
The Gulf War

Iran's new human wave offensive

by Scott Thompson

Iranian troops on Feb. 9 launched a two-pronged human wave offensive, striking at Basra (the second-largest Iraqi city) to the north and the port of Faw, toward the Persian Gulf in the south of Iraq. Over 200,000 Iranian troops had been staged for the "Dawn 8" offensive, which is taking place on the eighth anniversary of the toppling of the Shah by the mad Ayatollah Khomeini.

While the Iraqi Third Army quickly annihilated those Iranian forces aimed at Basra, there are reports that Iran has conquered upwards of 280 square miles in the south, including the port city of Faw, which had been a major oil-pumping depot for Iraq prior to the outbreak of the Iran-Iraq war six years ago. This southern offensive has brought Iran's rag-tag army within 13 miles of the Kuwaiti island of Bubiyan, which has been jointly used by Iraq and Kuwait for exporting oil products.

This incursion threatening Kuwait highlighted threats from Teheran that all of the Gulf was at risk if Saudi Arabia and Kuwait did not stop their oil price war (see article, page 8). Within hours of the drive toward the Persian Gulf, Iranian President Ali Khamenei spoke with Libya's dictator Muammar Qaddafi and Syrian President Hafez al-Assad, Iran's sole allies in the "tripartite agreement" that marks the Soviet-backed Arab rejection front.

On Feb. 11, after speaking with Khamenei, Qaddafi threatened in an interview to the Italian daily *La Stampa*, "The war in the Gulf would escalate fatally, involving Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, if there are continuing attempts to play on the oil price decrease. . . . Pay attention to what I'm saying. It is very important."

The Iranian invasion drew an instantaneous response from a seven-nation committee of the Arab League, which had been formed after Iran's last human wave offensive in 1984. On Feb. 11, Kuwait issued the following statement: "Kuwait condemns and is deeply concerned by Iran's attempts to occupy Iraqi territory. Its offensive threatens security and greatly harms countries of the region." The next day, Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Saud al Faisal flew to Baghdad for a meeting of the Arab League committee, warning that unless Iran accepted an immediate cease-fire, continuation of the offensive "would undermine Arab-Iranian relations."

Prince Saud al Faisal was the de facto chairman of the meeting, which brought together the foreign ministers of

Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Jordan, North Yemen, Tunisia, Morocco, and Iraq. The Kuwaiti news agency KUNA said that further talks would center on implementing decisions at a 1982 summit, in which Arab League states called for a united Arab defense against attacks on Arab territory. On Feb. 12, the Arab League called for a U.N. Security Council meeting on the latest offensive.

The United States, which is strategically allied with both Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, has also issued warnings against Iran. State Department spokesman Bernard Kalb said: "The United States views the newly intensified fighting in the Gulf War with deep concern." The possibility of direct U.S. intervention to protect the Gulf was raised by a military expert at the American Foreign Policy Institute: "Any substantial Iranian attack upon Persian Gulf shipping or neutral countries such as Kuwait or Saudi Arabia could force U.S. intervention."

The Iraqi counteroffensive

On the military front, Iraqi troops have been preparing a massive counterattack, and Baghdad claims it has Iranian forces surrounded in a gigantic pincer movement reminiscent of World War II. There are two areas of counterattack being planned. The first is to drive back enveloped Iranian forces, now retreating in a disorderly manner, thereby smashing them against the Shatt al-Arab waterway, which they had to cross at the beginning of the offensive. This will be bloody fighting, which has already resulted in 7,000 Iranians killed and 14,000 wounded. Baghdad Information Minister Latif Nassif Jassem accused the Iranians of using chemical weapons.

The second area of counterattack was proposed by the commander of Iraq's Third Army, who asked the Iraqi President for permission to launch a counteroffensive onto Iranian territory. Iraqi forces, backed by missiles, heavy artillery, and tactical air, have begun to move on Khorramshahr, once an Iranian city of a quarter-million, which had been the original Iranian staging area. Khorramshahr was captured and briefly held by Iraq at the beginning of the war.

Whatever the outcome of this fighting, and the situation presently favors Iraq's ability to contain the war so that it does not spread throughout the strategic Persian Gulf, Iraq has clearly been stabbed in the back by the Soviets. Only four days before the Iranians launched their offensive, the most senior Soviet delegation ever visited Khomeini's Teheran, led by First Deputy Foreign Minister Georgi Kornienko. Soviet officials said that Kornienko discussed economic cooperation, mutual oil exploration in the Caspian Sea, and Soviet arms sales to Iraq. Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Ali Besharati declared that the two countries share a long history of "co-existence," and he hoped to strengthen ties with the Soviets. Moscow has long nurtured the hope of a "deal" that would permit the takeover of northern Iran after Khomeini's death.