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### Commando force poised to track and kill Saddam

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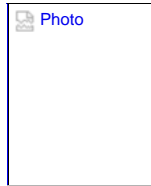
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Jack Kelley [USA TODAY](#)

KUWAIT CITY -- Armed with high-tech weapons, night-vision goggles and pictures of their targets, small teams of Delta Force commandos will soon descend on the outskirts of Baghdad to begin the most anticipated mission of the war: capturing or, if possible, killing Saddam Hussein ([news](#) - [web sites](#)).



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Teams of the Army's elite 360-man force have been assigned to hunt down Saddam, his sons Qusai and Uday, and at least a dozen of Iraq ([news](#) - [web sites](#))'s top military and political leaders, according to senior Pentagon ([news](#) - [web sites](#)) officials with direct knowledge of the mission.

The commandos, now based in Kuwait, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and northern Iraq, are prepared to storm Saddam's presidential palaces, attack his convoys and suffer casualties to bring Saddam's 24-year rule to an end, the officials say.

The Delta Force -- a commando group so secretive that the U.S. government regularly denies its existence -- and the CIA ([news](#) - [web sites](#)) have been training clandestinely for this mission for several years, U.S. intelligence officials add.

Officially, the U.S. objective in Iraq is not to kill Saddam but to force a change in the country's regime and to secure the banned weapons that Iraq is accused of developing.

In his speech to the nation Monday night, President Bush ([news](#) - [web sites](#)) left open the possibility that Saddam could go into exile. "Saddam Hussein and his sons must leave Iraq within 48 hours," he said.

But three separate sources confirm that the preferred outcome is to kill the Iraqi leader and his associates. "The expectation is to kill him within days" of the start of the war, a senior Pentagon official says. "It's what Delta has been training 24/7 to do."

To accomplish this, several steps would have to be taken.

An executive order signed in 1976 by then-president Gerald Ford prohibits assassinations of foreign leaders. U.S. intelligence officials say Bush could rescind the order if the Delta Force has a clear shot at the Iraqi leader, though it's not clear that would be necessary. Under international law, once a war begins, there are no restrictions on military operations against enemy leaders, particularly if forces are acting in self-defense.

Last year, Bush directed the CIA to undertake a covert mission to topple Saddam and, if the operatives believed their lives were in danger, to kill him.

Simply capturing Saddam would pose problems. If the Iraqi leader were detained and



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Iraq's leader.

#### U.S. lacks specific intelligence

But even finding Saddam is likely to be difficult. Few military officials believe the United States has the "actionable," or specific, intelligence to find Iraq's leader amid his underground bunkers and tunnels.

Saddam will not make it easy for the commandos to find or kill him, according to those who know him. He is believed to have three body doubles who are surgically enhanced to look more like him. Former Iraqi officials say he seldom sleeps in the same bed two nights in a row, and he is protected by nearly 30,000 security forces. In the 1991 Gulf War ([news](#) - [web sites](#)), U.S. warplanes bombed 260 "leadership targets," such as Saddam's underground bunkers, command centers and offices, in a failed effort to kill him, a Pentagon official says.

This time, U.S. officials hope Saddam will make a mistake: They're closely monitoring his use of satellite and cellular phones and looking for any signs he is fleeing Baghdad, which would allow Delta commandos to locate him.

"Tracking a tyrant as concerned about his personal security as Saddam is challenging, to say the least," says Pentagon adviser Mike Vickers, director of strategic studies at the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, an independent think tank in Washington. "One either has to have an intelligence break on his movement that is actionable or maintain continuous surveillance on him, which is very unlikely."

Already, Delta Force and CIA operatives, many of whom are foreign nationals, have been in Iraq for weeks conducting what military planners call "pre-H-hour" (hour of invasion) activities, U.S. intelligence officials say. Their activities have been widely reported in the American news media, so planners assume the Iraqis know of the plans, too.

#### Seeking Iraqi help

With the help of the Iraqi opposition both inside and outside the country, the operatives have been trying to buy off Iraqi military officers and civilians who have knowledge of Saddam's whereabouts or those of his chemical, biological and nuclear weapons.

The CIA conducted a similar effort in Afghanistan ([news](#) - [web sites](#)) with warlords, who provided vital information that helped a U.S.-led coalition topple the ruling Taliban regime in 2001. But even by dangling a \$25 million reward, the United States was unable to obtain timely and reliable intelligence on the whereabouts of al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden ([news](#) - [web sites](#)).

CIA operatives also have been photographing and monitoring Saddam's presidential palaces in and around major cities, including Baghdad and his hometown of Tikrit, for any signs of the Iraqi leader, intelligence officials say.

In addition, six U.S. spy satellites fly over Iraq daily to photograph Saddam's suspected hideouts. Two other satellites, along with an RC-135 Rivet Joint surveillance aircraft, have been trying to intercept telephone conversations of Iraqi leaders. The information is relayed by computer to Delta Force operatives in Iraq who can call in airstrikes on the suspected hideouts by Navy F-14 Tomcat fighters and Army AH-64 Apache helicopters.

It is believed that high-ranking Iraqis know of the satellite surveillance: They often stop talking when the satellites are overhead.

Some of the Pentagon's most specific information on Saddam's whereabouts has come from Jordan's intelligence agencies, Pentagon and Jordanian officials say. Jordanian special forces, along with British and Australian commandos, have been operating inside Iraq for weeks, Pentagon officials say. Although Jordan is publicly opposed to war in Iraq, King Abdullah has quietly allowed Jordanian special forces to train and work alongside their American counterparts, Jordanian officials say.

#### Killing scenarios

Shortly before the war begins, Delta Force commandos, many of them wearing camouflage, are expected to be dropped by Black Hawk helicopters to pre-selected sites on the outskirts of Baghdad, Pentagon officials say. Knowing the Iraqis will expect them, they plan to deploy at night.

Soon after they arrive, they plan to hack into and shut down Iraq's

placed on trial, the "most likely" scenario would be a military tribunal established by the United States and its allies, says Patricia Wald, who served as a judge on the United Nations ([news](#) - [web sites](#)) war crimes tribunal for the former Yugoslavia. But within the Bush administration, there is concern that such a trial could rally sympathetic Arabs around Saddam. A trial also could fuel continuing criticism of the administration's single-minded push to remove

communications and power facilities using laptop computers -- a standard tactic in recent military operations. Pentagon officials want to prevent Saddam from communicating with Iraqi military officers who might help him escape or who would be awaiting orders to use biological, chemical or nuclear weapons.

"Special forces have now been trained so that they can break into land lines and monitor what's going on inside those systems or feed in false information," says military analyst Anthony Cordesman of the Center for Strategic and International Studies, a think tank in Washington, D.C.

Delta commandos are then expected to call in pinpoint airstrikes on specific targets, including several of Saddam's suspected hideouts, Pentagon officials say.

The goal is to minimize civilian casualties, preserve the city's infrastructure and maintain goodwill with ordinary Iraqis. After the bombing, the commandos will begin a systematic search of the sites to determine whether Saddam -- or his three reported doubles, who also are to be killed -- have died in the attack. However, unless matching DNA from a relative is available, it could be a while before any remains are positively identified.

If Saddam tries to flee in a convoy, Pentagon officials say they plan to attack the vehicles with a laser-guided bomb or an unmanned Predator aircraft armed with a Hellfire missile. Officials say Delta also could swoop down by helicopter and attack the convoy.

If the Iraqi leader tries to hide in a private house in a residential neighborhood, as he did for several days during the 1991 war, Pentagon officials say Delta Force commandos might conduct house-to-house searches for him.

To limit casualties, Pentagon officials say they want to reduce hand-to-hand fighting by commandos. Instead, they plan to bomb Saddam's hideouts and "hopefully find his body in the rubble," says a senior Pentagon official with direct knowledge of Delta's plans.

The United States also hopes other Iraqis will help find Saddam. Appeals have been made to Iraq's military and political leaders to hand him over.

CIA and Defense Intelligence Agency assessments indicate that the leadership around Saddam is "brittle" -- not as loyal as it once was. Pentagon officials say thousands of pamphlets will be dropped over the capital at the beginning of the war urging Iraqis not to let Saddam escape. Officials hope Iraqi officials or citizens will kill Saddam themselves.

"A nice price on his head once the war begins will have a better chance than the one offered for Osama bin Laden," says Amatzia Baram of the University of Haifa, a leading Israeli expert on Saddam. "While Osama is surrounded by people who left the perks and pleasures of middle-class life to go to the mountains of Afghanistan, Saddam is surrounded by men who seek pleasures in this: power, women, prestige and money. They are more likely to sell him down the river."

Others aren't so sure that plan will work. They say most of Saddam's military and political officers are unfailingly loyal to him.

"His senior commanders have gotten to be senior commanders because they've never looked at him cross-eyed," says Andrew Krepinevich, a Pentagon adviser and executive director of the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, an independent think tank in Washington.

#### **Last stand in Baghdad**

Saddam is expected to make his stand in Baghdad, military analysts say. Satellite images show he has redeployed all 10,000 soldiers of the Adnan Republican Guard division, one of his best fighting forces, from the northern city of Mosul toward Baghdad. That suggests he is more interested in a showdown in his capital than in defending Iraq's borders.

"Saddam has been preparing for this final showdown for years," says Wafiq al-Sammarai, a former chief of Iraq's military intelligence who defected in 1994. "He'll have more tricks to foil the U.S. Special Forces than they can imagine."

Of urgent concern is Saddam's suspected arsenal of banned weapons. Pentagon officials fear he could use them in a pre-emptive strike on U.S. forces or whenever he believes he is surrounded. A separate Delta Force team has been charged, along with other special operations forces, with finding and securing biological, chemical and nuclear sites.

"In the event Saddam believes his end is near . . . he will not 'go quietly in the night,' " writes CIA official Regis Matlak in an unclassified profile of the Iraqi leader. "His dreams of glory are too great for a humiliating epitaph that headlines his imprisonment, or execution as a war criminal, or his body being ripped to shreds in Baghdad's streets. Short of assassination, he would more likely fall cloaked in a glory befitting a leader of historic proportion."

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