**Indian Ocean Fury #5 – Hormuz Hoedown**

**Playtest Report by AndrewJ July 2018**

India and Pakistan both on the map. Uh-oh...

Edit: And the Sara's 90 miles away from its closest Tico. Never a good feeling.

Edit 2: French heavy ASCM helicopters - neat!

Here's a bit of AAR, midway through the first morning...

**THE SITUATION**

After the initial flight of forces from the Gulf, and the closure of the Straits of Hormuz, I have been instructed to take control in the air, re-open the straits, and recommence the transit of supertankers in and out of the Gulf.

I have a small pack of tankers sheltered in the Gulf itself, and a much larger group of them holding south in the Indian ocean, which must be protected and escorted about their business. In order to do this, I have an assortment of aircraft along the length of the Gulf, with varying degrees of ammo shortage, some minesweepers sheltering in Oman, a single SSN, an ASW group and the Saratoga group in the Indian Ocean, and two sets of important logistical ships heading north to meet them.

Within 5 days I must have tanker traffic flowing through the Gulf again.

**THE PLAN**

My southern logistical ships are isolated, weakly defended, but very important, particularly the cargo ship with the ordnance for my air forces in the Gulf. While they’re unlikely to get attacked by air, subs are a very real threat. Each of the groups is assigned a dedicated patrol of either P-3s or S-3s to clear their path. The tankers loitering in the Indian Ocean also get an S-3 patrol, although I question its effectiveness given the large area they cover, and the little frigate steams around the area to show the flag. It won’t have much other use.

The Sara will steam slowly north while its Tico rushes to catch up, and the isolated Spruance moves over to join it from Pakistan. My aircraft have plenty of range, so there’s no need to hurry the carrier into the Gulf. After forming up the Sara will gradually head NW towards Oman, which should give me a bit more clearance from anything Soviet coming out of southern Iran or India. (Speaking of which, I intend to stay well clear of Indian and Pakistani shores whenever possible.)

The ASW group will consolidate a little, and head towards the Gulf hunting for subs en-route, and the SSN will work cautiously towards the straits. The minesweepers will hold for the moment. The two warships up in the Gulf are ordered to make very close barrier patrol with active sonar, hoping to protect the tankers there from anything sneaking in along the shore.

Airpower will begin with probing attacks at either end of the Gulf, intending to provoke fights there and knock down as much of the peripheral enemy air force as possible, as cheaply as possible. (My low missile stocks are definitely a concern.) The Straits of Hormuz are very heavily guarded, so I won’t tackle them immediately. Instead, I will try and give myself freedom of maneuver, so when the time comes I can attack unmolested. I’ll probably begin engaging targets in/around the straits sometime on Day 2, and then begin clearing it on Day 3.

**NIGHT 1**

I’m the first to open hostilities, making probes against the weaker ends of the Iranian air force. Sparrow-carrying F-18s from the Sara head north with a jammer in attendance to tackle the Phantoms in the Chah Bahar area (as well as getting a Badger hunting for my ships). At the same time, I start probing out of Kuwait to engage aircraft from Omidiyeh, and the F-16s do a very nice job against the F-5s loitering there, closing in to use Sidewinders when possible. It’s also relatively easy to beat up on the Phantoms operating out of Bushehr, without expending large amounts of missiles. However, when the Mig-29s start popping up things get a lot more difficult, so I have to ease off to preserve my missile stocks. I don’t want to be out of ammo in the event of an attack.

Down south, I pick up the emissions of another powerful airborne surface search radar off the Indian coast, in the gap between the Sara and my logistics ships. My initial impulse is to shoot it down immediately, but then I consider that this could be an Indian airplane, so best to leave it alone. As I’m congratulating myself on showing diplomatic restraint more information comes in confirming that it really is a Soviet Badger, so it does get shot down after all (two F-18s and a KA-6 tanker), but it does raise the concern of where it came from. Are the Soviets operating out of an Indian base?

The Iranians make the next move, using their F-14s to press towards my coast of the Gulf, and by their courses it looks like they’re tracking my valuable support aircraft. If they still have a Phoenix or two then this could be a real problem for clumsy AWACS or ELINT planes. Their aggressive actions come when many of my better fighters are recycling, and my lesser planes don’t have the range to tackle them safely. Fortunately, the belt of Patriot missiles is well placed to deal with them as they press in, and the SAM gunners rack up a good score, particularly the crew in Bahrain. Hopefully the missiles I’ve used up here won’t be needed in the event of a Soviet missile attack.

After their F-14s are down, two of mine arrive, refuel, and then make an afterburner dash across the Gulf to knock down their Mainstay with a long range Phoenix shot. I would have willingly traded several fighters for that target, but the Iranians are temporarily down, so my planes get away with it unopposed.

As this goes on overhead an SSK surfaces in the Gulf, to the east of the assembled tankers there, and is immediately spotted on radar. He’s far enough offshore that he can’t see my ships, but his presence is alarming all the same. He’s swiftly sunk by a helicopter before he can make his escape.

My surface search radars have also picked up some isolated naval contacts sitting motionless very close along the eastern Iranian coast. Now that the Phantoms out of Chah Bahar seem to be down for the moment, a British helicopter with Sea Skua and good night vision goes sneaking in at wavetop level for a peek. The ship turns out to be a La Combattante, and the helicopter sinks it with a barrage of missiles before sneaking home again. With this information in hand, the others are sunk over the course of the night by a combination of Harpoons and LGBs.

My next move is a heavy strike against the airfields at Chah Bahar and Jask, in order to secure the open end of the Gulf of Oman. The majority of the attackers come from the Sara, but the Tornadoes and F-15Es also fly in to contribute. I’d feared pop-up SAMs, but it looks like previous fighting got rid of most of those, and the bombardment is unopposed. The runways are cratered, ammo bunkers are destroyed, and aircraft in open parking are eliminated. I don’t go after the hardened shelters, since it would take too many bombs, but with the runways cratered any survivors are trapped for the moment. I should have air control over this end of Iran now, and the closest active airfield is Bandar Abbas. This should greatly reduce the risks of air strikes on incoming tankers.

**DAY 1**

Shortly before dawn I start getting numerous airborne contacts deep in central Iran, roughly in the Isfahan area. There are a dozen of them, loitering in a tight orbit at very low speed. This can only mean one thing: tankers!

At first, I’m baffled about how I can even see that far, since none of my radars can reach there. Looking around I see the alarming sight of the Saudi E-3 almost half way across the Persian Gulf, en-route to my tankers over the Gulf of Oman! High command immediately directs the Saudis to turn back, rather than make a one-plane overflight of Bandar Abbas, and clarifies that they are not, repeat not, to seek further refuelling from us.

Regardless of how it was spotted, a tanker track is too valuable a target to ignore. It probably means an incoming bomber strike from distant airfields is in the making, so I need to move quickly. A decent force of my F-15s and F-16s launch out of Kuwait, intending to brush aside the two fighters on CAP near Omidiyeh and proceed on a direct path to the tankers. Mistake! The two planes on CAP die as expected, but swarms and swarms of Mig-29s come boiling up out of Omidiyeh, and the north end of the Gulf soon becomes a massive dogfight. I’m outnumbered, and I have to launch more and more planes from Kuwait to try and rescue the situation. The Fulcrums are difficult targets, and it usually takes multiple AMRAAMs to achieve a single hit, and soon I’m burnering in fighters from Bahrain to try and break through.

I eventually win the fight, but most of my planes are heading home Winchester, and the few that proceed don’t have full missile loadouts any more. The first pilot to reach the tanker area gapes in amazement at the large planes silhouetted against the bright horizon. They aren’t tankers. They’re Bears! Engaging as quickly as they can, my pilots manage to achieve gun and missile hits, but the Bears are extremely (some would say absurdly) tough, and many of them take multiple missile hits and keep flying. The majority are shot down, but some manage to make their escape despite gaping holes in their fuselage, and they fly away deeper into north-east Iran.

Remember that bit about preserving precious missiles? Engaging as cheaply as possible? Not here! This engagement totally blew that plan away. There are only 17 AMRAAMs left in all of Kuwait, and most of those are on aircraft already. My F-16s are loaded Sidewinder heavy, and the F-15 pilots are trying to remember how to use Sparrows. Any further engagements with the Mig-29s will be on an even footing at best, or far worse in the case of the F-16s. Hopefully I won’t have to do any anti-missile duty, with one-target-at-a-time Sparrows. That supply ship is going to be really important.

Out at sea, the Spruance leading the Sara group has picked up a few submerged contacts using active sonar. They mostly turn out to be false targets, but this morning one of them turns out to be a Victor, lurking motionless below the layer, and very close to where the tankers will eventually have to go. It’s sunk by helicopter. Meanwhile in the Gulf of Oman, my creeping SSN picks up a passive contact, but unlike all the other false contacts and fish, it’s only momentary, which makes me very suspicious. Did something briefly run its engines? Was that a launch transient? After several minutes of indecision, hoping for the contact to re-emerge, my paranoia gets the best of me and I send a torpedo downrange below the layer popping it up when it gets closer to the contact. That gets a response! The SSK tries to flee, but does not escape.

My ships have all consolidated in their groups by now, and with them comes increasingly concerning information about war preparations in India and Pakistan. I’ve been monitoring the Indian May, flying up and down its coast, as well as fighters and ASW helicopter radars. The possibility of Russians coming at me from behind is alarming (where did that Badger come from?), and the latest intel makes me even more nervous. The replenishment group is ordered to angle further east, into the tanker swarm and away from India, and I’m considering sending a CAP way down south just in case.

The last thing I need is getting caught up in a regional hot war with a capable force like India.

A bit more time, a bit more AAR...

**DAY 1 CONTINUED**

As the day continues, my air-forces conduct a variety of fighter sweeps to engage isolated aircraft (ESM recon, jammers, weak CAP, etc) in the enemy rear, and the targets are mostly gone by noon. A single-plane CAP is set up over the tankers in the Indian Ocean, and recce Mirages scout the Iranian coast of the Persian Gulf, looking at the lesser airports and facilities there. The Bushehr defences are alert, and a pair of medium range SAMs take a shot at the Mirage, forcing it to turn away before it can get a good look at the area. My ESM also starts picking up ground-based surface search radars near the straits, presumably from the SSM coastal defence units which are supposed to be in the area, but my attempt to sneak one of my little drones in for a look ends when it’s shot down by a Mig-23.

Mid-morning my Mirages start making a major fighter sweep to engage planes near Hormuz, flying along the Gulf from the west, and they become embroiled in a massive fight with Mig-23s. The planes are nearly at parity. I have a slight missile range advantage, but not a great one, and my pilot skill is low, so it’s a struggle, and once again I find myself pouring in more and more aircraft to rescue the situation, including sending in my Sparrow-firing F-16s.

As all this is happening, my ESM planes loitering at high altitude up near Kuwait start picking up more airborne surface search radars where we saw the bombers before. Is it an actual incoming raid this time? The F-15s launch out of Kuwait (going around the Omidiyeh CAP this time), the F-16s with Sparrows are pulled away from the Hormuz fight before they can get there (sorry Mirages!), and a precious pair of F-16s with AMRAAM are also launched as backup to guard a tanker, in the event of emergencies. Fortunately, the skies are clear en-route to the bombers (which turn out to be Blinders this time), and my fighters batter them out of the sky with Sparrows and Sidewinders before returning home.

Back at Hormuz, the main wave of Migs has subsided, and some of my Mirages are pursuing the retreating stragglers back towards Bandar Abbas. Up to this point the SA-5 has taken one or two ineffective long-range potshots, but now one of the SA-10s opens fire, and the Mirages turn to flee, diving to the deck and hurtling across Qeshm Island (the long one on the NW side of the straits) in an attempt to dodge the shots. This works, but prompts two previously hidden SA-6s on the island to open fire. Fortunately, they do this at the edge of their envelope, and the Mirages manage to escape.

These new SAM threats may be a problem when it comes time to deal with the boat swarm and mine clearing in the straits, and fortunately I can get at them since they’re just beyond extreme SA-10 range. The F-16CGs and Jaguars are sent to deal with them, with a combination of high altitude HARMs and Mavericks, and then cluster bombs to finish them off. When this round of strikes are done we’ve managed to destroy 2 and damage 1 SA-6, and destroy one and damage one SA-8 at the east end of the island. This is encouraging progress, but tackling the more modern defences (SA-10/11/15) is going to be much tougher.

While this is happening the Exocet carrying helicopters try and make their way into the fray, since the skies over the straits are empty at the moment. Unfortunately, that doesn’t last long, and the helicopters keep retiring and returning as they try and avoid the numerous enemy reinforcements which keep dashing into the area. My F-16CG strikers are put to work with their defensive AMRAAMs, and more F-16CGs with precious AMRAAM loads are launched to afterburner in and provide support. Many of the enemy F-4s take single missile hits, and promptly turn about and return home in the safety of their SAM umbrella, where I can’t follow. No doubt they’ll be back after a day or two of repairs. The helicopters finally find a gap in the air cover, and manage to sink the destroyer and a few of the small warships in the straits (plus one Boghammer by accident), but the big cargo ships (presumably with arty on deck like before) and the swarm of small craft remain un-molested for the moment.

This leaves me with the greater part of my land-based aircraft down for reloading at the moment, and with even fewer AMRAAMs than before, so hopefully the Iranians and Soviets don’t try anything for the next few hours until we have a chance to recover. If they do, I may have to put a lot of trust in my SAMs.

The situation is calm at sea. My replenishment group (with the nuclear cruiser now in attendance) is now among the tankers loitering in the Indian Ocean, and P-3s have begun to hunt along the route the tankers will take. I expect to start moving up the tankers after dusk, once I’ve had a bit more search time in the area. The Sara is near the tanker destination area, and will continue to patrol slowly there, looking for subs which may be lurking to ambush the arriving ships. I don’t think the ASW group in the Gulf (TG Elliot) is covering enough area, so I’ve split it in two, with a Spruance, short range AA, and long range AA ship in each group. The air threat is hopefully reduced enough that the weaker groups won’t be at risk. They’ll slowly patrol up the Gulf of Oman in parallel, banging away on active sonar, and hoping that my recce report of no SSMs on the Iranian shore here is actually correct. The SSN continues to patrol cautiously, not wanting to get too far into the straits for fear of mines.

No further reports from India and Pakistan so far. Fingers crossed for restraint. Hopefully I’m not asked to intervene.

A little more AAR..

**AFTERNOON 1 & NIGHT 2**

As the afternoon draws on I start looking at the Bandar Abbas and Straits of Hormuz, with an eye to a strike after dark. There are a large number of high-grade SAMs concentrated in the area, which I will have to deal with. ESM contacts have revealed four SA-10 sites, which are my primary concern, and numerous shorter range SAMs, and there are presumably another set of mobile SAMs lying hidden, similar to the SA-6s on Qeshm Island. Although the ESM contacts give me the general area of the SAM batteries, I don’t have precise targetable locations, and I need them.

A direct overflight of the SAM sites with my Mirages or other pod-carrying fighters would be suicidal, but I do have the U-2, with an 80-mile camera on it. Since the SA-10s only have a 40-mile range, I may be able to get a good look at them. However, the U-2 is a very vulnerable target, if left alone. Therefore, it is preceded by a flight of 6 Mirages, which tackle the Mig and Phantom CAP which has reformed. Once those are down the U-2 advances, escorted by an EA-6 flying underneath to jam the SA-5 radar, and a pair of F-14s a few miles out on each side to handle any sudden surprises. The U-2 flies over the straits until it’s just out of range of the known SA-10 batteries, getting superb pictures of the Boghammers below. Unfortunately, it gets nothing on the well camouflaged SAMs. I’m not about to send the U-2 into the SAM envelope, so it makes a quick scout of the Gulf of Oman, and then goes home. The whole operation is a bust.

Meanwhile my SSN, patrolling E of the straits, picks up another very quiet slow-moving target at close range, creeping along at 1 knot at the standard 40 m shallow depth. Another SSK, proclaims the captain! My sub ducks under the layer, fires a torp, and then brings it up through the layer as it approaches the target. Which is gone… Baffled (and a little alarmed) the sub rises up above the layer to listen again. Still no contact. Worried they made a dreadful mistake, and the reported contact position was wrong, the captain orders an active sonar search. Still nothing! It takes several more minutes (as the torp runs out of fuel) before contact is finally re-established, and the embarrassed captain records the school of fish in his log.

Evening falls, and the tankers are ordered to begin moving closer to the Gulf of Oman. My SSN puts a few long-range Harpoon shots into the last of the Iranian destroyers, under cover of darkness. My strike aircraft are finishing swapping loadouts to emphasize HARMs, SLAMs, ALARMs, and other standoff munitions. Slow moving ECM planes and tankers start lifting off to move to supporting positions. It’s time for the Bandar Abbas strike to begin.

My primary objective for this strike is to destroy the SA-10s. My secondary objective is to damage or destroy other SAMs. To enable this Bandar Abbas will also be struck, mostly as a means to force the defences to react, but I do not expect to completely disable it on this first round of attacks. TLAMs will come through the mountains from the NW. HARM and ALARM strikes will come from all directions around the target. I want the enemy to spend lots of missiles trying to shoot down the fast-moving ARMs. This will hopefully allow SLAMs, with their optical sensor and man in the loop, to come over the mountains just behind the TLAMs, and find and destroy the SA-10s. If those go down, shorter range weapons (Walleyes, Mavericks, LGBs) will close in to attempt to deal with the remaining defences.

The strike goes mostly as planned, although there is some struggling to get aircraft in the right place at the right time, particularly the heavily laden F-18s with SLAMs, which have to tank en-route, and then fly around to the opposite side of the target from the carrier to make their through-mountain approach. The heavy fighter escort proves unnecessary (only one pair of Migs comes up, before the attack is fully in place), which is a relief. When the SAMs open fire the ARMs reply, coming in like the spokes of a wagon wheel. The lesser SAMs are targeted with roughly one each, medium SAMs get two or three, and the SA-10s get the bulk of the barrage, but for a while it looks like the Iranian defences are going to stop them all. Only four HARMs survive to reach their targets, killing an SA-8 and hitting two of the SA-10s, and then the ALARMs (fired in bulk) manage to slightly damage another SA-10.

The first of the 45 TLAMs (the VLS Spruance’s entire stock) arrive moments later. The initial 15 are directed at hangars and weather shelters, and most of them are shot down by the remaining defences, so they do minimal damage. However, the remainder are assigned 15 each to the two runways, and they get through mostly intact, pummeling the runways into rubble. In the meantime, the majority of the SLAMs have reached their targets, completely destroying two of the SA-10s, and rendering the other two combat ineffective. Unfortunately, I don’t bring in my second wave of strike aircraft quickly enough, and by the time my A-6s and F-15Es arrive the SA-11s have begun firing again. Most of my Walleyes are shot down (despite intense jamming), and I can’t get close enough to use LGBs effectively, so only one of the SA-11s and a couple of lesser SAMs are destroyed.

The flight home is mostly uneventful, except that the damaged SA-6 on Qeshm Island turns out to have repaired itself (something to bear in mind in longer scenarios), and it takes a potshot at a passing F-16. Fortunately, it misses, and there are some Mavericks nearby to deal with it.

So the strike achieved its primary (SA-10s) and tertiary (airfield damage) objectives, but did not fully accomplish its secondary objective (lesser SAMs). It came very close, and I think even being 2 minutes sooner with the Walleyes would have made all the difference. I should have been right on the heels of the TLAMs. As it stands now, I will have to re-attack, and the medium and short ranged SAMs will be completely reloaded and ready for me again. I can’t simply ignore the airfield, since the SSM batteries are sheltering under the SAMs there, and they must be destroyed. This time I won’t have a 45 missile TLAM strike to ‘prime the pump’, and I’ve used up many of my ARMs, so I’ll probably have to take it in stages. We shall see!

Next stages…

**DAY 2**

The remainder of the night is quieter, with most of my aircraft flying back to base to re-arm. Many of my lesser aircraft (the Mirages and F-5s) are switched over to bomb loadouts, in preparation for tackling the boat swarm in the straits when daylight comes. A few isolated Iranian CAP aircraft are engaged, and a few TLAMs are used to strike isolated surveillance radars.

When morning comes the CVBG is on station near the tanker assembly area, where it will continue to patrol. The replenishment groups continue to advance towards the Gulf, and the two ASW groups continue their slow sweep further into the Gulf of Oman, where they find and eliminate another SSK. (This one’s a solid active sonar contact – nothing fishy about it.) The minesweeper group and associated patrol boats are ordered to advance towards the straits (although not to enter them yet). The Indian Ocean tankers continue to close in, but I’m getting more nervous about their defencelessness. The initial briefing mentioned the possibility of SSGNs out there, so I decide to increase the tanker CAP to a pair of F-14s, in the hope of limiting the damage from a pop-up Charlie or the like. (The Iranian fighter situation is calming, so I have more fighters to spare.)

Bandar Abbas receives two strikes during the day, the first, from the mainland, dealing with some of the peripheral SAMs, and the second, from the carrier, finishing off the remaining SAMs immediately around the airfield itself. With the SA-10s gone, and the positions of the other SAMs already established, the strikes proceed without too much difficulty. Once the SAMs are gone the exposed planes are bombed, local docks are destroyed, and the coastal defence SSMs are hunted down and killed. These ones were radiating, and thus were reasonably easy to find. Hopefully there aren’t any more hidden ones elsewhere. Escorts of the homeward-bound strikers returning to Kuwait take the time to engage more of the CAP at Omidiyeh, which seems to be the only place the Iranians are still flying at the moment.

The boat-swarm in the Straits of Hormuz is anchored around some large freighters loaded with artillery and MANPADS, and these get engaged with Exocets (courtesy of the big Puma helicopters) and some LGBs. The attacks are never enough to sink the big ships outright, but they have poor damage control, and they usually burn out and flood within a few hours of being hit. The attack on the boat swarm itself is done old-school, with lots and lots of iron bombs. The Mirages tote ‘airshow loads’ that would be much too heavy for long-range strikes, but a dozen bombs per plane starts to add up rapidly. The surviving drone from the Tripoli loiters overhead to act as a FAC, and by mid-afternoon the straits have been cleared.

Once opposition there is cleared the minesweeping helicopters enter the area and begin their hunt, soon finding a dense field of mines on the E side of the straits, which they begin to sweep.

**NIGHT 3**

The Indo-Pakistan conflict goes hot after dark, but we’re well out of the area by now, and so far there are no calls for us to intervene. Hopefully they’ll just clash indecisively, because if one of them starts winning then the nuclear issue could be a very nasty problem.

My minesweepers arrive at the straits, and begin slowly sweeping the eastern minefield, in an organised line-abreast pattern along the length of the field. The objective of this formation is more to find the mines (with overlapping sonar fields) than to sweep them. My helicopters swoop in to provide rapid sweeping, without having to put the ships at risk. As dawn approaches the sweepers are doubling back along the outer edges of the field, looking for outliers, but I think it’s mostly clear. My helicopters have also found a second field further in, just past the center of the straits, running in a north-south direction. I’m wondering if there’s a third field even further west, but so far I haven’t found anything yet.

Extensive tanker support is used to allow a carrier strike on the airfields at Bushehr, and then Shiraz. Bushehr is reasonably well defended, with SA-11s and an SA-6 (plus the SA-5, which seems to be out of ammo), and it’s wall-to-wall light flack down around the reactor. A combination of HARM, Walleye, and my few remaining SLAMs break down the SAM defences, and then LGBs shut the runways. Shiraz is not as well defended (just some flack), so the runways quickly fall victim to LGBs, and the F-15Es and Tornadoes do a good job on the large number of Su-24s parked in the open.

I also need to conduct ASW operations inside the Persian Gulf, to protect my exiting tankers, who will have to start moving soon. My two warships in the Gulf are not great ASW platforms, which means the search will have to fall to MPA. The Iranian Abu Musa island airfield has some flack defences which might interfere with a low-flying sub hunter, so I begin engaging those with Mavericks, intending to clear the island before beginning patrols. In the meantime, the two warships start slowly zig-zagging along the tankers’ expected path of travel. They won’t do much, but it might help a bit.

As dawn approaches, my replenishment group has reached the carrier, and UNREP operations will begin shortly, and the first of the incoming tankers has reached its form-up area. The two ASW groups have swept the majority of the Gulf of Oman, and are nearly at the Straits, and another Spruance is proceeding into the center of the Gulf from the mouth. I’ve had a few worrisome submerged contacts which show up briefly on long-range VLAD sonobuoys, and then never get found again, so another look couldn’t hurt.

**PLANS**

Since the tankers are nearing the Gulf of Oman I’d like to tell them to proceed, but that would tell the ones in the Persian Gulf to begin moving too. Since they’re much closer to the straits they’d get there reasonably quickly. If there’s a third (western) minefield, then they might hit it before I can clear it. So, we’ll have to hold, probably for half a day, until I can confirm the minefield situation. I expect to clear the eastern field by mid-morning, and the second (central?) field will probably be safe by dusk, or shortly afterwards, at which point I can give the “go”. That should leave me two days for transit, part of which I can use to clear a third field (if present) before the tankers reach it. (I wish I knew exactly what route the tankers would take, so I could proof specific lanes, but these civilian tankers could go anywhere.)

One thing that’s making me nervous is the possibility of some sort of pop-up SSM attack on the transiting tankers when they are near the straits. I can give them a decent CAP without too much difficulty, but I think I’d like a good area-defence AA ship in there too. Ideally that would mean a Tico, but I’m really reluctant to leave the carrier without my only one. A combination of my nuclear cruiser and the Belknap may make a reasonable substitute, so they will head for the straits to cover the tankers passing through.

Here's the next bit.

**DAY 3 through DAY 4**

The next couple of days proceed with little opposition from the enemy.

The minesweeping helicopters go on a series of recce runs where I think the third minefield might be, but they find nothing. By noon on Day 3 it becomes apparent that there are only two minefields. The first one has been completely swept, and the second one is well underway. Therefore, the command is given to declare the straits open, and the tankers begin getting underway.

My two warships in the Persian Gulf form up in the center of their tankers to provide SAM cover, and a P-3 is sent to work the area in front of them. One of my ASW groups (from the former TG Elliot) proceeds through the straits to meet them, while the other monitors the other side of the straits. The cruiser SAM group arrives to loiter in the center of the straits to provide SAM cover there, while the SSN lurks below, listening for any surprises sneaking in from the Bandar Abbas direction. F-16CGs from Al Dhafra fly CAP over the straits, while F-14s provide CAP for the tankers approaching from the Gulf of Oman. I’m not sure there’s much else I can do to secure the situation. The first fast tanker is just reaching the straits on Day 4, so the test will come soon.

Further out, the Austral Rainbow has reached Oman to offload its precious missiles, which will be sent to Al Dhafra. (Although I really needed the munitions up in Kuwait. Al Dhafra was relatively well off.) The Saratoga, still cruising in the mouth of the Gulf of Oman, has completed unrep. False sub contacts and biologicals continue to pop up here and there, but these are investigated and classified reasonably quickly.

Follow-up strikes have been launched on Shiraz, and Bushehr, targeting soft infrastructure (fuel tanks, hangars, etc.) and completely wrecking the nuclear facilities. Abu Musa was cleared of flack defences. A-6s also took the time to visit the two eastern-most airfields during the night and dump heavy bomb loads on the runways again, just to foil any attempts to repair them. (I’m sure there’s still some airplanes lurking in the hardened shelters, and I wouldn’t want a sudden pop-up surprise from a repaired runway.) I haven’t hit Omidiyeh yet, up by the tip of the Persian Gulf, but I haven’t seen any planes from there for a day now, and I’m not sure if it’s worth the stretch to attack it.

At this point it looks like it’s a matter of watching the tankers for another day, and hoping I haven’t missed any mines. (And hoping nobody’s sneaking in underwater to lay new ones.) We shall see how it goes.

THE REST... DAY 4 and 5

As the tankers proceed through the straits, it suddenly occurs to me that I need to take care of them after they come out of the straits too! The first westbound tanker is making a beeline for Kish Island, which is still occupied by flack defence troops. A hastily organized strike bombs the defences, and then recce runs are sent up and down the coast looking for any more enemy units. They find and destroy a cluster of radars (sitting quietly without emitting), but nothing else of note.

As the clock ticks down, the tankers continue to transit. As dusk falls on the last day, and I think all is well, I suddenly get the report of Bear radars again! Have I let down my guard too much? Is this attack for real? The spread-out tankers would be very vulnerable to attack, and most of them are beyond any CAP. F-15s race in to intercept from Kuwait, but fortunately the Bears (just 3 of them, sporting fresh patches over battle damage from the first day) are still in their holding pattern, and they get shot down before they can do anything.

The scenario ends a few hours later, with all tankers having successfully transited the straits.

This one has a nice live feel to it at the start, with numerous things happening along the length of the Gulf, a long area of operation to worry about, and interesting news reports coming in about other developments. It gives me interesting choices about where to spend my combat power. Try and defend the wide-spread tankers from a vague submarine threat, or concentrate on specific military units?