

TAC NEWS

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The Battle of Susangerd Khuzestan, Iran - January 1981

On September 22, 1980, The Iran-Iraq war began when five Iraqi divisions crossed the Iranian border on a four hundred-mile front in the face of fierce, but disorganized Iranian resistance. The Iraqi attack plan quickly became apparent. The invasion was not aimed at the total destruction of Iran, but at the occupation of specific areas as part of a strictly "limited" conflict. The main axis of advance was made in Khuzestan aimed at separating the Shatt al-Arab waterway from the rest of country. A second (Central) thrust was aimed at "Mehran-Qasr e Shirin" and a third (Northern) one at Penjwin. But these were no more than secondary and supportive of the main effort, although they had important objectives of their own. The central thrust was concerned with the occupation of the traditional Tehran-Baghdad invasion route. Baghdad, it should be noted, stands a mere eighty miles from the Iranian border. Blocking this route would protect Baghdad from Iranian counter-attack. The northern advance was aimed at establishing strong defensive positions opposite Sulaymuniyah to protect the Kirkuk oil complex. Within two weeks, however, the Iraqi "Blitzkrieg" ground to a halt and the war took on the form it would keep for the next nine years.

Historical Background

The information detailed below has been extracted from a lecture entitled: The Iran-Iraq War: Struggle Without End, By Major Martin J. Martinson, USMC, (1 April 1984); Marine Corps Command and Staff College, Marine Corps Development and Education Command, Quantico, Virginia.

(A full transcript may be obtained by contacting the above institution.)

The Iraqi Army, September 1980
200,000 men with 100 T-72's, approximately 2,500 armored fighting vehicles (AFV's), and about 1,000 tubes of artillery. The tank force was a mixture of T-34/55/62's and PT-76's of Soviet origin and some 100 French AMX-30's, of which more were on order. Mechanized forces included Soviet BTR 50/60/152's, and BMP's, French Panhards and British Ferrets.

The Iranian Army, September 1980
150,000 men in the active army and another 400,000 in the reserves. Iranian tanks numbered about 2,000, primarily M-60's and Chieftains. Artillery numbered almost 1,000 tubes. There were also 250+ M-113 Armored Personnel Carriers.

Comparative Analysis

(We take up Major Martinson's lecture at the beginning of Chapter 2.)

"...There are several qualitative factors that can be used to contrast the two armed forces. Because of the disarray that existed in the post-revolutionary era Iranian military, the edge in leadership, one of several qualitative factors, must be given to the Iraqis. Although, the Iraqi staff system was not without its troubles, it was an in-place and functioning system. In contrast, the Iranian army staff had essentially ceased to exist above the brigade level. One possible reason that the brigade staffs survived the purges was that the Iraqis attacked before she purges could get down that far. The edge in combat experi-

ence must also be given to the Iraqis at the time of their attack. Elements of the Iranian Air Force, Navy, and six Army brigades had been involved in the Dhofar Rebellion in the 1970's, but many of the veterans had been purged. The Iraqi Army saw some combat in the 1973 Arab-Israeli War, as well as in the almost decade-long counterinsurgency campaign against the Kurds (who were supported by the Iranians and other agencies). The Kurdish campaign had resulted in almost 60,000 Iraqi casualties and it had led the Iraqis into adopting a style of fighting that would hinder them in the present conventional conflict. Unable to suppress the small Kurdish guerrilla units in combat, the Iraqis resorted to Soviet siege tactics. The Iraqis would surround a suspected village, seal it off from support and then, through methodical use of air, artillery and dug-in tanks, reduce the village to rubble. Given ample time and a poorly-equipped foe this technique might work, but it had no place in the high-speed thrust that Iraq needed to conduct in 1980.

Command and control of the army proved difficult for the Iranians. The struggle between the Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces, Bani Sadr, and the Ayatollah Khomeini led to a split in the armed forces.





Iranian Pasdaran Troops

The *Pasdaran*, the Revolutionary Guard Militia which had been formed to protect the Ayatollah and his revolution, was viewed as the keeper of the Shiite faith. The regular army, as a carry-over from the Shah's reign, was viewed as unreliable. The regular army's performance during the first days of the war cleared it of any charges of unreliability but it was still not the Ayatollah's favorite force. The Pasdaran was in the forefront of the fighting, at least as seen by Iranian news sources. The Revolutionary Guard had been given the responsibility of defending the cities and villages and it was there that one could find the TV cameras of Iran. The regular army, at least until January 1981, was used in a limited, counterattack role which was designed to relieve some of the pressure that the Iraqis were putting on the border cities.

Although giving the external appearance of having a viable command, control and communications (C3) system, the Iraqis also had serious problems. Saddam Hussein, as Commander-in-Chief, directed the war through the Revolutionary Command Council which had representation from the armed services. However, there were several flaws in this body. First many key military officials had been purged in 1978. The vacuum that was created by their deaths was filled by personnel who were loyal to Hussein and who had seen what happened to those who performed in a manner that did not meet with his approval. Secondly, some of the potentially most-effective fighting units were kept to the rear to protect the government from opponents of the Ba'ath Party. Offensive aircraft, T-72's and loyal combat units were held around Baghdad and kept under the control of internal security forces. Thirdly, the Ba'ath Party has a history of distrusting the military and Hussein as the leader of the Ba'athists may be the most distrustful. Several sources have indicated that it was Hussein who selected the military's objectives over the objections of some of the members of the Revolutionary Command Council. Finally, the politicized military lead-

ers who were leery of being the "messenger who brought bad news" did not accurately report the condition of the Iraqi Armed Forces. Thus, we can see one of the reasons for Hussein's overly-optimistic estimate of his own country's fighting capability.

Finally, the morale of the opposing force must be considered. Many Iranians, imbued with religious fanaticism, were apparently willing to suffer great losses to protect their land from the "infidel" invaders. Iraq, on the

other hand, was trying to maintain a "guns and butter" policy to limit casualties and to isolate the civilian population from the war. The Iraqis had another reason for keeping the casualty figures low. The Iraqi officer corps is composed mainly of Sunni Muslims while the enlisted ranks are, for the most part, from the Shiite community. The Iraqis, fearing a flare-up of the Sunni-Kurdish-Shiite conflict of the early 1970's, did not want it to appear as if the Sunni officers were wantonly sacrificing the lives of the Shiite troops. Additionally, it would not be easy to convince the populace that the war was going well if ever-increasing numbers of Iraqi soldiers were being brought home in boxes..."

(We pick up the narrative again at the beginning of Chapter 3.)

Assault on Susangerd

"...The war entered its second phase with Bani Sadr's unsuccessful attempt at retaking Susangerd in January 1981. The fact that the attack was unsuccessful can be misleading because it was the last major defeat for the Iraqis thus far. In addition to the armor regiments (about 300 Chieftains and M-60's) that were committed by the Iraqis, a parachute regiment was also used as a conventional ground force. However, the Iraqis foresaw the attack and prepared their defensive positions. Accordingly, as the Iraqis attacked, the Iraqis pulled back a few kilometers toward the Kharek River and set up a three-sided ambush. The Iraqis, thinking that the

Iraqis were retreating, rushed in with their armor forces. Over the course of the next four days the two divisions fought each other by employing their helicopter gunships and tanks. The Iraqis were caught in untrafficable terrain and had to leave about 100 to 150 tanks on the battlefield; the Iraqis then pursued the fleeing Iraqis about sixty more kilometers into Iranian territory before halting. The Iraqis lost about 100 tanks themselves as well as many of their attack helos. Moreover, the captured Iranian tanks were of little value to the Iraqis because they had no training on the American and British equipment. The Iraqis did have Western equipment, however, and became the real winners of this battle because they received the captured Iranian tanks without having participated in the fighting..."*

* Gary C. Demack, Perception and Misperception in the Persian Gulf: The Iran-Iraq War, Parameters, June 1983, p. 26. Tactics

"...a defensive force can make maneuver as much a part of its plan as the attacking force can make it part of its plan. The Iraqis employed maneuver at Susangerd when they redeployed their forces into a three-sided ambush that destroyed an Iranian armor division. Unfortunately for the Iraqis, Susangerd was one of the few times that they seem to have considered maneuver. During the remainder of the first Iranian offensive, the Iraqis would remain in their defensive positions until they were bypassed, surrounded and cut-off from their lines of withdrawal. The Iraqis (on the other hand) have generally been unable to maneuver on a large scale because the infantry does not have the ability to move its divisions undetected over the open terrain and because the command and control was insufficient for anything except frontal assaults..."



Sword of Allah!

Susangerd, Iran - January 1981

As the third year of the war began, the Iranians had regrouped and were anxious to drive the hated Iraqis from their soil. The greatest tank force seen to date in the region was assembled for the push, aimed at driving past the village of Susangerd, then past Kouramshar, and eventually to the Shatt al Arab. But the Iraqis were all too aware that the assault was coming. They laid an elaborate mousetrap, retreating headlong for kilometers, only to fall into extensive, prepared positions. For four days, the tanks and helicopters slugged it out.



	Iranians Elements, 5th Arm. Div. Major General Ali Shahbazi (Generation: II)	Cohesion 13
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	Iraqis Elements, 7th Arm. Div. General Ibrahim Abdul Sattar (Generation: II)	Cohesion 14
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1st Wave: Enter East edge of the battle area on turn one (1)
[Break Point: 54]

Brigade Headquarters: 1xTL2 Infantry(B) GHQ-1/M577,
2xBMP-1[R], 2xScorpion/75[R]
Armored Battalion: 1xM60A1 (HQ), 9xM60A1
Armored Battalion: 8xM60A1
Armored Battalion: 7xM60A1

2nd Wave: Enter East edge of the battle area on turn one (2)
[Break Point: 56]

Brigade Headquarters: 1xTL2 Infantry(B) GHQ/M577,
2xBMP-1[R], 1xScorpion/75[R], 3xAH-1G "Cobra"
Armored Battalion: 1xCheifan Mk5 (HQ), 8xCheifan Mk5
Armored Battalion: 6xCheifan Mk 5
Armored Battalion: 1xCheifan Mk5 (HQ), 6xCheifan Mk 5

Air Support: 2xF-5E - Ordinance Load: 6 / 8 (4)
(PRE-PLANNED)

SPECIAL RULES

- 1) Regardless of actual "Tech Level", no Iranian stand may have a "Tech Level" greater than two (2).
- 2) Due to recent torrential rains, all non-aircraft stands' movement rates have been reduced. The weapons stats reflect this.
- 3) All Iranian ground forces must move at maximum speed in a westerly direction in turns one through five.
- 4) The Iranian player is not required to make "Cohesion" die-rolls for movement until turn six (6).

Blocking Force:

Enter West edge of the battle area on turn five (5).

[Break Point: 76]

Division Headquarters: 1xTL2 Infantry(A) GHQ+1/BTR-60P,
3xPT-76[R], 4xMi-24 "Hind-A"

Tank Regiment: 1xT-62A (HQ), 7xT-62A

Tank Regiment: 1xAMX30 (HQ), 6xAMX30

Tank Regiment: 1xT-55A (HQ), 8xT-55A

Artillery Battalion: 3x122mm D-30(3) (OFF MAP)

Air Support: 3xMiG-21

Ordinance Load: 8 / 9 (2) (PRE-PLANNED)

Maneuver Force "A":

Enter North edge of the battle area on turn five (5).

(Break Point: 40)

Tank Regiment: 1xT-62A (GHQ-1), 8xT-62A

Tank Regiment: 1xT-55A (HQ), 9xT-55A

Maneuver Force "B":

Enter South edge of the battle area on turn one (6).

(Break Point: 38)

Tank Regiment: 1xT-62A (GHQ-1), 9xT-62A

Tank Regiment: 8xT-55A

SCENARIO LENGTH: 20 TURNS

SUGGESTED READING

Primary Sources

1. Cottrell, Alvin J., General Editor, The Persian Gulf States. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980. A comprehensive compilation of essays on the states of the Persian Gulf. It provides a wealth of detailed information on the militaries, cultures, economies, politics and histories of the states.
2. Staudenmaier, William O., A Strategic Analysis of the Gulf War, Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania, U. S. Army War College, 1982. This memorandum examines the war from a strategic perspective to determine the causes; to analyze the military strategy and events of the war in order to shed light on significant tactical and logistical developments and to derive tentative conclusions.
3. Dunn, Michael F., There's a new Armored War Being Fought, Defense and Foreign Affairs, January/February 1982, pp. 9+. The theme of the article is that the emphasis of armored warfare is shifting from reliance on heavy tanks to reliance on lighter, more reliable armored fighting vehicles and Light tanks.
4. Cordesman, Anthony H., Lessons of the Iran-Iraq War; Parts One, Two and Three. Armed Forces Journal International, April 1982, June 1982, and May 1983, pp. 32-47, 68-85, and 36-43, respectively. In this series of three articles, Mr. Cordesman has fully described the causes of the war, traced its development, analyzed the tactics and weapons and drawn conclusions. An excellent source of information.
5. Helms, Christine Moss, The Iraqi Dilemma: Political Objectives Versus Military Strategy, The Brookings Institution, 1983. As the title indicates, Iraq is faced with the problem of developing military strategies to accomplish vague and undefined political objectives.
6. O'Ballance, Edgar, The Iraqi-Iranian War: The First round, Parameters, Vol. XI, No. 1, pp. 54-59. A preliminary discussion of the causes, progress and future of the war.
7. O'Ballance, Edgar, The Iran-Iraq War, The Marine Corps Gazette, February 1982, pp. 44-50. An updated version of his earlier work, it provided some of

the background for Cordesman's early article.

8. Rogal, Kim and Ron Moreau, The Youngest Martyrs, Newsweek, 21 March 1983, p. 51. A brief description of the religious fervor that grips Iran and Iraq.
 9. Rosser-Owen, David, Lessons of the Iran-Iraq War, Armada International, March 1982, pp. 40-47. A recapitulation of the course of the war. It provides a good recipe of the successes and failures of the two sides.
 10. Staudenmaier, William O., Military Policy and Strategy in the Gulf War, Parameters, Vol. XIII, No. 2, pp. 25-25. A condensed version of Col. Staudenmaier's "Analysis" for the U.S. Army War College. Excellent coverage of the early part of the war.
- Secondary Sources
1. Jacobson, Jay C., Military Arsenals: The Persian Gulf, War Data, 1979.
 2. The Military Balance, 1981-1982 ed. The International Institute for Strategic Studies, London, 1982.
 3. Demack, Gary C., Perception and Misperception in the Persian Gulf: The Iran-Iraq War, Parameters, Vol. XII, No. 2 pp. 65-73.
 4. F-5E/F Fighters Provide Defense on Iraqi Border, Aviation Week and Space Technology, June 27, 1983, pp. 79-80.
 5. Chronology, The Middle East Journal, Winter, Spring, Summer and Fall of 1981, 1982, 1983 and Winter 1984.

VICTORY CONDITIONS:

Iranian Victory Conditions:

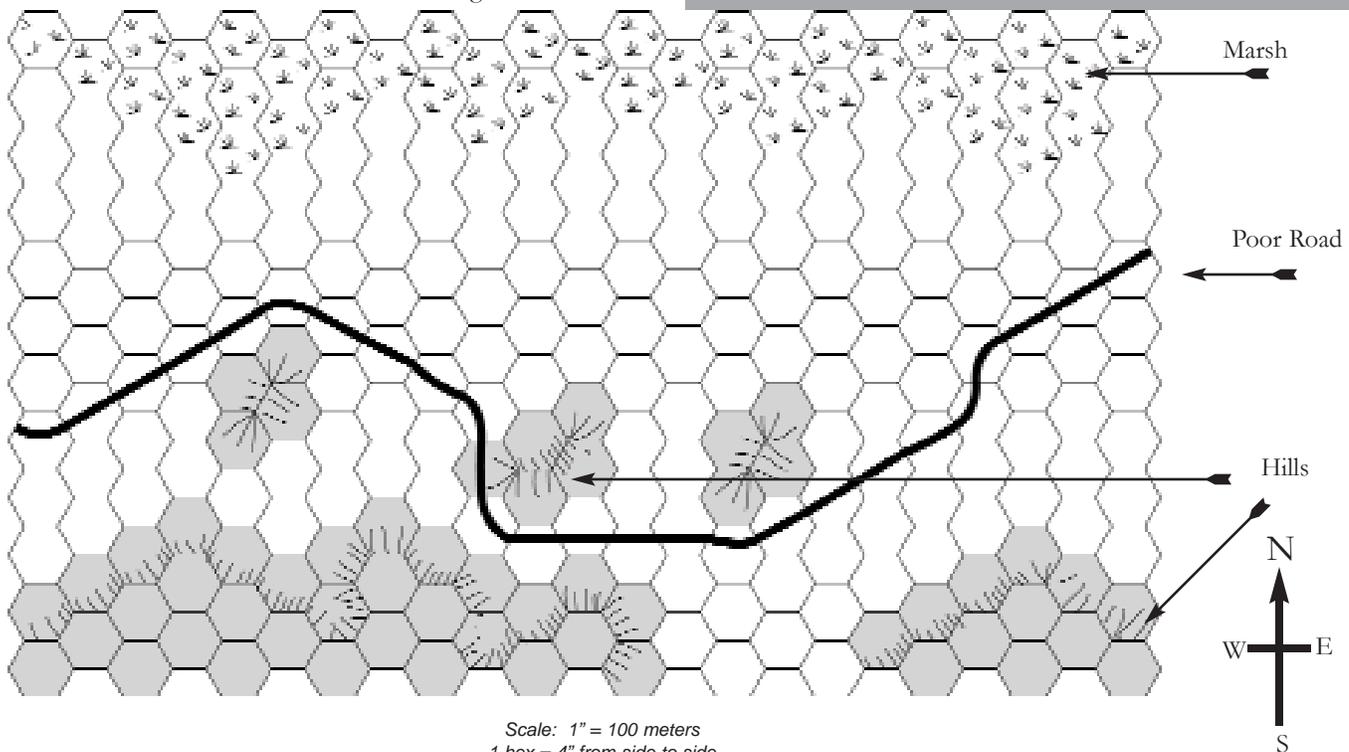
- Marginal: Prevent one wave "Breaking" before the end of the game.
- Tactical: Prevent both waves' "Breaking" before the end of the game.
- Decisive: "Break" one Iraqi "Force" before the end of the game.

Iraqi Victory Conditions:

- Marginal: "Break" both Iranian waves by the end of the game.
- Tactical: "Break" both Iranian waves by the end of turn fifteen (15).
- Decisive: "Break" both Iranian waves by the end of turn fifteen (15) and prevent any Iraqi force from "Breaking."

TERRAIN SUGGESTIONS:

- The map should be approximately 72" x 96"
- "Mixed" Desert with one "Poor" road running East-to-West.



Scale: 1" = 100 meters
1 hex = 4" from side to side