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**Presenter: Lieutenant General David Petraeus, Commander,
Multinational Security Transition Command-Iraq**

**Friday, February 4, 2005 10:03 a.m.
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Special Defense Department Briefing on Iraq Security Forces

Via Satellite From Iraq

BRYAN WHITMAN (deputy assistant secretary of Defense for Public Affairs): General Petraeus, this is Bryan Whitman. Can you hear me?

GEN. PETRAEUS: I can, Bryan. Good morning to you.

MR. WHITMAN: Well, ladies and gentlemen, good morning, and thank you for joining us.

Today, as most of you know, I think, General Petraeus -- is the commanding general of the Multinational Security Transition Command-Iraq. There's been a considerable amount of interest in Iraqi security forces over the last couple of days, and there's nobody better to talk to this than the man that's actually out there training the Iraqi security forces. And so General Petraeus is going to give us an overview of his efforts and what they're doing to organize, train and equip and mentor the Iraqi security forces, with the goal of getting them to the capability to provide their own security needs in Iraq. He has a few words, opening comments that he'd like to make, and then we'll get into some questions. And we have just about 30 minutes to wrap it up.

So, General, with that, I'll turn it over to you.

GEN. PETRAEUS: Okay. Thanks, Bryan.

Good morning to you all, and greetings from Baghdad. As Bryan noted, I do understand there's been some interest back there in the effort to help Iraq with the training and equipping of its security forces. And so today I'll endeavor to lay out the status of that effort for you.

The bottom line, up front, is that considerable momentum has been achieved in the effort to help Iraq develop its security forces. We saw this most vividly on Sunday. Democracy was on the march in Iraq on January 30th, and that march was secured by Iraqi soldiers and police. Some 5,200 polling sites were secured with two rings of Iraqi security personnel, estimated to number 130,000. Certainly the backup by coalition forces was of enormous importance. However, it was Iraqi security forces who prevented terrorists from penetrating the security around any of the more than 5,000 polling sites, and it was Iraqi police and soldiers who gave their lives to prevent several suicide vest bombers from blowing up large numbers of those standing in line to vote.

As Secretary Rumsfeld noted to you all yesterday, there are currently 136,000 trained and equipped Iraqi security forces; that is, members of Ministry of Interior or Ministry of Defense security elements who have completed the training required for their component of service and have their individual equipment.

The training of various elements ranges in length and sophistication. Iraqi counterterrorist task force operators, for example, who are already serving soldiers, must complete a demanding 13-week course. Intervention force soldiers complete 13 weeks of basic and urban operations training, which follows four weeks of cadre training for their officers and noncommissioned officers. New regular army recruits receive eight weeks of basic training, while experienced former soldiers require a three-week refresher course. New Iraqi police go through an eight-week academy, while serving police, who graduated from the old Iraqi police academy, go through a three-week transition course.

Emergency response unit members recruited from trained police go through an eight-week training program, and so on. You get the idea.

Seventy-nine thousand of the 136,000 number are members of Ministry of Interior elements; that is, members of the regular police, special police commando battalions, public order battalions, police mechanized battalions, border guard units, dignitary protection elements, highway patrol or the National Emergency Response Unit. Fifty-seven thousand are members of Ministry of Defense elements; members of regular army battalions, intervention force battalions, National Guard battalions -- which are now part of the army -- special operations forces, the new air force squadrons, naval elements, or the marine regiment.

There are, I might add, another 16,000 Iraqi security force members who are currently in training and some 35,000 Iraqi police who are in uniform and performing security tasks, but who have not yet completed training. None of them are counted in the trained and equipped number, nor do any of these numbers include the roughly 75,000 facility protection security force members, who are trained by an element of the Ministry of Interior but are then transferred to the ministries whose sites they secure. As the secretary explained yesterday, those individuals were removed from the statistics last summer.

Another number on which we focus is the number of operational combat battalions, as fighting an insurgency puts a premium on units vice individuals. The progress in this area has been substantial. There are now 90 battalions, as of today, that have completed training. Eighty-eight are already conducting operations, and the two regular army battalions that graduated yesterday will commence operations in the next two weeks. Sixteen of the 90 battalions are part of Ministry of Interior elements. Seventy-four are part of Ministry of Defense elements. Not all have every vehicle or piece of unit equipment, few are at full strength, and some are still receiving replacements for combat casualties and losses suffered due to severe intimidation. However, there has been no shortage of volunteers, and the over 3,500 replacements who will complete training in the next week will help bring the average strength of the 90 battalions to well over 80 percent.

Of great importance to our effort have been the adviser and support teams that help train Iraqi regular army and intervention force battalions and their brigade and division headquarters, as well as various special operations, naval and air force units, and some special police units, and have then gone into combat with them. We have over 45 such teams in the field now. In addition, many of the multinational corps units have committed substantial resources to similar efforts with the Iraqi National Guard, regular police and border guards, the latter two elements of which are also helped by some 700 international police advisers and trainers in Iraq and several border support teams from the Department of Homeland Security.

As I believe you all know, the results of the adviser initiatives have led General Casey to increase the numbers engaged in such duties, and in the months ahead we'll see the addition of a good number of adviser teams that will work with Iraqi elements.

There are already adviser or training teams, as well, with the three main Iraqi command centers, the Iraqi Joint Headquarters, the two Iraqi military academies which graduated their first classes on 6 January, the Iraqi Basic Training Battalion and Noncommissioned Officer Academy, and the national and regional police academies, as well as with many of the brigade and division headquarters of the eight Iraqi army divisions being formed.

Another important part of our effort has been the construction or reconstruction of Iraqi army bases, police and military academies, border forts, ports of entry, training bases, police stations, logistical infrastructure, and even air and naval bases. This is a massive \$1.9 billion program, and it too has achieved substantial progress. Most significantly, Iraqi soldiers have for several months occupied and trained at four huge bases that hold multiple brigades and at dozens of other smaller institutions, all built or rebuilt in the past year.

The capacity of the police academies has expanded to the point that they soon will produce over 3,500 new police a month, and that includes the output of the academy in Jordan. In addition, many dozen police stations, border forts and security force compounds and headquarters have been refurbished over the past year as well, providing good operating bases with solid communications links for Iraqi military and police elements.

The equipping effort has also gained considerable momentum. Since July 1st alone, the Multinational Security Transition Command has issued to Iraqi security forces over 79,000 pistols, 60,000 assault rifles, 94,000 sets of body armor, 5,900 vehicles, 20,900 radios, 2,400 heavy machine guns, 54,000 kevlar helmets and 79 million rounds of ammunition. In addition, over 140 million rounds of ammunition have been received and pre-positioned at 12 different sites around Iraq for Iraqi forces. And again, all of this is in addition to what had already been provided to Iraqi forces prior to 1 July.

Finally, I should note that we have worked hard over the past seven months to modify various training programs, operational constructs and equipment authorizations in response to the situation on the ground. Police training, for example, now includes much more time spent on skills associated with operations in an insurgent environment. The police operational construct now emphasizes hardening of stations, better communications, and well-armed and responsive quick-reaction forces and SWAT teams. And the development of special police commandos and police mechanized and army armored units, as well as the hardening of some Iraqi vehicles, recognizes the need for higher-end capabilities than were originally planned.

More such efforts are part of the plan that will be executed this year.

Well, I hope that this has provided you some sense of the enormous scope, complexity and magnitude of the effort under way to help Iraq develop its security forces, and also some sense of the substantial progress achieved since the transition of sovereignty late last June.

This effort has obviously been carried out in the face of countless challenges, and despite barbaric actions by an enemy who recognizes the threat posed by the development of Iraqi forces. There have indeed been periodic setbacks, some particularly disappointing. We and Iraqi security force leaders have learned from those setbacks and made changes to the training, equipping and employment of Iraqi forces, and all involved have with determination and courage continued to push forward to achieve the considerable momentum that I have highlighted to you here today, and to make possible the historic elections that took place in Iraq this past Sunday.

Thank you.

And now I'd be happy to take your questions.

MR. WHITMAN: Well, thank you, General, for that very comprehensive overview. I'm sure we still do have a few questions here, though.

So, Will?

Q General, this is Will Dunham with Reuters. How many U.S. troops are going to be diverted from counterinsurgency and combat operations and assigned to training? And also, can you give me an idea of how far behind numerically you are in terms of the number trained and equipped who you had hoped to have on this date?

GEN. PETRAEUS: Let me answer the last one first. We are not very far behind at all, actually. And in fact, we can thank Iraqi initiatives for that. We're about on track with the police numbers. We fell a bit behind on the regular army side, although we just had three more battalions, as I mentioned, complete training. And there are three battalions left that will complete their training by mid- March, out of the original 27 that you used to hear about. But in the meantime, thanks to some great Iraqi initiatives with respect to the special police commandos, with some organizations that are not part of the regular army but originally were called the Muthanna Brigade and the Defenders of Baghdad, we actually ended up with more battalions for election day than we had hoped to have. So things turned out pretty well in that regard.

We were also helped considerably by some equipment donations from Estonia, Denmark and Romania that arrived in January on the NATO side, and that we were able to push out to the police and to some of the other forces in time for the elections.

In terms of diversion, I do not know the answer to that. There are already, as I mentioned, substantial numbers of advisers in a sense taken out of hide by units like the 1st Infantry Division and the 1st Cavalry Division. And in fact, it is those examples that General Casey and others were looking at when they saw the importance of doing this with the Iraqi National Guard. I might note that those units have performed quite well in the past couple of months despite some very, very serious challenges to them in the run up to the election.

The details are being worked out now for the request for forces. There are some additional advisers that are coming over for the Multinational Security Transition Command Iraq as well for special police elements and for some border elements. But as to the specific numbers, those will have to follow.

Q Follow-up, sir. My recollection is that by the time of the election, the goal was to have approximately 145,000 trained and equipped Iraqi security forces on the job. Are you now approximately 10,000 behind where you had hoped to be?

GEN. PETRAEUS: I would have to go back and look at what we call the "sand chart." I know that, again, on the -- with respect to battalions and particularly national battalions if we will -- if you will, we ended up again, as I said, actually a little bit ahead of where we thought we would be. With police, we were on glide path. There were some -- several thousand that actually came out of that projection just because of a transfer of customs people to the Ministry of Finance. So again, we were behind a bit in raw numbers, but again, not all that much.

MR. WHITMAN: Barbara?

Q General Petraeus, Barbara Starr from CNN. A couple of questions.

What we don't seem to hear very much about, aside from the numbers, the sheer numbers of trained and equipped, is of course capability. How many Iraqi security forces do you consider fully capable, capable of fighting the insurgency? And I ask this because yesterday the chairman said on the Hill that there were about

40,000 that can go anywhere and do anything. Is that the number that are actually capable of fighting the insurgency?

And what is the standard for capability? How do you measure that?

GEN. PETRAEUS: Well, Barbara, first of all, let me explain the 40,000 number. That came out of a conversation that I had with the chairman yesterday morning before he went over to the Hill, and we were discussing how many of these, again, if you will, national battalions are out there, and by that what we mean is battalions other than the Iraqi National Guard battalions, which tend to be, as you probably know, regional in orientation, have limited transportation, and more locally oriented than are the regular army Intervention Force or the special police units that have deployed all over the country in the last month or two.

And I would note that, for example, there are seven of these battalions deployed in Mosul; two police commando units and five Intervention Force Battalions. There are nine battalions deployed into the Fallujah and Ramadi area. There are roughly eight in Baghdad. And these are always in addition to the Iraqi National Guard units that are based there and, of course, to the local police.

So I don't want to diminish at all the contribution that Iraqi National Guard and these regional units have made. The truth is that of these 136,000, this is truly an organization that Congress would love because it has the highest tooth-to-tail ratio of any military and police in, I think, the history of combat. And in fact, this year what we have to do is help the Iraqis build a lot more of the tail, a lot more of the combat service support units and the combat support units, so that in fact they can more effectively project power around the country.

The 40,000 figure came out roughly of the number of, again, these national battalions, and then some other special capabilities out there like the Iraqi Counterterrorist Force, the Emergency Response Unit, the army commandos, and so forth.

You know, the best way I measure a capability, Barbara, is are they fighting or not. We are certainly working to develop a system, you know, along the lines of our readiness reporting system that will have Iraqi brigade commanders, most likely, evaluating the training readiness of their units, their personnel field, their equipping levels, and then a subjective rating. And that's going to take some time for us to put into place, and they'll be aided in that by the adviser elements that are with them.

But saying how many are capable, you have to say capable for what? The Iraqi security forces in all of the nine southern provinces and the three Kurdish provinces, that's 12 out of 18, actually have assumed the burdens of Iraqi security tasks in those areas. They are the ones out front. If you look at how much we had in terms of forces in Najaf back in August and September and look at it now, it's a greatly reduced number, and the reason is because, again, it's Iraqi police and National Guard forces that are shouldering the tasks there.

So again, to come back, this 40,000 figure came out of this discussion where we were talking about how many can be moved around the country, and in fact are being moved around the country. I should have mentioned, in Samarra, again what's really helping to secure the peace there, if you will, is three battalions that have deployed into that area, in addition to one local National Guard battalion formed in Salahuddin Province by the 1st Infantry Division, and then one battalion of coalition forces.

Q Well, very, very quickly, you said there was a request for forces; that some additional advisers will be coming over to Iraq. Your request for forces, how many people is that?

GEM PETRAEUS: And I also said, Barb, that I don't know, that the details on that are still being worked out. It's really a Multinational Force-Iraq issue, not a MNSTC-I issue, if you will.

Q The requirement for. What is the numerical requirement for U.S. military advisers, not what you've requested? What do you think you need?

GEN. PETRAEUS: Again, Barb, this is not my requirement. This is for all of the forces that all of Multinational Corps and the Multinational Security Transition Command work with. And again, I don't know what that number is. That is still being refined.

MR. WHITMAN: John?

Q General, John Lumpkin with the Associated Press. I wanted to ask, do you have an ethnic and religious breakdown of the various security forces? And to what degree are these forces integrated, integrated between Sunni, Shi'a, Kurds and the other ethnic and religious groups? Any concern that sort of unintegrated units will be more loyal to their particular group than they would to a central government? And how do you deal with those kind of issues?

GEN. PETRAEUS: John, first of all, I don't have a breakdown like that. We don't keep one. There is, if you will, a policy and an intent that the Iraqis want their national forces to reflect the national population in terms of its ethnic breakdown as much as they can. And the national forces, again, these are the regular army intervention force and the others that go all over. Regional forces, both local police and, again, the Iraqi National Guard most prominent in that category tend to reflect the ethnic makeup of their community.

We have no reason to question the loyalty of the forces that are out there wearing the Iraqi flag on their right shoulder, frankly. There are elements all over that are responding to the orders of those over them, and they've done that quite effectively.

MR. WHITMAN: Go ahead, Lisa.

Q General, Lisa Meyer from AP Radio. Two questions for you. One briefer after another in the past has said that one of the hardest nuts to crack has been cultivating good leadership within the Iraqi forces. Number one, is that coming along, and can you describe that a little bit? And also, is it possible to give an estimate of what the desertion rate is at this point?

GEN. PETRAEUS: Lisa, leadership is critically important. In fact, among the lessons that we've learned over the last six or seven months is just how important leadership is in Iraqi units.

The truth is, you know, when I was commanding the 101st Airborne Division, if they'd sent me off somewhere, three weeks later the soldiers might know I'd gone, and they certainly wouldn't have changed anything that they were doing. They would just continue to drive on.

In an Iraqi unit, the leader is really of paramount importance. He really sets the tone for an organization. His level of inspiration is reflected in the soldiers' performance. And so, again, there really is a premium on finding and then investing in and strengthening good leaders.

There have been some very, very fine leaders who have emerged. I would offer the division commander of the Intervention Force Division, who was asked the other day to give a list of certain officers who were going to get a bonus for their fine performance during the elections, and he said he wouldn't provide the list unless every one of the soldiers received a bonus, and otherwise, as I said, he wasn't sending any names back.

The leadership in the special police commandos has been just tremendously aggressive. There's one of

these individuals that I call personally every night before I go to bed, just to get energy from him, and to cross-level our bubbles, if you will, share information and so forth, because he's just so much into the operations and really, again, very much getting after it.

So this is very, very important. It also touches on something else that we're trying to do, which is to help the Iraqis rebuild their institutions. I mentioned the reestablishment of the Iraqi military academy, which graduated some 92 cadets on 6 January. They've now begun the first one-year course, the full year -- it's the Sandhurst model -- while they also continue at the other academy the three-month course for those who are already at a certain advanced stage in the old academy.

The NATO training mission, which I also command, will help the Iraqis reestablish their staff college, which has enormous importance in Iraq. You even get to wear a little red stripe on your rank, and your rank is then called staff colonel or staff general ever after that. And we'll start training the trainers, the instructors in mid-April for that. We already have a building for it. And the Iraqis are very excited about that. The course will start in September. And in fact there's a NATO nation that is volunteering to take lead nation status in that.

Same with the war college also, beginning the work towards that, the curriculum, and also for branch schools and for combined arms schools and so on. And various nations are offering to take -- to help in this regard. Hungary, I might add, offered also over 70 T-72 tanks, and also other assistance, so that's very heartening. And it's very, very important that we continue that effort even as we continue, obviously, putting the pressure on the insurgents and not letting that up at all.

And I need you to repeat the second part of that question, please, Lisa.

MR. WHITMAN: It was the desertion rate.

Q The desertion rate. And also, General, can you tell me with regard to the leadership development, are you close to where you want to be?

GEN. PETRAEUS: We have a lot of work in terms of reestablishing all these leadership development courses. There is specialty training that goes on on the police side, I should add as well. There are typically eight to 12 special courses: mid-level management, major case management, forensics, anti-kidnapping, counterterrorism -- a whole host of these types of specialty skill courses going on. But there's a lot of work to be done in this area. I cannot give you a number on the desertion rate. As I mentioned in the opening remarks, once the 3,500 replacements complete their training over the next week, we'll have the average of all those 90 battalions back up over 80 percent. There clearly was a huge challenge, particularly in the Sunni areas and in the area of Ninevah Province, to a couple of regular army battalions. There was a story in the paper, in fact, the other day about one of those battalions that's suffered enormously. This is an area where the insurgents were actually cutting the heads off soldiers as they were trying to come back from leave, and so forth. A major challenge, retention in those units, was a real challenge during that time, but we've turned the corner with that and, as I mentioned, a substantial number of soldiers headed in the direction of those units.

MR. WHITMAN: Over here, Mick.

Q General, Jim Miklaszewski with NBC. Just a quick follow-up on Lisa -- Lisa's question, before I ask my question. Are you still prevented from recruiting or hiring former higher-level Iraqi military leaders? And if so, where are you getting these new leaders for the Iraqi military if you have to start basically at scratch?

GEN. PETRAEUS: Mick, there's not a prohibition on getting former higher-level military leaders. There is, obviously, considerable concern about getting leaders who were high-level Ba'ath Party members. And I think that's the distinction to be made there.

In fact, many of the serving generals were serving brigadiers, or what have you. Not every single member of Saddam's military was a Ba'ath Party member, or at least was a high-level (Urdu ?) Firqa or above. And the Iraqis certainly have flexibility and recognize the need to bring back people from the former military. There are even some former junior members of the Republican Guards that they brought back -- they brought back, not us -- to help form the mechanized battalion which rolled into Baghdad during the elections and did a superb job. Again, those were professional soldiers; they weren't Ba'ath Party members. And so there has been that flexibility, but those are Iraqi calls these days. The transition of sovereignty is long since complete. They do the vetting against criminal records and Ba'ath Party records, but at the end of the day it's their call and they make it.

Q And the \$20 million question is when -- or at what point, because we understand there's no set timetable -- but at what point will these Iraqi security forces be in a position to provide adequate security for the country and significant numbers of American troops can start to come home? What measurement will there be to arrive at that point?

GEN. PETRAEUS: Well, first of all, Jim, what I'd say is that there are places already where Iraqi security forces have allowed coalition forces to draw down. As I mentioned earlier, I think, in Najaf, if you look back to what we had in Najaf during the summer and the early fall, it has drawn down very, very substantially. The same thing in Kut. The same in Hillah, Karbala, Samawa. So there are places throughout the country where, in fact, again, Iraqi security forces are shouldering more of the tasks already and where, at the very least, coalition forces have been able to take a bit of a backseat, at the very least, and in some cases already to reduce their numbers, right now tending to redeploy them elsewhere.

I think the secretary mentioned yesterday in his comments to you all there's a number of factors that will influence the answer to the \$20 million question, and they include, you know, the political environment in which all this plays out. There are economic aspects to it, social aspects to it, and obviously the enemy gets a vote at the end of the day as well. And it's the interplay of those factors as well as the continued development of Iraqi security forces that will determine when we reach that \$20 million point and can begin to draw down U.S. forces in particular because Iraqi security forces are shouldering that burden.

MR. WHITMAN: Well, General, we've come to the end of our time. This has been very informative, and we really do appreciate you taking the time this morning on somewhat short notice to be with us. And we hope that in the coming weeks that you'll be able to make some time so we can do this on a periodic basis. Thank you very much.

GEN. PETRAEUS: Thanks, Brian. Good morning to you all.

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