

13/08/2013, 21:30.



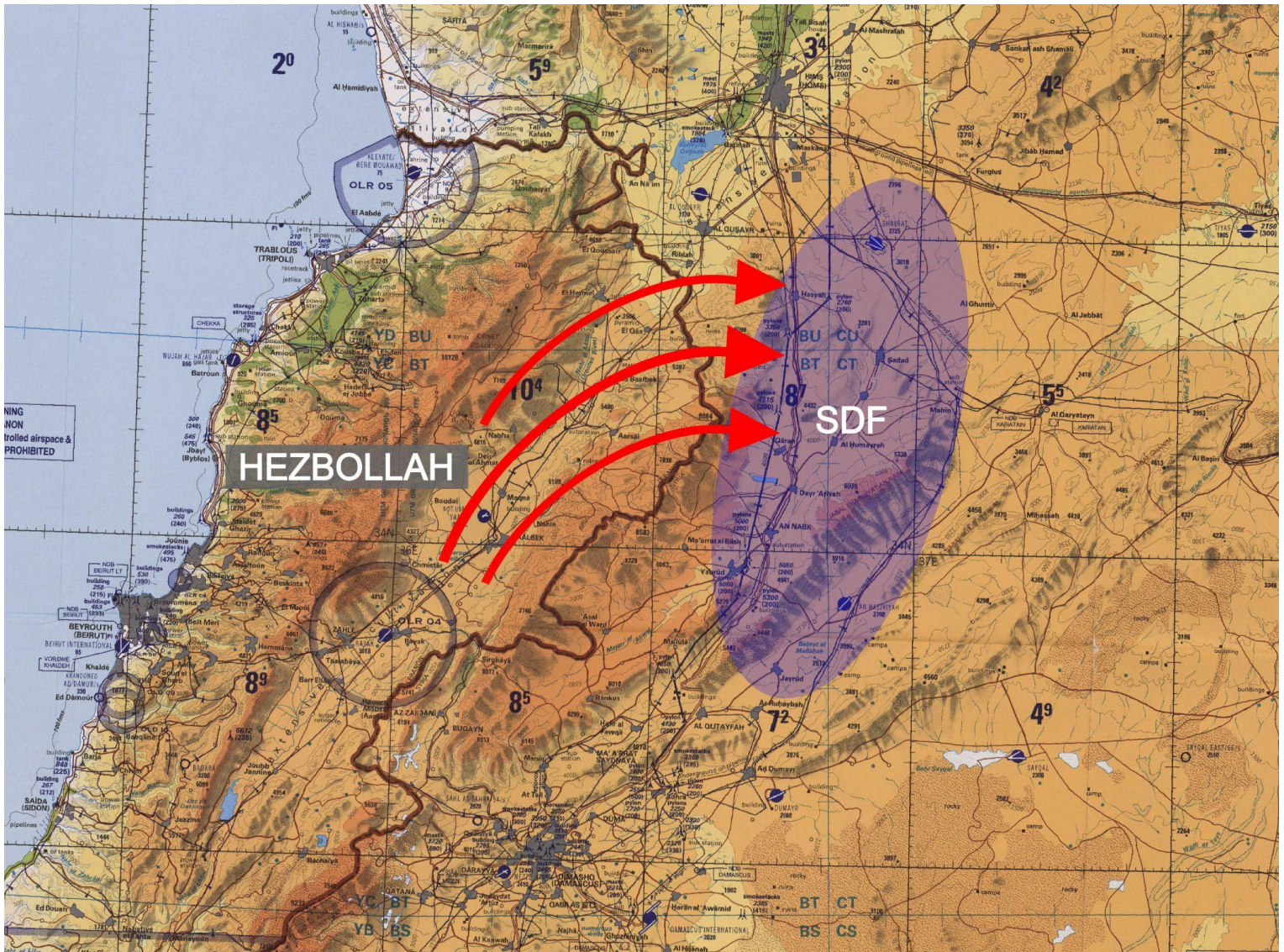
So, things in Syria have taken a sudden turn over the last week. First of all, six days ago we learnt that the SIA weren't as defeated as we all thought when it was discovered that SIA fighters appear to have escaped Raqqa, most likely hidden amongst the refugees. We learnt this the hard way - as the SIA popped up in a number of locations and launched attacks on SDF, Hezbollah and Syrian positions. So far there have been reports of SIA attacks around Homs and Aleppo, the Turkish border and in various positions on the Lebanese border.

This however was just the beginning of further complications in Syria. I got the first indication that something was going on when I was called into a briefing this evening along with the rest of the Red Devils. When we arrived we found a grim looking Major Colvyn and Lt. Col. Lincoln already waiting for us, and as the squadron got seated they launched straight into the briefing.

Major Colvyn began by giving us the intel update on the situation in Syria. Beginning with the SIA threat he updated us on the activity that has unfolded over the last week. It has been confirmed that an SIA cell managed to infiltrate Turkey, however they were detected and stopped about 30 miles north of the Turkish border by the Turkish defence forces. Worryingly they were in possession of significant weaponry - where they got these weapons from remains unclear. Further SIA forces have also been engaged near Homs and Aleppo, and for now these threats appear to be contained. A significant number of SIA fighters have also appeared along the Syrian/Lebanese border, engaging in fighting with both the SDF and Hezbollah. Major Colvyn continued, telling us that additional JSTF special forces have been deployed into these hotspots to support the SDF in hunting down the SIA forces. Complicating things even further, over the last two days Israel has begun conducting air strikes against SIA positions in both Lebanon and Syria. Israel has clearly found the presence of the SIA so close to home intolerable. Regardless of their intended targets, the fact that the IAF have struck in Syrian territory has drawn strong condemnation from both Syria and Russia.

Major Colvyn then paused momentarily, a serious look drawn across his face, before continuing. The resurgent SIA threat, he stated, was no longer the only new problem we were facing in Syria. At this point he brought up a new slide on the screen at the front of the room - zoomed in on the Syrian and Lebanese border. Colvyn continued, early this morning Hezbollah forces launched a massive attack out of the Bekaa valley and into the Syrian border regions. Hezbollah has deployed in full force along a 30 mile stretch, launching itself into the SDF flank, this has had a significant impact on the battlefield, helping to relieve beleaguered SAA forces and in places, force the SDF back. It is also believed that this deployment has been designed to quickly eradicate the SIA presence in the region. The most recent SATINT shows significant numbers of Hezbollah forces moving north through the Bekaa valley, most likely heading to reinforce their troops already engaged in the fighting.

Major Colvyn's assessment was that without additional support, the SDF would be unable to maintain their current hard won positions in Syria.



Moving away from the Lebanese border Colvyn told us that prior to the Hezbollah assault the SDF were making decent progress, having finally assaulted and captured Shayrat and Tiyas airbases. Palmyra airbase however still remains under siege.

The Syrian Air Force remains relatively inactive and appears to be currently confined to mainly point defence activities.

Colvyn concluded his briefing by discussing Russian activity. The Russian air force remains active, maintaining a strong presence in the air over the Russian Quarter, we are also now seeing the Russians deploying their A-50 AWACS around the clock. The cruiser Moskva is also believed to have arrived at Tartus to reinforce the Russian fleet.

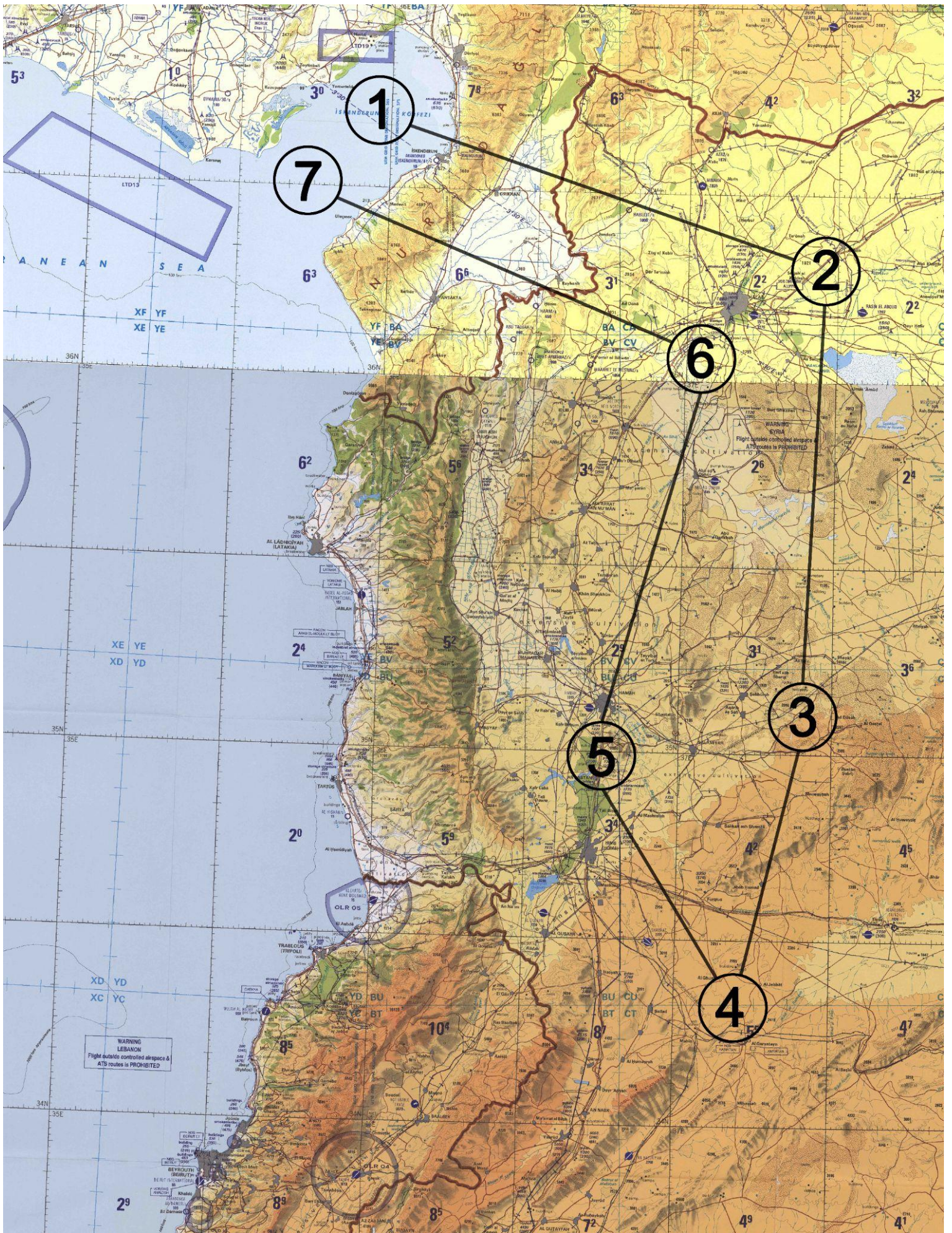
Major Colvyn then stepped aside to allow Captain Edwards to brief us on today's weather. The news was not great, tomorrow morning looks like it will bring poor weather throughout the region, with an overcast starting at 15,000 feet, turbulence is also expected to be particularly heavy today.

It was then Link's turn to step up and speak. The SDF are under real pressure, now fighting on multiple fronts with the SAA and Hezbollah and in certain hotspots with the SIA as well. The hard won SDF gains around Yabrud and Jayrud have been lost, with SDF forces pushed back to An Nasiriyah airbase and Yabrud itself. Further north, Hezbollah forces have launched into the SDF flank between Yabrud and Homs, pushing the SDF back to positions east of the Homs road. Hezbollah forces have overrun Al Qusayr airbase and are threatening the southwest perimeter of Homs itself. The most concerning development however is the threat of Hezbollah and the SAA cutting the Homs road and allowing them to control this key route between the northern SDF strongholds and their forces further south.

To counter the growing threat to the SDF, the JSTF are intensifying air support operations in order to stabilise the SDF positions. Therefore today's sortie will once again be to provide CAS to SDF forces south of Homs.

I will be Poodle's number two on this mission, we will be equipped with a pair of 1000lb GBU-16s, a pair of Mk-20s and two pods (19 shot) of M-151 rockets. A slightly different loadout to usual, which I queried but found myself quickly shut down. "Marines make do", they told me...make of that what you will.

We will perform a standard departure out of Incirlik and into Syria, the procedure for which I am now very familiar with. Once clear of Aleppo we will turn south for waypoint 3, here we are planned to rendezvous with Texaco for air-air refuelling and will top off our fuel before proceeding on to waypoint 4 - our Marshall point. Enroute to Marshall we will once again follow Sentinel's instructions to ensure deconfliction in the stack. Sentinel will again be our link between Watchdog and the forces in the field requiring CAS and we will be tasked as required. Once all assigned tasking is completed we will egress the area via waypoint 5. Bingo fuel is 5700 lb.



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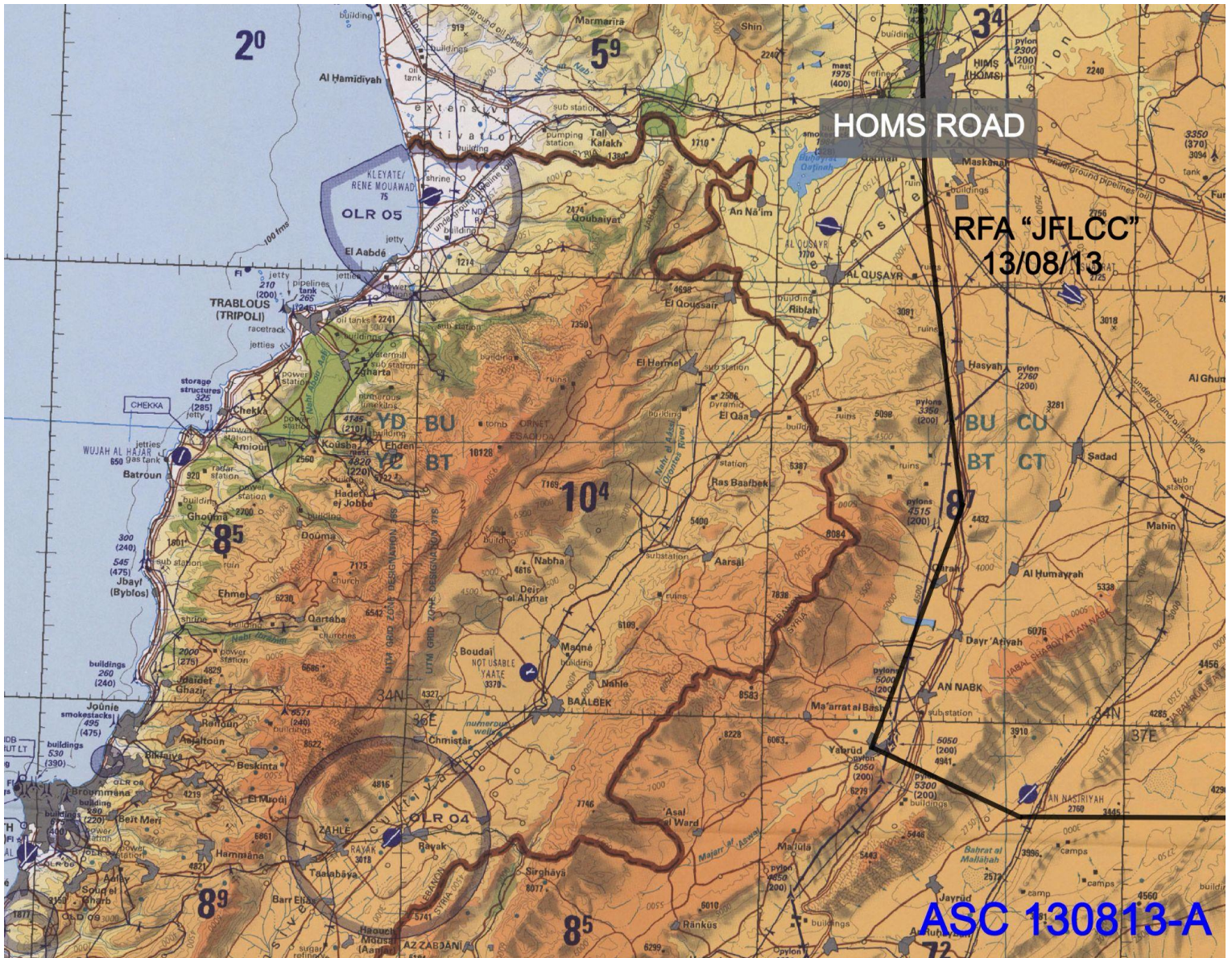
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WARNING
LEBANON
Flight outside controlled airspace &
ATS routes is PROHIBITED

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SYRIA
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Link next discussed the air support charts. All SDF forces have pulled back to the east of the Homs road or Homs itself. With this in mind a restricted fire area has been set for the areas lying east of the main highway running south out of Homs and bounded on the southern side by Yabrud and An Nasiriyah AB - meaning all attacks within this area must be under the control of a FAC. All territory west and south of this line has been designated a free fire area.



As Link was discussing the air support charts, Poodle asked how far the free fire area extended, specifically referencing the border with Lebanon. Link was honest in his answer...he wasn't sure. He told us we are certainly cleared up to the border, any targets beyond that will be at the decision of the CAOC and we should expect guidance from Sentinel should the situation arise.

The Syrian airforce is not expected to get involved in the fight, however French Mirage-2000s will be maintaining a CAP south of Homs to safeguard against any interference.

Once the briefing was complete I retired to my room, pondering the developments we were briefed on. During the brief, they kept saying things were getting ever more complicated...I would have to agree...we're now in a situation where the JSTF, SDF, Syrians, Russians, Hezbollah, SIA and even Israel are involved in combat operations within 30 or 40 miles of Damascus. Complicated indeed...let's hope it doesn't get worse.

*** NOTES FOR PLAYER ***

This will be another two part mission, with part 1 ending behind the tanker and part 2 resuming after refuelling is complete.