

Talking Points for the ADDI for HPSCI Briefing
9 June 1987

Recent Developments in the Persian Gulf
and the Iran-Iraq War

Iranian leaders describe the decision by the US and the USSR to protect Kuwaiti ships as a threat to regional security and say Iran will not allow the superpowers to interfere in the Gulf.

--Iran has repeatedly warned that all three countries will pay a price for anti-Iranian actions. [redacted]

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In pursuit of its goal of preventing an increased superpower presence, once the protective arrangements begin we believe Iran is likely to:

--attack unescorted Soviet-and US-flag commercial shipping; and probe cautiously for opportunities to attack escorted US and Soviet-flag shipping in order to humiliate the superpowers.

Iranian Navy or Revolutionary Guard units probably will not directly attack a foreign warship, although the heightened-tension in the Gulf raises the risks to them as well. [redacted]

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Because the superpowers are now taking a more active role in the Gulf, Iran is likely to focus its efforts on making them leave. Tehran may conclude that a dramatic military or terrorist attack could cause the US to lose its resolve and withdraw.

--[redacted] statements by Iranian leaders indicate that they are aware of domestic opposition in the US to the Kuwaiti reflagging plan. This perception may encourage Iran to be bold. [redacted]

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Iran has stepped up pressure on Kuwait to force it to withdraw its request for superpower protection and to end its support for Iraq.

--Iranian-backed saboteurs probably were responsible for an explosion--similar to incidents in January and April--at Kuwait's largest oil refinery on May 22.

--In late May, Iran seized seven Kuwaiti speed boats and claimed they were spying for Iraq.

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Iran continues other efforts to isolate Iraq and to foster Gulf State opposition to the Kuwaiti reflagging plan.

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--Foreign Minister Veleyati and other senior foreign ministry officials visited the UAE, Qatar, and Bahrain in late May to discuss the Kuwaiti plan. Iranian officials are warning that the increased involvement of the superpowers could draw the Gulf States into the conflict.

--The Gulf States have urged the US to honor its commitment to protect Kuwaiti shipping, but have expressed concern that they will be drawn into the conflict.

--President Khamenei has stated in public that Iran is willing to enter into negotiations about ending the war in the Gulf. He stressed that Iran will stop its attacks on shipping if Iraq can be persuaded to stop its attacks on Iranian shipping. Iran's proposals are similar to previous ones that leave out the land war with Iraq and are unacceptable to Baghdad.

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Military Developments

A defacto ceasefire against shipping in the Gulf has obtained since late May. Tehran may be standing down on ship attacks temporarily because of Iraq's hiatus on ship attacks.

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Iranian actions and rhetoric, however, indicate that the regime continues its naval operations aimed at pressuring Kuwait.

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Sporadic, limited battles continue along the entire border in the ground war with the heaviest fighting occurring between Kurdish and Iraqi forces in northern Iraq.

--Baghdad is containing the Kurdish dissidents using harsh methods such as razing villages and using chemical warfare.

--Iran probably will launch multi-brigade attacks along the border this summer. The most likely area for an attack in the coming weeks is near Al Amarah, where we have seen an increase in Iranian forces and logistic sites.

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ADDI Talking Points
8 June 1987

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Soviet Public and Diplomatic Posture

Statements by Soviet officials on attacks in the Gulf have avoided confrontational language.

- o The strongest to date was USSR Deputy Foreign Minister Petrovskiy's 3 June statement that the Soviet Union "reserved the right to act in accordance with international law" in the event of another attack on a Soviet ship. He did not specify a response.
- o An indirect threat came in a leftist Kuwaiti newspaper quoting a Soviet MFA official that Moscow's reaction would be "violent" if Iran attacked another Soviet ship. This language has not been repeated by Soviet media.
- o Moscow has tried to play down the presence of Soviet warships. On 6 June Soviet First Deputy Foreign Minister Vorontsov said in an interview that the USSR had no intention of augmenting its three small warships in the Gulf despite its apprehensions about US plans for a naval buildup there.

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Most Soviet commentary cites the need to maintain freedom of navigation in the Gulf and calls for renewed attention to Soviet proposals on "zones of peace" in the Indian Ocean and Persian Gulf. It has also tried to contrast the USSR's emphasis on "peaceful" solutions and actions according to "international law" with what it calls US military designs in the region and specific threats of retaliation.

- o Moscow has stopped short of asking for sanctions or embargoes on arms shipments to Iran. The Soviets appear to be keeping options open with Iran by following the lead of others in supporting stronger UN measures.
- o Press accounts have given prominent coverage to President Reagan's remarks on retaliatory strikes and orders to US ships to defend themselves. Izvestiya compared the attack on the Stark to the Gulf of Tonkin incident and said it would be used to justify a further buildup of US forces.

Despite two incidents involving Soviet merchant ships, the Soviets have not suffered any casualties and have responded in a low-key manner.

- o TASS comment on the 6 May attack on the Soviet cargo ship Koroteyev, as well as the 8 May Soviet demarche in Tehran did not mention Iran as the attacker.
- o A Soviet MFA official told the US Ambassador in Moscow that the missiles involved in the 6 May attack were not equipped with explosives and that the attack was a "calibrated warning"
- o When the Soviet tanker Marshal Chuykov struck a drifting mine on 17 May Soviet media coverage was minimal and factual.

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