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Has War Begun?

U.S. Teams Already Attempting to Undermine Iraq's Military Strength

By [John McWethy](#)



Has the war against Iraq already begun? (REUTERS/Stephanie McGehee)

Feb. 17 — In many respects, the war with Iraq has already begun.

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U.S. warplanes are bombing Iraqi air defenses almost every day. Other aircraft are dropping millions of leaflets all over Iraq warning people things are about to change.

Small numbers of CIA and U.S. military operatives are secretly working inside Iraq.

American commando teams have been operating in Iraq's western desert, where the United States believes Saddam Hussein has hidden Scud missiles capable of hitting Israel or Jordan with nerve gas, sources told ABCNEWS.

These teams are dropped by helicopter in darkness. They stay for

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one to two days in order to hunt for missiles, scout for future bases and plant surveillance equipment.

Other teams, operating more openly, have set up small bases in Kurdish-controlled northern Iraq. They are working with tribal leaders, assessing their willingness and ability to fight.

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Psy-Ops Aimed at Commanders

The United States is also conducting a major psychological operation. The most secret part is aimed at Iraq's top military commanders.

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The United States is sending e-mails to the commanders' private accounts, calling them on private cell phones, urging them to consider overthrowing Saddam Hussein.

At a minimum, it's intended to rattle them.

"Let them know that we can reach out and touch them personally," said Michael Vickers, a former special forces officer. "We know who they are. Let them know that we are watching their behavior."

The leaflet drops are a much broader effort to reach the Iraqi people, warning them to stay away from Iraqi soldiers and providing frequencies for American radio broadcasts that are already beamed into Iraq from special aircraft.

The Bush administration is betting that it is working, as part of a war that is already under way. ■

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