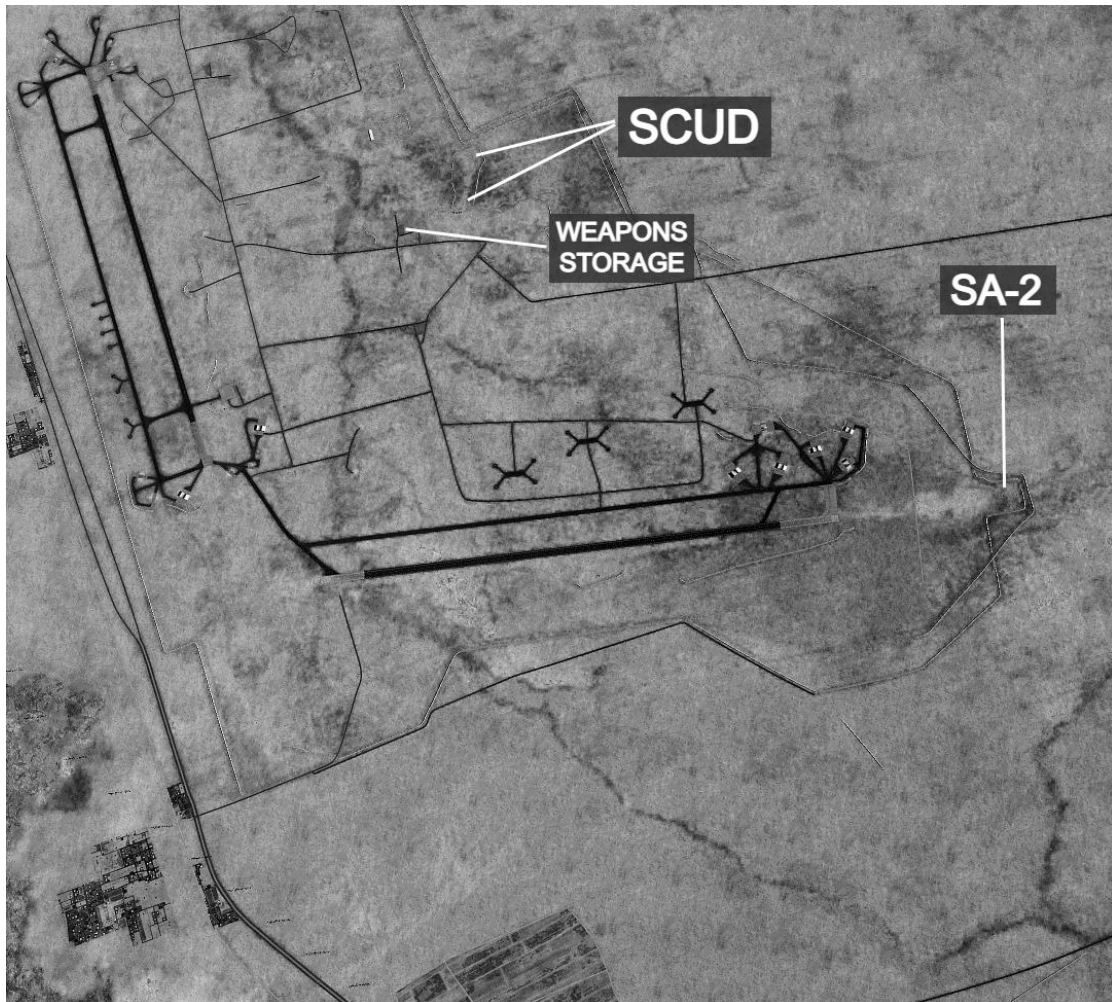
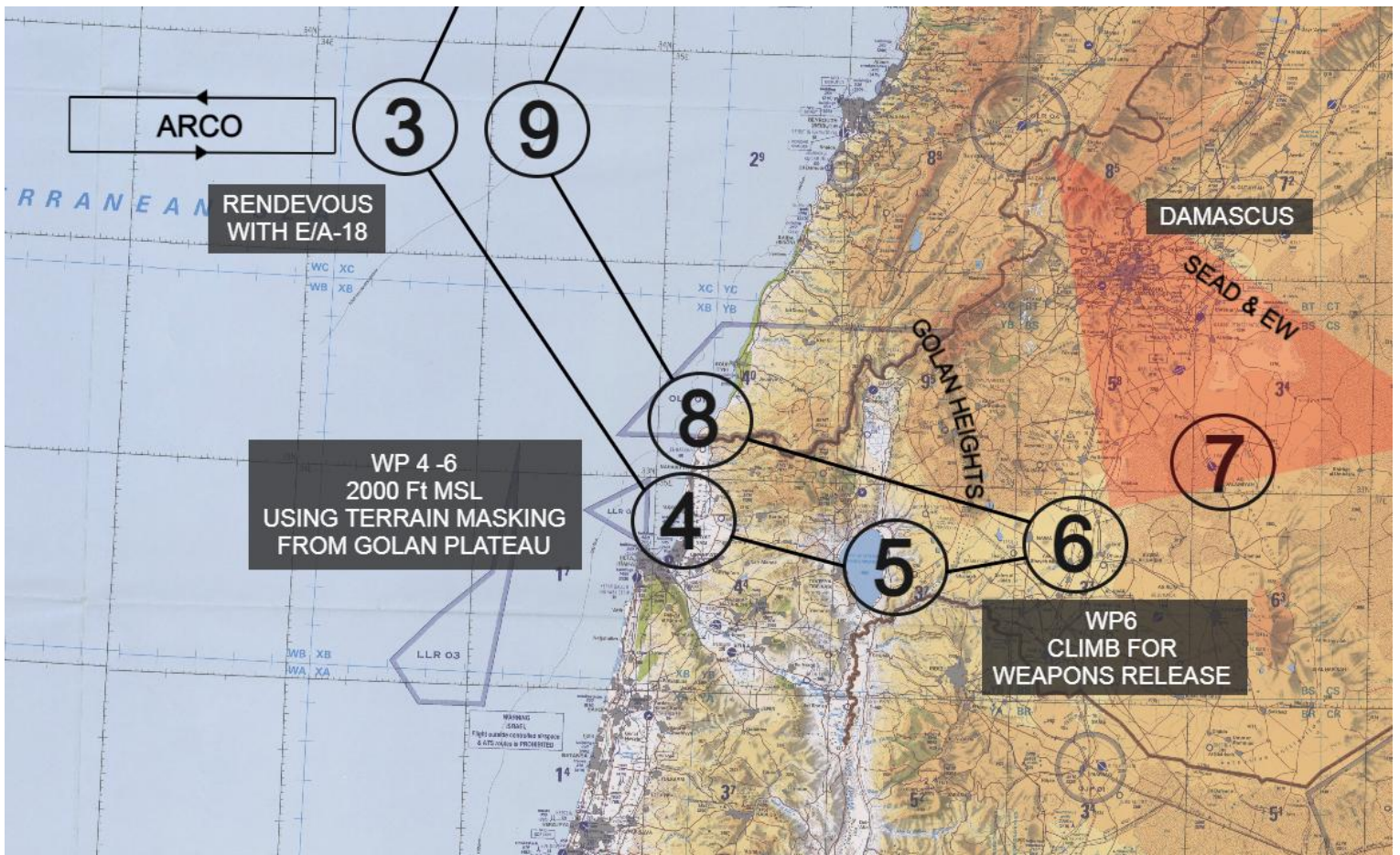
Departing Incirlik we will rendezvous at waypoint 1 and head south towards waypoint 3 where we will refuel with ARCO, we plan to take on around 6000lb of fuel to ensure we push to the target with full tanks. Once the package is assembled the EW and SEAD flight will lead the package into Israel at 2000 feet MSL, going feet dry at waypoint 4. We will stay at 2000 feet until waypoint 6, where we clear the Golan Heights and enter Syria. At this point

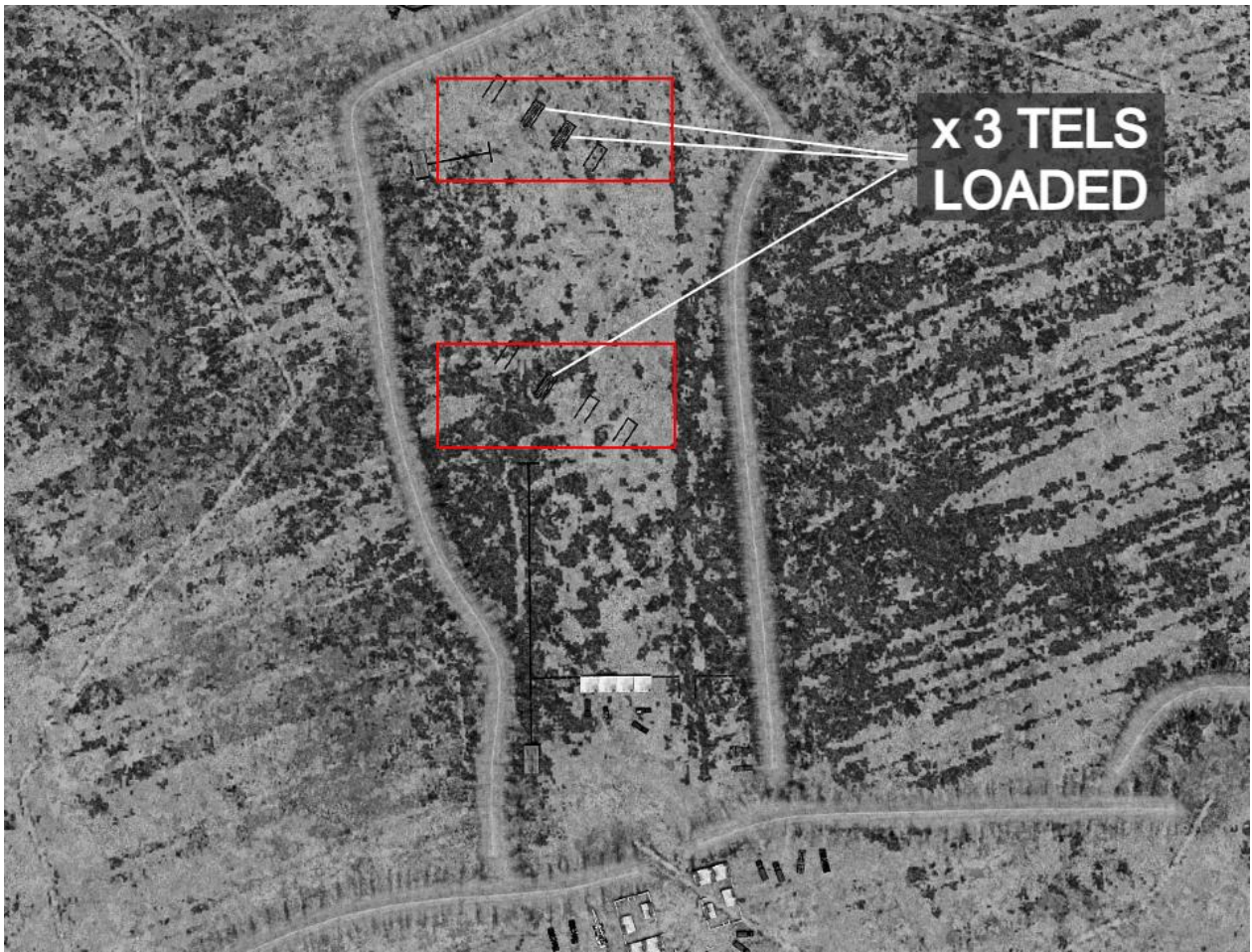
the EW, SEAD and OCA flights will begin their missions allowing our flight and Hammer 3 to engage their targets.

Poodle will be targeting the weapons storage facility, my target will be the two Scud launch positions. We will both be utilising JSOW glide bombs on this mission to ensure we can maintain a safe distance from the target. Poodle will be carrying the AGM-154C version with the BROACH warhead and myself the A 'cluster' variant. We will begin to climb at waypoint 6 and then deliver the weapons once within range. We'll also be carrying additional dumb weapons on our centreline stations as backups, although the chances of being able to successfully employ them seem small to me.

Once we have delivered our weapons we will turn for waypoint 8 and egress back towards the Israeli coast, once again using the Golan Heights as terrain masking. We will not need to refuel on the return leg.



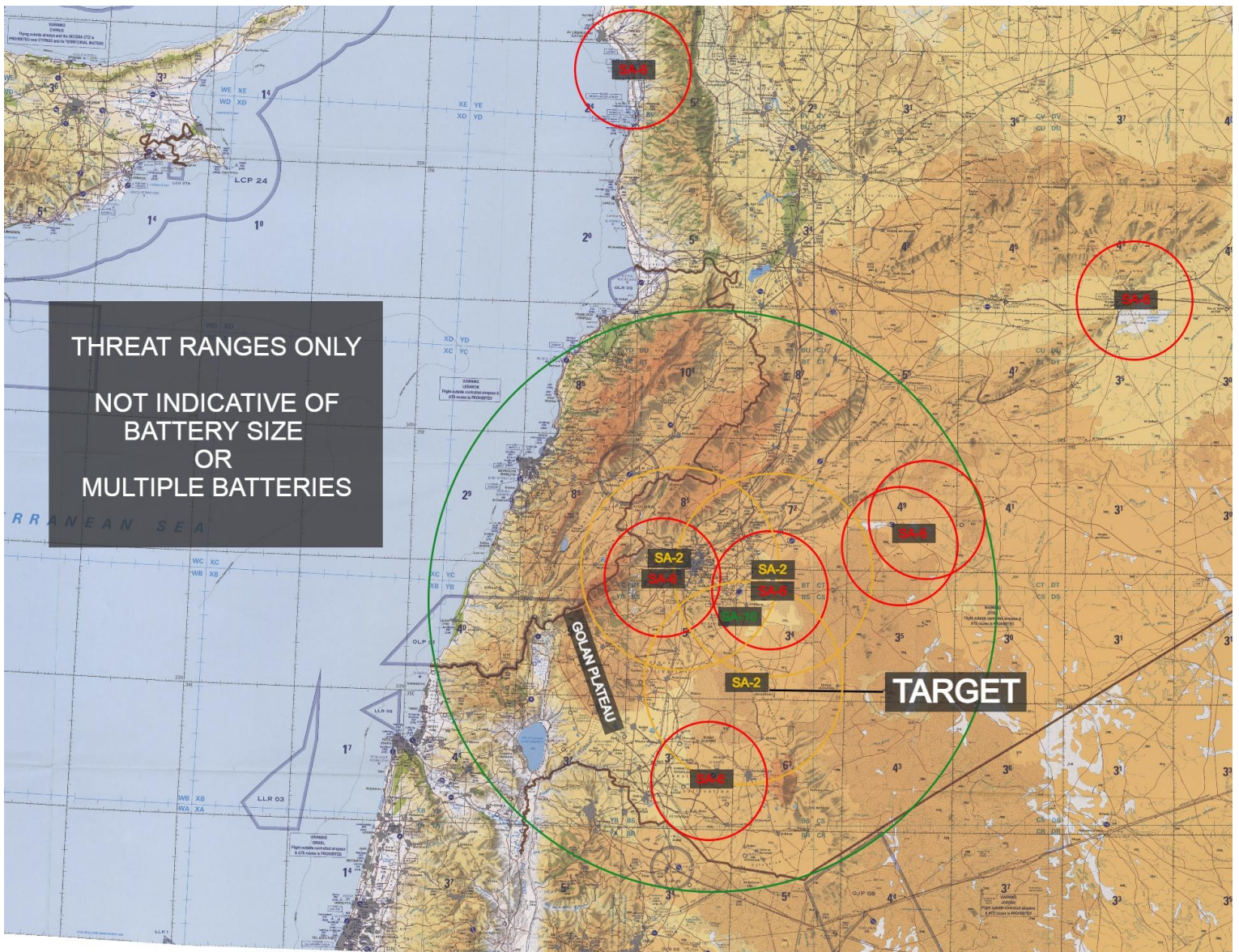






The threat environment is going to be very challenging on this one, but as ever the actions we are taking to suppress and jam the Syrian air defences will be enough to keep us safe so long as we stick to the plan. Damascus, as you would expect is a clear no go. This is where the air defences are anchored, and whilst the Growlers will be supporting us, should we stray too close to the city we risk the Syrian SAMs burning through the jamming screen.

The SEAD flights will also be assisting here, in recent flights we have seen the SAM operators shut down their radars once our weasels show up - we are hoping for the same again tomorrow...we just don't yet know how long they'll stay off for. It'll be important I pay close attention to the Vul times of the support flights (20 minutes from entering Syria), I do not want to end up left in Syria alone and without support.



We ended the briefing by discussing threats. The biggest threat we will encounter will be the SA-10 batteries deployed around Damascus. It is believed there are at least two batteries currently deployed and we will be within range of these soon after we go feet dry.

Khalkhalal airbase is protected by an SA-2 site located at the northeastern end of the base, there are also two additional SA-2 sites at the 159th SyADF site 4 miles to the north of the base. Khalkhalal also has numerous AAA sites (both S-60 and ZU-23) and a number of SA-8s present. Our JSOWs should ensure we can maintain a standoff distance from the target.

Sticking to our assigned flight plan will be very important, stray too close to Damascus or the target and the SAMs will burn through. Stay too far south and we will be in range of the SA-6 at Tha'lah airbase. There are also numerous SAA bases scattered to the north of our flight plan, these are likely to contain a mixture of short range air defences and should be avoided.

Once the briefing was complete I retired to my room to study the briefing material some more and ponder the mission ahead. I can't believe we've been authorised to strike from Israeli airspace, tactically it makes sense...but strategically I wonder if it will end up being a mistake in the long run. The mission ahead scares me, the defenses we're going up against are the heaviest I've ever faced, but I have faith that the plan is solid and will make sure we all make it back in one piece. But whatever my feelings I know this mission is a vital one...after all I've seen first hand what these weapons can do.

### \*\*\* PLAYER NOTES \*\*\*

This mission will take place in two parts. Part 1 will end once you are behind the tanker awaiting air to air refuelling, **you will not be required to tank**. However if you wish to do so this option is still available to you, but you will still need to exit the mission after and move on to part 2.

Part 2 will resume with your aircraft and the rest of the package refuelled, the mission will begin in active pause, with the AI flights dormant and with many aircraft systems preconfigured. Use the active pause time to finalise your aircraft systems, you will need to input your JSOW targets. There is no need to input your target data during part 1. Once you have finished setting up your aircraft, press spacebar and the AI will activate, active pause will cease and the mission will begin.

This approach has been taken to remove the need for players to refuel, to provide a checkpoint in case of being shot down and to eliminate the long and problematic AI task of refuelling a large package.