

Iraq's oil outlets badly crippled

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TEHRAN, JAN. 23—Iranian military plans were always offensive vis-a-vis Iraq. It was not surprising, therefore, that the Iranian air force's first raids on Iraq after the war broke out in late September focused on economically important targets.

The Iraqis, too, have concentrated their attacks on Iranian economic centres — a situation that seems to invite the acronym MAD (mutually assured destruction) that is being bandied about in regard to nuclear warfare today.

Iraq's vital oil exports were badly hit by the war. The Iraqi coastline extends for only 58 km. and the three

Iraqi ports, Basra in the Shatt-el-Arab and Umm Qasr and Al Faw that are almost adjacent, were all hit by Iranian air raids. Iraqi access to the Persian Gulf, therefore, has been nearly cut off.

In addition, Iraq has three pipelines that are supposed to transport its crude out of the country: One via Syria to Syrian ports, the Second via Syria to Lebanon, and the third to Turkey.

The Lebanon pipeline has not been used since 1977, and the Syrian pipeline is being used intermittently — the Syrians have been harassing the Iraqis by periodically shutting off the flow. Only

the Turkism pipeline is fully operational: It operates from the pumping station at Kirkuk.

However, all three Iraqi refineries, at Basra, Baiji and Mosul, have been working and there has been little or no damage because of the war. The result has been that Iraq's oil exports have been crippled, while internal demand has been more than sufficiently met. Hence, the absence of petrol rationing.

Iran's outlets, on the other hand, have been unaffected by the war. The Kharg island terminal — the largest exit point for Iranian crude — has

been untouched, while Bandar Abbas, further to the east, has also escaped attack. The reason is that the Iraqi ports are within seven minutes' flight from forward Iranian air bases while only Iraq's Tupolev bombers can reach Bandar Abbas — and only with short-range fighter escorts, which are impractical. Anti-aircraft defences on the Iranian side have been generally keeping Iraqi war planes at arm's length from Kharg island.

Of the six Iranian oil refineries at Abadan, Kermanshah, Tabriz, Esfahan, Shiraz and Tehran, the Abadan refinery, the largest in the

world, which was built by the British in 1911, has been totally destroyed by sustained Iraqi shelling. Abadan accounted for 60 per cent of Iran's total refining capacity and turned out 115 products (which did not include, strange enough, kerosene).

The Tabriz refinery, too, is believed to have been knocked out by the Iraqis. A similar fate has befallen Kermanshah. A mysterious fire in the Esfahan refinery in mid-December is reported to have caused considerable damage. But the Tehran and Shiraz refineries, as far as one could

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