

November 15th, 2011.

We're three days into Rapid Eagle and it's been a solid start overall. The Marine RCTs have moved out and are making steady progress, with the first major target - Bam, now under our control. Det B supported the assault on Bam, with our aircraft providing effective assistance to multiple troops in contact situations across the day. However despite our overall superiority on the ground and in the air there were still setbacks, with several dozen casualties amongst the ground forces and one AH-1 Cobra lost to AAA near Bam Citadel.

The mission over Bam was also my first with Noble, got to say she was very eager to get into the action, too eager really. She did the business on the day but her attitude...well...it concerned me a little.

Over the last two days Det B has provided air cover over the Kerman AOR as our forces consolidate in Bam and prepare to push on Rafsanjan. In the air, these two days have been pretty quiet and uneventful. But I can't say the same thing about life here at Juliet, with two separate SCUD alarms yesterday as the Patriot battery dealt with incoming fire. Seems the Iranians aren't all that happy with our presence here. Thankfully nothing came near the base and the worst that happened was our inconvenience as we had to keep donning our protective gear in case of a gas attack.

The detachment pilots reported for a briefing at 07:00 today, held as ever in the now familiar decaying office. All the usual faces were present, but looking decidedly less fresh than they did a week ago. Major Drucker kicked things off by inviting Captain Parkin to deliver the met brief.

"Thank you Major" Parkin began as she rose to her feet, "The low pressure front we saw move into the area yesterday has really bedded itself in and shows no sign of shifting yet". This was met with groans from the back of the room, Mother's eyes met Chief's and the groans soon stopped. We all knew how he felt though, the clouds that moved in yesterday are a real pain in the ass, especially in the mountains where we're operating.

The Captain continued, looking straight at Chief, "So yes Lieutenant, it looks like more clouds for you to deal with. You're looking at a broken layer at around 10,000 feet and possibly another around 30,000 feet. The winds have remained fairly active, in the region of 8-10 knots lower down and possibly up to 20-25 knots at altitude. You can also expect moderate turbulence". Concluding her briefing, Parkin was dismissed and Major Daniels took to the head of the table to begin the intel brief.

Daniel's brief was short and sweet, delivered in his usual dry, no nonsense manner. He informed us that Bam had been fully cleared of conventional Iranian forces, although small pockets of Basij remained. Basij attacks within Bam have been far lighter than expected however. The bulk of the Iranian forces in the province are currently dug in around Kerman and Rafsanjan, although smaller blocking forces remain on the main routes through the valleys and around key towns such as Mashiz. Militia strength in these areas remains unknown, although we have seen several ambushes on patrols and on supply routes around Bam and Sirjan. Daniels finished up by informing us that a large number of civilians were evacuating Kerman city itself.

With the completion of his briefing, Major Daniels departed and the Air Liaison Officer, Major Shaw was invited to speak by Mother. Shaw filled us in on the progress and current positions of the Marine ground forces. He began by telling us that the primary MSR between Juliet and Bam and Sirjan were established and that the RCTs had begun moving out on the next stage of their mission. RCT 1 have begun to push from Sirjan towards Rafsanjan as they orient themselves to assault the city. RCT 7 have secured Bam and have begun probing northwest into the valleys leading to Kerman City. Across the centre of the province, 1st Recon and RCT 5 have captured the town of Rayan and started to clear the area northwest towards Mashiz.

With his briefing complete, Shaw departed and we were left with Mother, who began to brief today's flights.

"Ok pilots," he began, "As Major Shaw just told you, we have a lot of units out in the field probing and patrolling, clearing out pockets of resistance as they go. There are no major operations planned today and so our role will be to get airborne and provide on-call CAS as required".

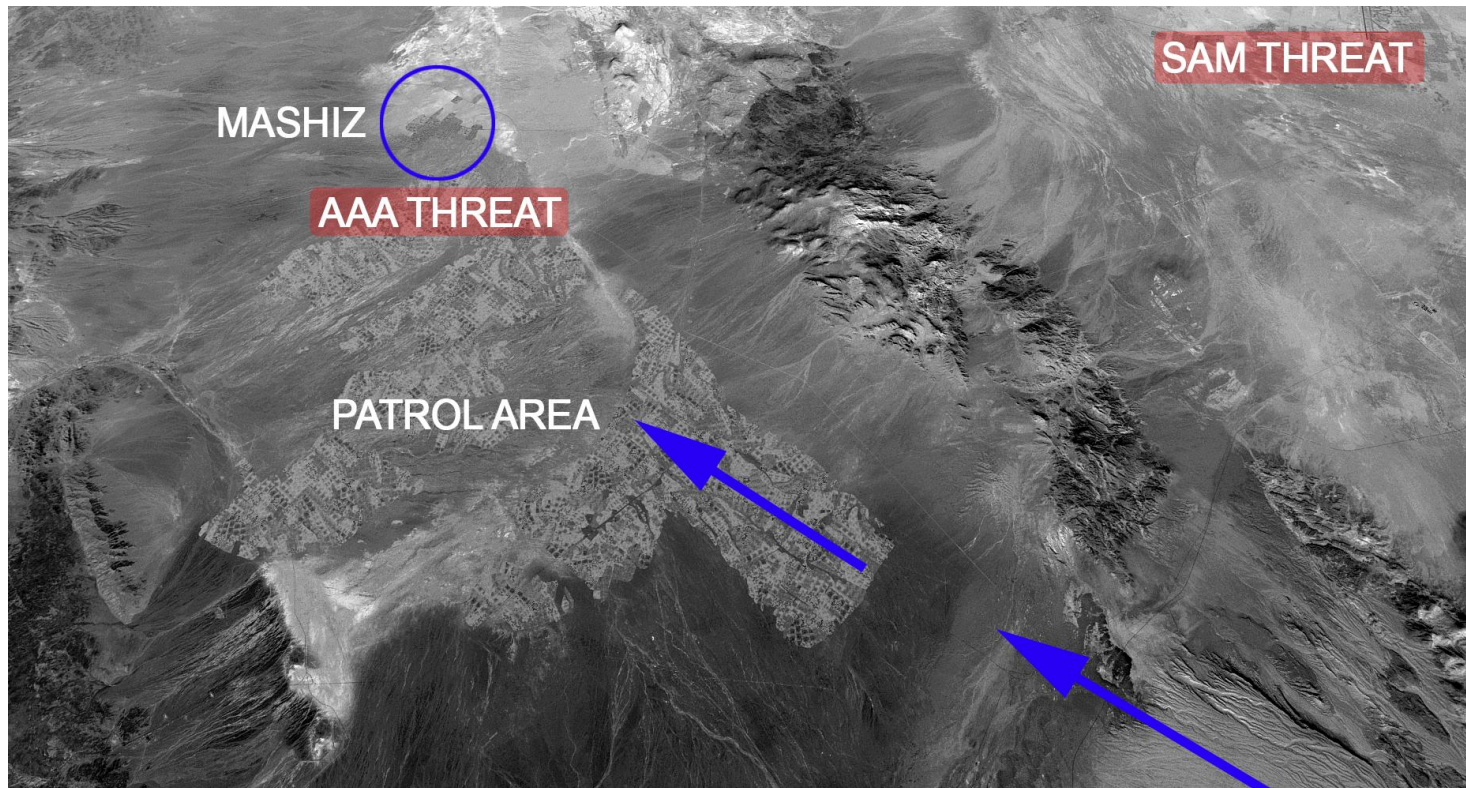
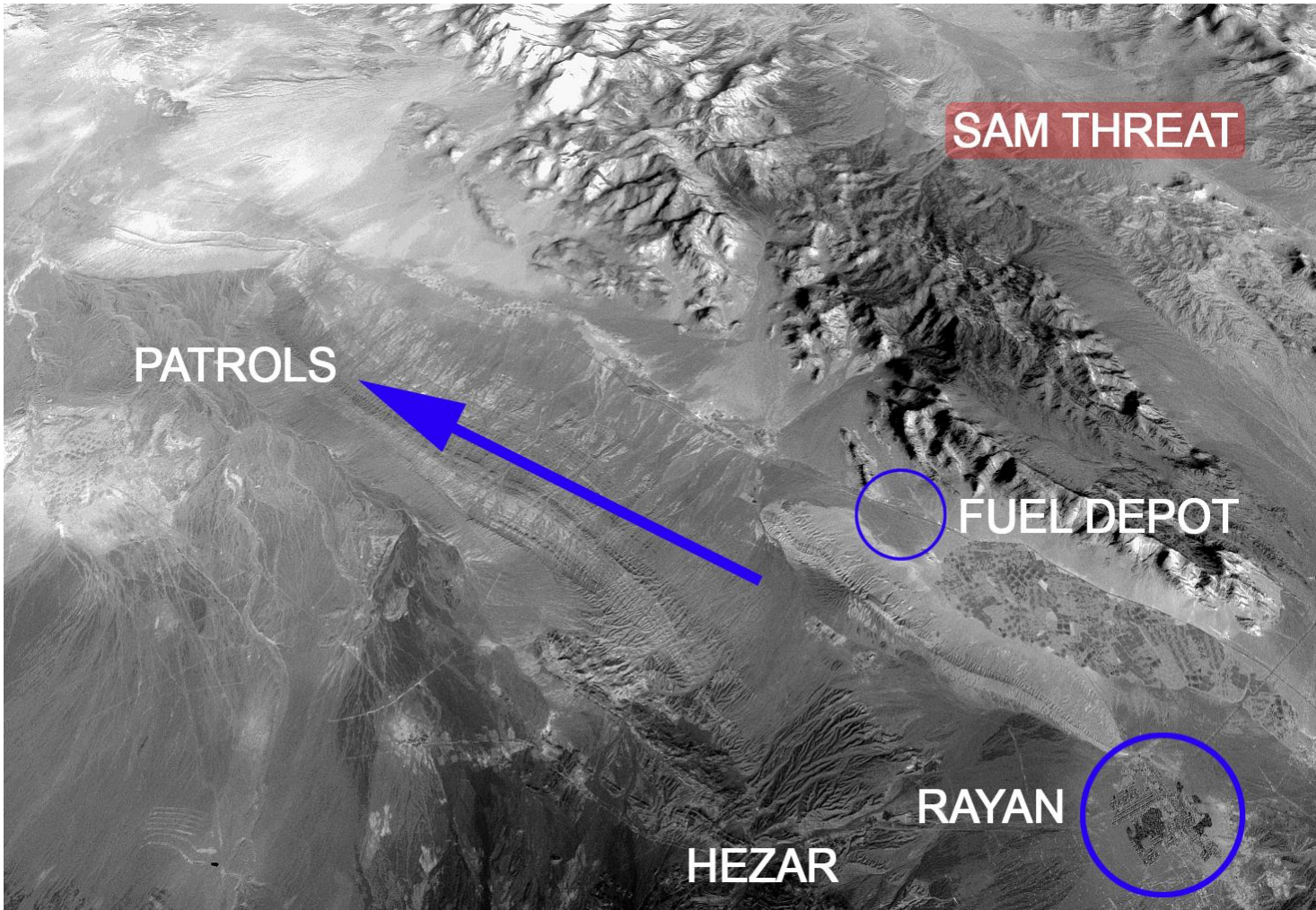
The Major went on to brief the first set of flights. Mother and Noble will be on XCAS over the Rafsanjan area, supporting RCT 1 as they close in on their target, they will then be relieved by Baz and Chief.

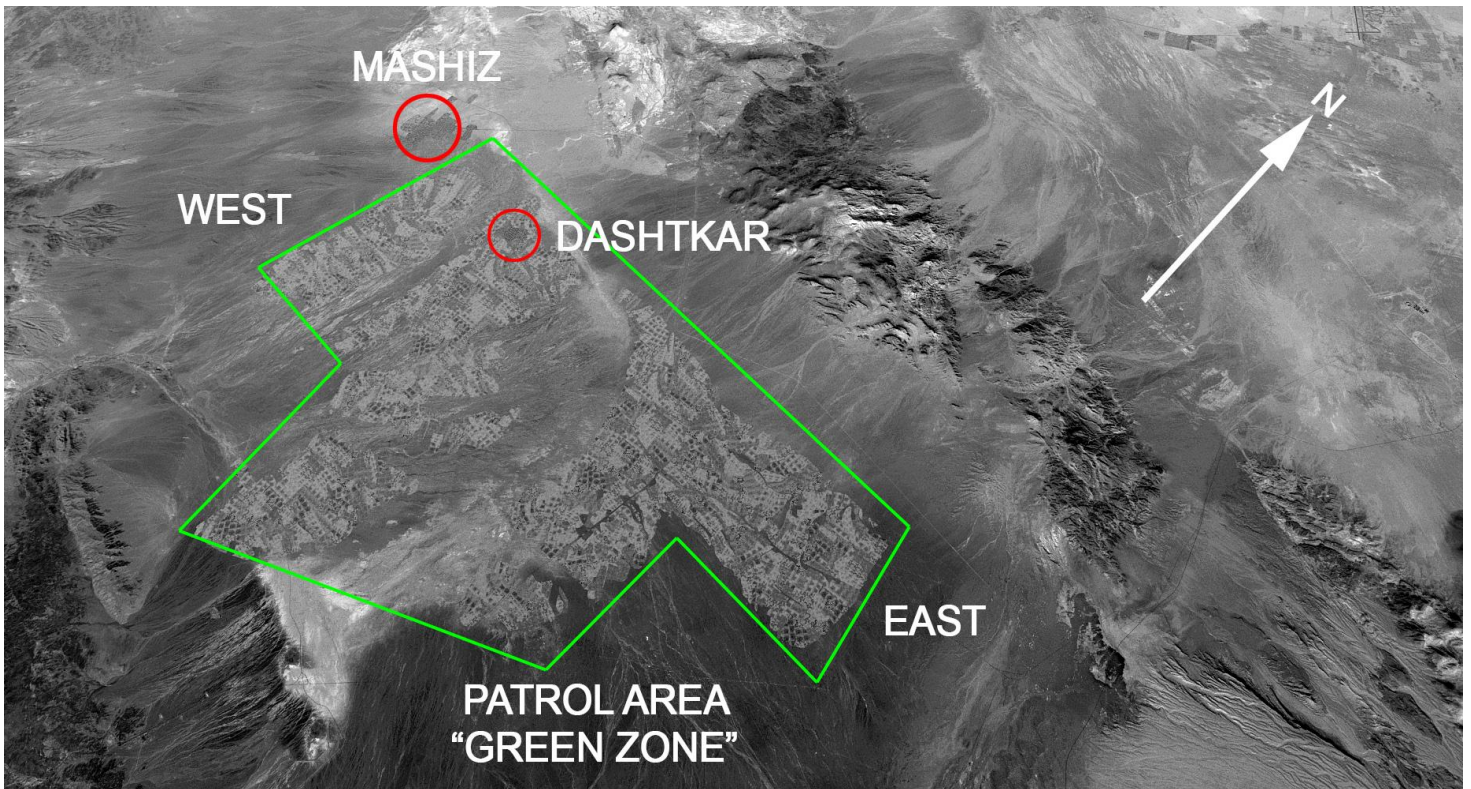
"As for you two," Mother gestured towards Ein-Stein and myself, "You will be patrolling a route over the Rayan and Mashiz region in support of RCT 5 and 1st Recon".

Mother went on in more detail, "RCT 5 have taken control of Rayan and have established FARP Romeo close to Rayan Castle. RCT 5 currently occupies the town, along with the fuel storage facility at Gowdal, 6 miles northwest of Rayan. Along with 1st Recon, they are now probing to the northwest towards the town of Mashiz".

"Mashiz is important as it sits on a major road running north towards Kerman city, any enemy forces present in Mashiz will also be in a position to interfere in the attack on Rafsanjan, RCT 5 are going to eliminate those forces, but before they get to that, first recon and RCT 5 will need to sweep the green zone between Rayan and Mashiz. Mike-Mike your flight will be patrolling in support of this sweep".

Mother switched the screen over to show us satellite photos of the area we will be patrolling.





"The ground force will be clearing the agricultural area on the plain southeast of Mashiz, this is the 'green zone', so called as it the only greenery for miles around. As a result the area is full of small settlements scattered among the fields and trees".

Ein-Stein spoke up at this point, "Major, can you expand on the threats in the area?"

"Of course", said Mother, "As you can see, north of the green zone are a line of peaks, north of these peaks there are believed to be a number of SA-8s and SA-15s protecting the Iranian armoured formations deployed on the approach from Bam to Kerman. There are also several AAA batteries around Mashiz itself, a mixture of S-60 and ZU-23. Outside of your AO, but still a threat if you go off course we have SA-6 and Hawk around Kerman and Rafsanjan".

"No doubt we can expect MANPADS at lower levels as well" I added.

"No doubt", replied Mother. "The clouds have the potential to give you trouble up here as well, the green zone is at an elevation of around 6,800 feet MSL so it doesn't leave a lot of room for you beneath the layer to work in..."

"...putting us firmly in MANPAD and AAA range" I remarked. "What loadout are we taking, we bothering with the pod on this one?"

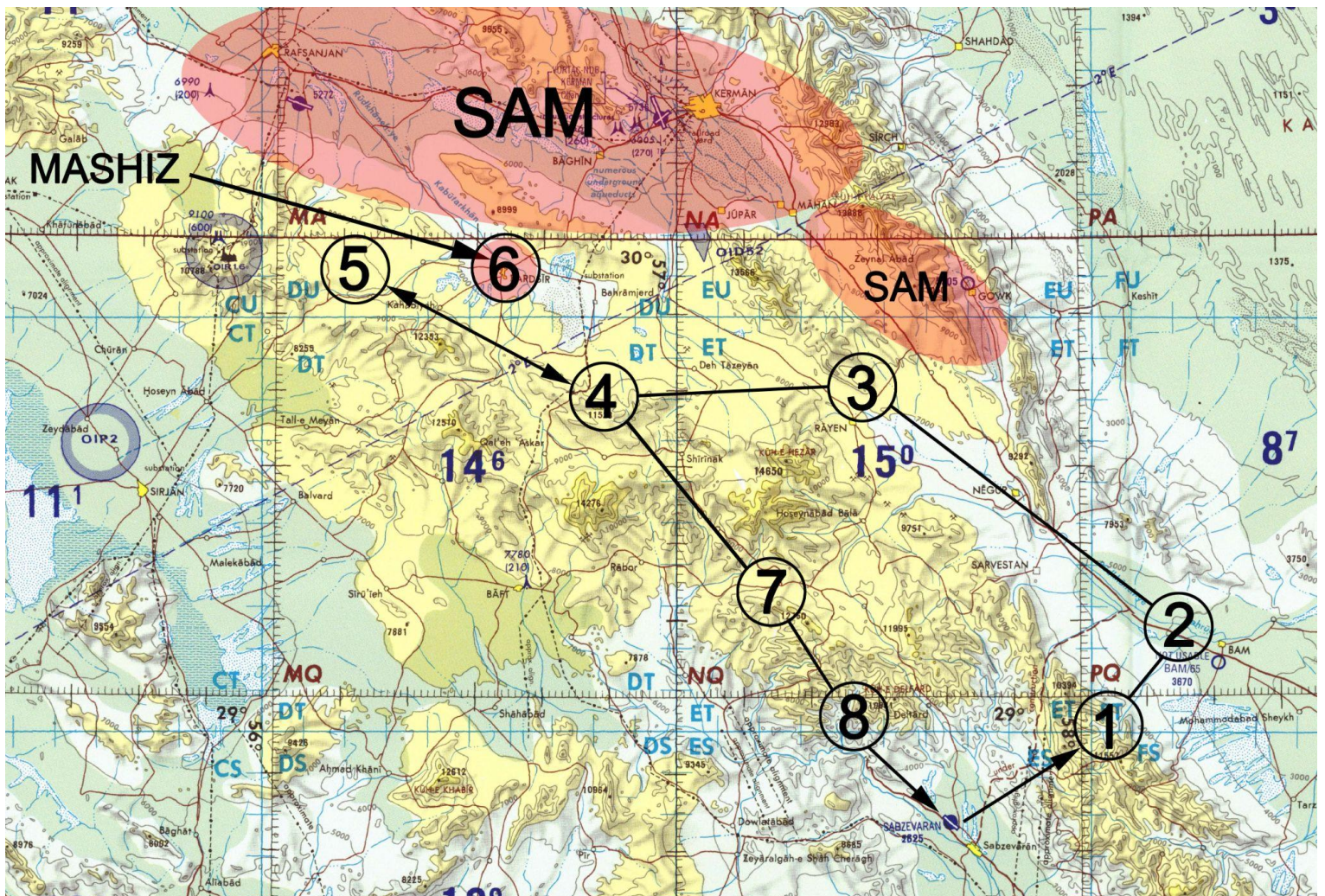
"That's a negative" Mother responded, "The pods are going up to the Rafsanjan area with us, more likely to run into hardened targets and armour up there, and besides they won't be much use to you at that elevation with all that cloud. Your loadout will be Rockeyes, Mk-82s, fuel and the gun".

"Looks like we're going old school on this one Ein-Stein" I declared enthusiastically, patting him on the back. Ein-Stein did not look amused.

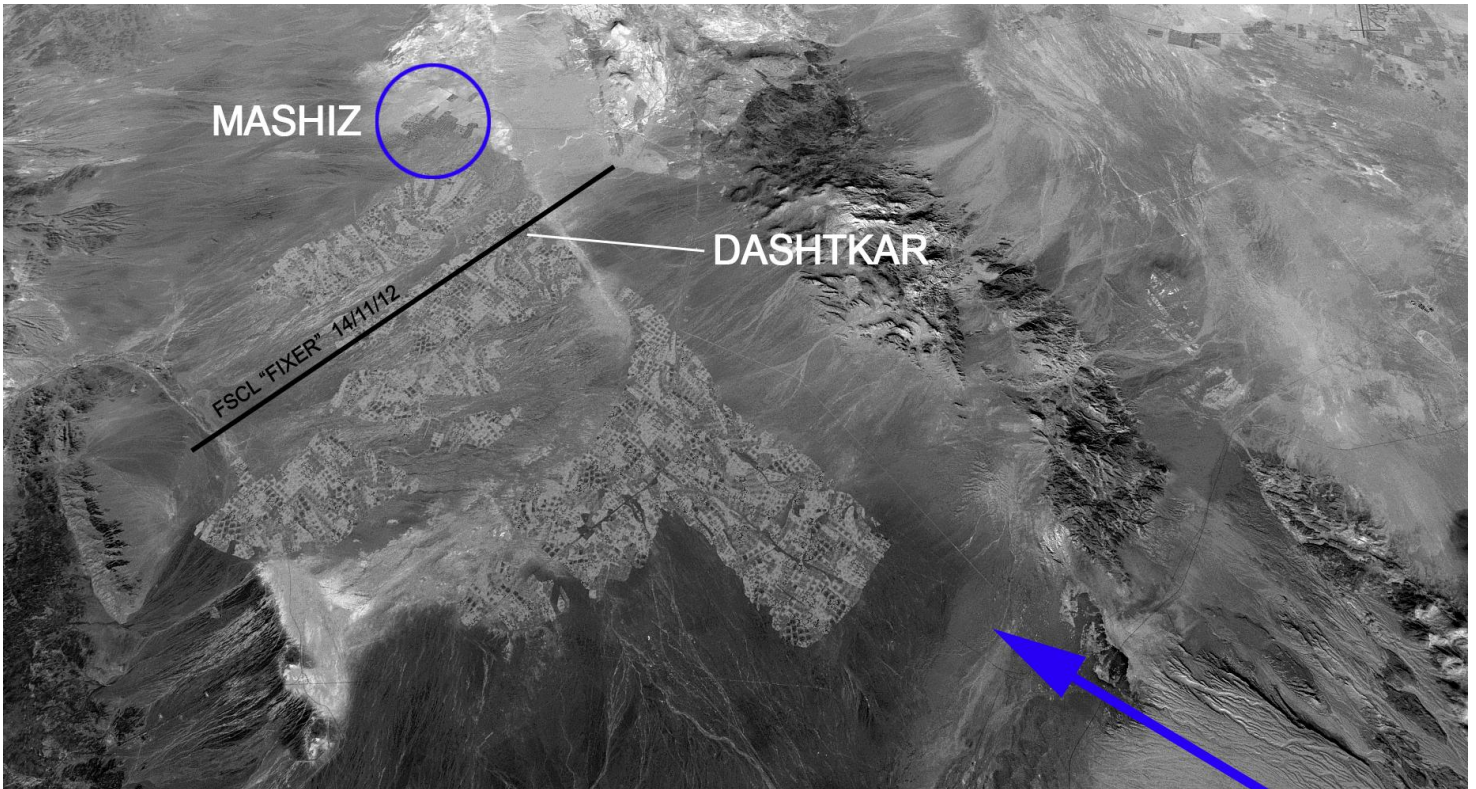
Mother then ran through the mission flow in more detail. After takeoff we will assemble our flight at waypoint 1, before heading towards Bam and waypoint 2 and following the road northwest to waypoint 3.

At waypoint 3 (Rayen) we will check in with the command element of RCT 5's FAC cell, Sandman 5, for a sitrep, before proceeding onto waypoint 4 where we will check back in with Chieftain.

We will then hold on patrol between waypoints 4 and 5 until we are bingo (3350lb), approximately 45 mins of loiter time. During this time on station we will need to pay close attention to our positioning to ensure we don't stray into SAM or AAA range. We will also need to remain in contact with Chieftain in case the DASC has any air support requests for us. Mashiz is located at waypoint 6 which may provide a useful reference point.



The FSCL for the ground forces in the green zone is set on the village of Dashtkar, which is 4 miles east of Mashiz.



The briefing wrapped up soon after. I spent the rest of the morning with Ein-Stein, going over the flight plan and threat details. This mission looks pretty straightforward on paper, but of course we need to be ready for anything, the further towards Kerman City and Rafsanjan we go, the more likelihood we have of running into both conventional Iranian forces and the Basij.

Ein-Stein remained as uptight as before, I was hoping that maybe I could get him to lighten up a little during our planning together...no such luck yet.

Take off time is 13:25.

*** *PLAYER NOTE* ***

On some scale levels of the moving map Mashiz is referred to as Bardsir.