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DCI Talking Points

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Situation in the Persian Gulf

During recent weeks the war in the Gulf has passed two important milestones.

--Iraq has begun attacking tankers on a regular, about once a week, basis.

--Iran has begun to retaliate against Gulf shipping.

The Iraqi raid on two tankers near Kharg Island late Sunday probably foreshadows a sharp increase in military activity in the Gulf as Baghdad and Tehran escalate the cycle of retaliation for each other's attacks. The Iranians are likely to respond to the latest Iraqi raids in the next few days with additional attacks in the Gulf.

--Iranian aircraft attacked a Kuwaiti tanker early last Sunday. Iraq responded later that day by attacking an Iranian and Greek tanker south of Kharg Island. The Kuwaiti and Iranian ships were only slightly damaged but the Greek tanker reportedly was seriously damaged.

--Press reports indicate that the Iranians attacked a second Kuwaiti tanker yesterday in the same area as the attack on Sunday.

-- We estimate that Iran has between 10 and 20 F-4 aircraft at airbases on the Gulf that are immediately available for attacks against shipping. Some of these aircraft carry Maverick air-to-surface missiles which Iran has used in the past to sink Iraqi missile boats.

--The Iraqis probably believe they can use the spiraling hostilities to increase Arab support for their cause and to put world pressure on Tehran to negotiate an end to the war.

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US ships and aircraft in the region will be in more danger from Iranian attack as the fighting escalates.

--Iraqi President Saddam Hussayn in a press interview on Saturday stated that AWACs aircraft are providing Iraq with information on Iranian activities.

--The Iranians have long claimed that the US has provided Baghdad with aid and could use Saddam's statement and the increase in hostilities in the Gulf as an excuse to attack US forces. They also may respond with terror attacks against US military personnel and civilians in the region.

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