

## Middle East Report by Scott Thompson

### Oil war aims at economic chokepoints

*Iranian forces now threaten the Kirkuk oil fields and Kuwait, but it still may all be a strategic deception.*

**O**n Feb. 25, Iranian forces outflanked the Iraqi armed forces in a new offensive, "Dawn 9," into a mountainous area near the Kurdish provincial capital of Sulaymaniah, 175 miles north of Baghdad. Within two days, Iranians reported that they had swept through 37 abandoned villages and seized heights for deployment of artillery.

The new thrust places unexpected pressure on Kirkuk—the site of Iraq's largest oilfields, a major oil refinery, and a pipeline that pumps one million barrels a day to Turkey.

The threat of a Gulf-wide oil war was first raised by Iranian Speaker of the Parliament Hojatolislam Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, on Feb. 21. He called Kuwait "our new neighbor." An earlier "Dawn 8" invasion of the Faw Peninsula had brought Iranian forces within 13 miles of the Kuwaiti border.

On Feb. 26, Iranian Prime Minister Mir Hossein Mousavi told war volunteers that the "Dawn 9" offensive was part of a fight to lower Persian states' oil production and to raise world prices, countering the Arab "oil conspiracy."

On the same day, Iranian President Ali Khamenei said that Iran might start confiscating oil produced for Iraq by other Arab states, which is shipped through the Persian Gulf. Kuwait and the Saudis produce 310,000 barrels per day for Iraq on a deferred payment basis.

Iraq reported on Feb. 27, that its forces had blocked an Iranian offensive from Faw against the Kuwaiti border. Kuwait's military forces are

on "red alert," while the foreign ministers of the Gulf Cooperation Council—Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, United Arab Emirates—have been meeting in emergency session to discuss the potential spread of the war.

Iraq is counterattacking against the 31,000 troops in the Faw "pocket." Pentagon sources who have the battle under satellite surveillance say that so far the heavily armored Iraqi counter-offensive has been hampered by rainy season weather. This has given a temporary advantage to the lightly armored Iranian invasion force. But, the advantage is only temporary. Iraq may slow the advance, reducing the pocket with artillery, missiles, and helicopter gunships before renewing the advance.

Pentagon sources close to Assistant Secretary of Defense Michael Armacost report that the "oil war" has so far been a propaganda war. The port city of Faw had been largely deserted since the beginning of the Iran-Iraq war six years ago. "Dawn 9" in the north takes advantage of terrain that favors Iranian "human wave" tactics over heavily mechanized forces, but Iran has yet to commit sufficient forces to make real the threat posed to Kirkuk, 75 miles west of the furthest Iranian advance.

These sources still think that Iran may be carrying out a strategic deception to wreak political havoc among the Gulf Cooperation Council states, while upwards of 400,000 reserves remain poised in the Basra-Hawizeh marshes area for an offensive against Basra, the second largest Iraqi city near

the banks of the Shatt al-Arab waterway.

The real question is, who is planning strategy for the Iranians, whose Islamic fundamentalist regime has executed or driven into exile, most of the elite of the Iranian armed forces?

The latest offensive began only days after a Feb. 2-4 visit by the Soviets' First Deputy Foreign Minister Georgi M. Korniyenko, which the Iranian side described as "good and successful." Korniyenko hammered out a broad-ranging agreement for economic cooperation and joint oil exploration, but defense sources note that presently the Soviets are training 200 Iranian Air Force pilots each year in Leningrad, Kiev, and Frunze. The Soviets have also supplied 130 surface-to-surface and SAM missiles.

The Pentagon is presently observing a policy of "strict neutrality," although the United States has resumed relations with Iraq for the first time since 1967.

Sources report that Fritz Kraemer, the man who created Secretaries of State Henry Kissinger and Al Haig, has advised Assistant Secretary of Defense Fred Iklé to the effect that: "The United States is lucky the two most radical Middle East states are bogged down in a war of attrition. Ultimately, this means that Iran, which has vastly superior manpower, will win the war. That will mean the ultimate collapse of Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, which are very brittle countries that would be far weaker than a combined Iranian, Shi'ite majority Iraqi state. Nonetheless, before the war started, Iraq had designs upon Kuwait, which it considers part of the Turkish province of Basra."

This is the sort of strategic insanity that had the Pentagon's International Strategic Affairs section providing covert aid to Iran via Israel.