

Central Intelligence Agency
National Foreign Assessment Center

30 November 1979

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Status of the Iraqi Armed Forces

Iraq's armed forces have not assumed a threatening posture towards Iran. [redacted]

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[redacted] Iraqi forces are quite mobile, however, and could be in position to launch a full-scale assault within three to four days of receiving orders. [redacted]

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Iraq has a clear military edge over Iran because of the turmoil in the Iranian armed forces. If the Iraqis decide to launch a full-scale attack, Iran's oil-rich Khuzestan province is the most likely target. A major uncertainty for Iraq in a showdown with Iran, however, would be the loyalty of its Shia troops. [redacted]

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Ground Forces. The Iraqi army numbers some 200,000 men, about one-third more men than Iran's half-strength army. Major combat units include four armored divisions, two mechanized divisions, five infantry divisions, and two special forces brigades. The bulk of Iraq's armor is concentrated around Baghdad. (see map). Army units [redacted]

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[redacted] probably are at peak combat effectiveness although [redacted] undoubtedly caused some wear on equipment. [redacted]

Iraq has the largest armored force of any of the Arab states. Approximately 2,200 tanks and 2,000 APCs are in tank or mechanized units with several hundred additional armored vehicles in storage awaiting distribution to units. (see chart). The army is equipped with the latest Soviet weaponry including T-72 and T-62 tanks, BMP armored infantry fighting vehicles, and 152mm and 122mm self-propelled artillery. In addition, the Iraqis are equipped with French MILAN and HOT antitank missiles. [redacted]

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This memorandum was prepared by the Office of Strategic Research for the Iran Task Force. Questions or comments may be addressed to Chief, Iran Task Force on [redacted]

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Iraq also maintains police, border guard, and reserve units numbering approximately 50,000 men. They are armed with older model tanks, APCs, and artillery and generally are stationed in Kurdish areas. In addition, the Iraqi regime controls the People's Army, a militia of about 125,000 men. [REDACTED]

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Air Force. The Air Force numbers about 17,000 men equipped with 575 combat aircraft, almost 25 percent more aircraft than Iran's 460 combat aircraft and probably double the number of operational Iranian aircraft.¹ Iraq has more MIG-23s and SU-20/22s than Egypt and Syria combined. In addition, the Air Force has 14 TU-22 and seven TU-16 medium bombers. The new MIG-23s and SU-20/22s have greatly improved the range and payload capabilities of the Air Force. [REDACTED]

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Most combat aircraft are deployed in the Baghdad area with additional concentrations in the north near Kurdistan and in the south near the Persian Gulf. Iraqi air bases have [REDACTED]

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Although Air Force capabilities are improving, they are still limited. Approximately 10 percent of the force consists of obsolescent MIG-15/17/19 and Hawker Hunter aircraft. The Iraqis have relatively unsophisticated air-to-air missiles and no precision-guided munitions. [REDACTED]

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The Iraqi Air Force controls the largest helicopter force in the Arab world, some 370 helicopters of all types. The Iraqis have over 50 Soviet MI-24 attack helicopters, 42 French Gazelle helicopters some of which are armed with HOT antitank missiles, and almost 175 MI-8 transport helicopters. Iraqi forces are proficient in heliborne operations and helicopters are used extensively in Kurdish areas. [REDACTED]

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Air Defense. The Air Defense Command numbers 21,000 men and operates approximately 295 surface-to-air missile launchers and almost 2,500 antiaircraft guns. The bulk of the SAMS are [REDACTED]

¹Assumes 80 percent of Iraq's combat aircraft are operational and only 50 percent of Iranian combat aircraft are operational.

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25X1A deployed around Baghdad or near Persian Gulf oil fields and ports. Antiaircraft guns are deployed to protect most major civilian and military facilities, including airfields. Iraqi armored units are equipped with shoulder-fired SA-7s, vehicle-mounted SA-6s and SA-9s, numerous ZSU-23/4 and ZSU-57/2 self-propelled antiaircraft guns, and large numbers of towed anti-aircraft guns. The Iraqi radar system provides coverage at 6,000 meters over the northern 275 kilometers of the Persian Gulf. [REDACTED]

25X1A Navy. Iraq's Navy is the least effective of its armed forces. It consists of twelve OSA missile boats, four Polnocny-class landing ships, helicopters with Exocet anti-ship missiles, five minesweepers, and numerous small patrol and auxiliary craft. The Navy reportedly has conducted only two live surface-to-surface missile firings and spends most of its time in port. [REDACTED]

Capabilities Against Iran. Iraq has a clear military edge over Iran because of the turmoil in the Iranian armed forces. Before the Iranian revolution, the two sides were about equal with Iraq having a slight advantage on the ground while Iran was superior in the air. At present, however, many of Iran's sophisticated aircraft and air defense systems are no longer fully operational. As a result, Iraq now has a two to one advantage over Iran in operational combat aircraft and has widened its advantage in terms of armored forces. 25X1A Iran, however, is still capable of closing the Gulf to Iraqi shipping and of severely damaging Iraqi oil facilities. [REDACTED]

Terrain limits Iraq's military options for a full-scale attack to the southern third of its border with Iran. The mountains along the northern two-thirds of the border generally favor an Iranian defense, access by road is limited, and parts of the area are inhabited by Kurds hostile to both governments. Moreover, neither country has important military or economic installations in close proximity to the border. In the past when they wanted to make a political point, both countries have initiated border skirmishes along the northern and central sections of the border. [REDACTED] 25X1A

The terrain along the southern third of the border permits large-scale offensive operations except in the spring when flooding presents a significant obstacle. In addition, vital Iranian military and economic installations in Khuzestan are relatively close to the border. The population of the area

25X1A is largely Arab, hostile to the Iranian government and engaged in guerrilla activity. Iranian efforts to suppress Arab dissent in the area could provide a ready excuse for Iraqi intervention. [redacted]

25X1A A full-scale Iraqi attack on Iran's Khuzestan province is likely to be successful. Iraq's five mountain divisions and two of its four armored divisions could conduct holding actions along the northern two-thirds of the border. The two Iraqi mechanized divisions stationed south of Baghdad could launch an attack on the single Iranian armored division defending Khuzestan with little or no warning. More likely, however, Iraq would expand its southern force to include two reinforced armored divisions from Baghdad and Tikrit, achieving a greater than four-to-one advantage in men and equipment.

25X1A Iraq's armored units are quite mobile, and the two reinforced armored divisions could be in position within three or four days of receiving orders. Although not absolutely necessary, some combat aircraft and amphibious equipment also might be moved from the Baghdad area to bases in the south. The Iranian armed forces are in such turmoil that they probably could not react quickly enough to provide significant armor reinforcements to the armored division defending Khuzestan.

25X1A The loyalty of its Shia troops would be a major uncertainty for Baghdad in any military confrontation with Iran. Although the percentage of Shias in the Iraqi armed forces is unknown, Iraq does recruit from all segments of society and Shias comprise 50 percent of the population. [redacted]

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complication for Baghdad is that any attack against Iranian Khuzestan would have to be launched from Iraq's largely Shia-populated southern provinces. Moreover, a full-scale Iraqi attack probably would unite all Iranians behind Khomeini, and 25X1A
Iranian forces are likely to put up fierce resistance. [redacted]

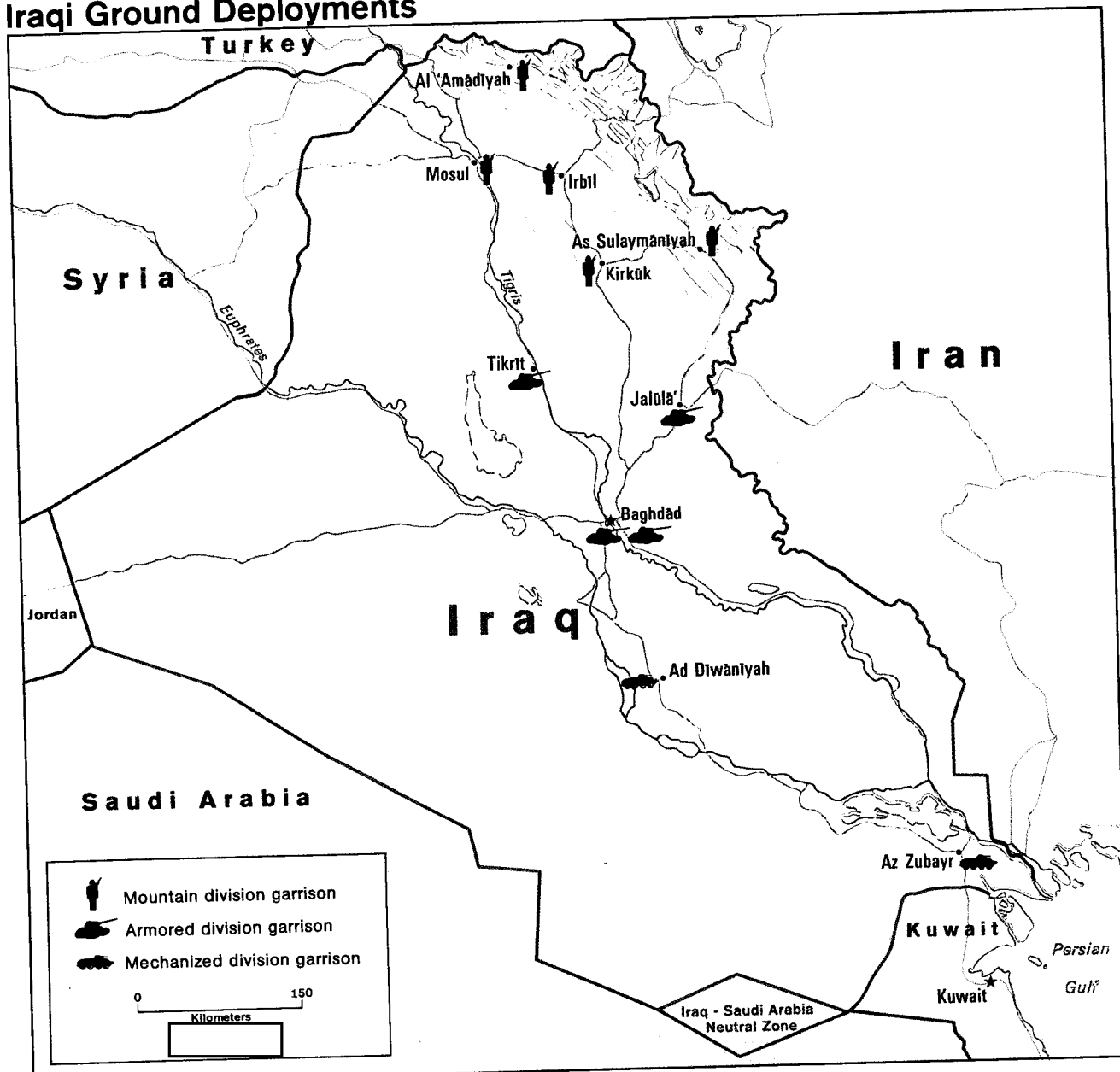
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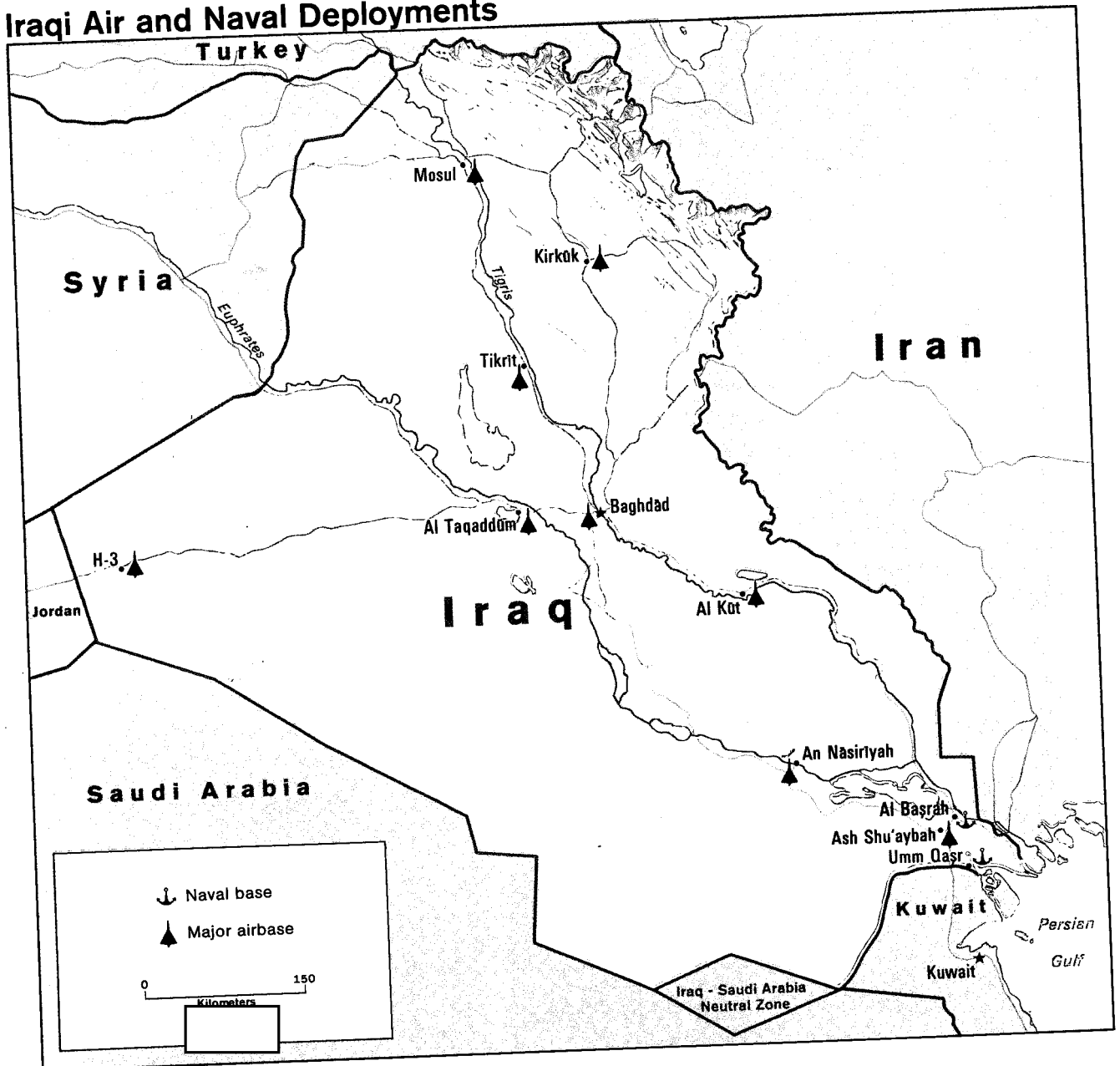
Iraqi Ground Deployments



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Iraqi Air and Naval Deployments



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