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**Presenter:** Army Maj. Gen. David Barno

Friday, March 14, 2003

### Briefing on Free Iraqi Forces

(Briefing on Free Iraqi Forces)

Staff: Good morning. Thank you for joining us today. Today we have joining us on the phone from Tazar, Hungary -- is Major General David Barno, who is the commander of Task Force Warrior. General Barno is leading the efforts to train the Iraqi opposition volunteers to assist U.S. and coalition forces in civil-military operations, should military action in Iraq be deemed necessary.

The Department of Defense has established this training task force to train the Iraqi opposition volunteers, also known as Free Iraqi Forces, in basic military skills, such as self-defense, and specialized civil-military operations to include coordinating humanitarian relief for Iraqi citizens who may need assistance during or after a potential conflict in Iraq. The training task force has been established under the provisions of the Iraqi Liberation Act of 1998. This act authorizes the U.S. Defense Department to provide the Iraqi Democratic Opposition defense articles from stocks of the Department of Defense, as well as defense services and military education and training.

So with that, I'm going to see if -- (to Major General Barno) -- General Barno, can you come up on the line?

Barno: Well, good morning. How do you hear me there?



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Updated: 14 Mar 2003

Staff: We hear you just fine here. Sir --

Barno: Well, great. It's a pleasure to speak with you all today from Taszar, Hungary. And I'd like to begin by a short opening statement. I appreciate your interest in this program to train Iraqi opposition volunteers with the skills that are necessary to assist coalition forces in civil-military operations. And I look forward to your questions.

First, I'd like to share with you some thoughts about our U.S. Army training task force here and the purpose of the overall Free Iraqi Forces training program.

First of all, our training task force is comprised of soldiers from 31 different U.S. Army units from across the United States. These soldiers are among the best trainers in the U.S. Army and in the world. We deployed the task force here in early January from three different Army installations in the U.S. and began training our first cohort of volunteers just three weeks after our arrival.

To prepare for this mission, key parts of the force trained together for two months at Fort Jackson, South Carolina, prior to our arrival here in Taszar. Our soldiers have demonstrated tremendous flexibility and versatility in this unique mission. They have truly done an exceptional job preparing for and training the Free Iraqi Forces.

The training program designed for the Iraqi opposition volunteers is given in two phases over a four-week total training period. The first phase concentrates on basic skills, such as self-defense, the Law of Armed Conflict, to include the Geneva Conventions, as well as map-reading, military customs and courtesies, drill and ceremony, and ethical decision-making. As part of their self-defense training, the volunteers learn such protective measures as basic first aid, land mine identification, training in the use of small arms for self-defense, and the use of protective equipment in the event of a nuclear, biological or chemical attack.

In phase two of the training program, our volunteers learn a variety of skills in the conduct of civil-military operations. Working side by side with U.S. and coalition civil affairs units, the volunteers will play a key humanitarian role in the event of a possible conflict in Iraq. Within this block of instruction, the volunteers learn how to work with displaced citizens, international and nongovernmental organizations and relief agencies during a potential conflict in Iraq and post-conflict Iraq rehabilitation efforts.

The Iraqi opposition volunteers also learn how to facilitate communication and coordination between coalition forces and humanitarian relief agencies, such as

the International Red Cross and Red Crescent, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and United States Agency for International Development (AID). Once the volunteers have completed their month-long training program, they are flown from Tazar Air Base to Southwest Asia in U.S. Central Command's area of responsibility.

I also wanted to share with you some background on the Iraqi opposition volunteers who have come to Tazar to participate in the training program. The Iraqi opposition volunteers participating here come from all walks of life, possess varying levels of education, and represent diverse social and economic backgrounds. But the common thread with all of them is their personal commitment to transforming Iraq into a democratic country that follows the rule of law and respects human rights. Many of our Iraqi opposition volunteers have endured hardships in Iraq and continue to have relatives there, but have rebuilt their lives abroad.

I've been inspired to talk with these remarkable people and listen to the degree of sacrifice they are making in joining this program. Each has now given up what they have built outside Iraq, in a new life, to volunteer for this program, to potentially assist our coalition forces in building a free and democratic Iraq.

We're proud to tell you that our first group of Iraqi opposition volunteers completed their training program and departed about two weeks ago to join civil affairs units already staged in the CENTCOM area of responsibility. I'm convinced they'll put into action everything they learned here in basic military skills and civil military operations with great determination and purpose. In the event of a conflict in Iraq, they will be ready to do their job, helping to ensure that Iraqi citizens who need help get help.

Again, it's a pleasure to speak with you here today, and I'd be happy to take your questions.

Staff: When you ask your questions, please use the microphone there, and if you could, identify yourself and your news organization.

Q: General, this is Matt Kelley from the Associated Press. Could you give us some more detail on precisely what the role of these Iraqis would be in the event of a conflict and give us a little more detail on what their training is like, what -- precisely small arms training they get and precisely what they're trained to do in terms of a liaison with the NGOs and working with the local populations?

Barno: Well, their role is to work very closely with U.S. and coalition civil-

military affairs organizations, some of which, of course, are already in the CENTCOM theater. They, because of their unique language skills, their regional expertise in certain areas of Iraq, and because of the training they received here, will be very valuable resources to work with those units to provide them both language knowledge, some regional expertise, and an ability to function and understand the mission and purpose of those coalition civil affairs units as they work to potentially restore government services, assist in relief supply distribution and things of that nature.

And the scope of their training program, they are trained in limited self-defense in the first two weeks of the program. That's oriented on nuclear, biological, chemical defense measures; wearing a protective mask, being able to operate in a protective suit. They also receive small arms training in the 9mm pistol here at the specially constructed range we've put together here at Taszar.

And the second part of their training program is when we focus on their civil military affairs tasks, and they learn such things as what a civil military operation center does, how that operates on a daily basis, how various international organizations would plug into that and work with civil affairs units to help deliver relief supplies and work with displaced personnel.

So it's a pretty broad program that gives them a good deal of skill. They're not experts and they're not steeped in this, but they're very well attuned to the requirements and they should be of great value, I believe, to U.S. forces.

Q: General, Tom Bowman with the Baltimore Sun. How many of these Iraqi opposition folks have already gone to CENTCOM AOR, and how many more are you training now? And when do you hope to wrap up all the training? And one other thing, too. Will they wear U.S. uniforms and carry sidearms as well?

Barno: I'll address the second part first. They have distinctive uniforms that are appropriately marked to distinguish them as Free Iraqi Forces, and they do have the ability to carry sidearms in self-defense.

On the first part of the question, from an operational security standpoint, I prefer not to discuss the numbers that are being delivered, but I will tell you that the program is ongoing. We're training a second cohort at this time, and we're making final arrangements right now to bring in a third cohort in the next several weeks. So I'm very satisfied with the recruiting effort that's going on out there. We have significant numbers in the pipeline, it appears, coming our way. And we're prepared to stay and train every individual that's sent to us to a high standard.

Q: Can you give us a ballpark on the number? Are we talking hundreds? Anything along those lines.

Barno: I think the possibility of the program is certainly that or greater. We have worked an agreement here, the U.S. government and Hungarian government, to train up to 3,000 over the calendar year that we're in right now, ending on 31 December. And I've got a Training Task Force sized to do that, so I'm prepared to train anyone up to that number, and there's certainly hundreds available that I'm seeing that are potentially in the pipeline for the program.

Q: General, this is Jim Mannion from Agence France-Presse. I was wondering if you could say whether -- what sort of military discipline these Iraqi -- Free Iraqi people are, and whether they have their own military structure, whether they have their own officers, that sort of thing.

Barno: Well, I think it's important to understand that these volunteers are coming to us from civilian life. In our first cohort, the majority was coming from North America. They were giving up lives and businesses and homes and families to come here. Their ages ranged from 18 to 55 years old in our first cohort. Average age was about 38 years old, so a pretty mature group. And they were not, you know, militarily trained, certainly, coming into this position. Some had military experience from their previous lives in the Middle East, but they all came to us as civilians and we were able to work closely with them to build them into a very cohesive team.

They were so involved with this program and I'm so impressed with them. We had a graduation ceremony here about two weeks ago, and many of them had tears streaming down their face at graduation. They're a very committed group. But they did not have any significant military training, certainly didn't come to us as a unit. They came to us as a collection of individuals that our great trainers and drill sergeants helped forge into a very cohesive unit.

Q: General, this is Thelma La Brecht with Associated Press Broadcast. May I just to back to the numbers issue? This is rather important since it could be a timing question, too, if something happens soon. Exactly how many do you have now? There's a report of only about 50. How many would actually be ready to go right now to start in any reconstruction effort, say, assuming there's a quick war?

Barno: Well, we do have our first cohort that's graduated and already deployed and are linked up with their units in Central Command. And without giving you the exact numbers, they form a very good basis. And they're covering all the major theater units as they arrived into the theater. That fell in on the plan that we

had developed. Our second cohort is in training now. We expect that they will graduate towards the end of this month. And I anticipate getting a third cohort in the next probably one to two weeks.

But I would tell you that it's important for you to understand that this training program continues regardless of the possibility of hostilities, so there's no anticipated intent to deliver all of these individuals, all of our graduates before any decision gets made on whether a conflict would ensue here in Southwest Asia. So our program will continue to move forward. The primary focus of the training, of course, is to assist in the post-conflict arena should that be required. So their value endures beyond any decision that may be made in the next weeks or months.

Q: Right. May I just follow up on that, though. Obviously, U.S. military officials are hoping that if there were some sort of conflict and if it should happen that they could perhaps do it in days, if not weeks, my only question is, are there enough people now trained that they would be able to provide enough help now in any reconstruction effort?

Barno: Well, they'll certainly form the nucleus or the beginnings of that process. I'm sure that the commanders who will be involved with this in the theater would welcome as many people as they could possibly get that are trained to a reasonable standard to be part of it, but I don't think they want us to send individuals to them that are untrained. That's obviously the purpose of our program.

So I'm very comfortable that the good-sized group that we sent down several weeks ago will form an excellent nucleus to work across the theater should that be required, and we'll build on that with these ensuing groups as they graduate.

Q: General, this Alex Belida from Voice of America. Clarify something, if you will, please. The training that they are receiving, will that enable them to be deployed with front-line combat units, to act as interpreters and/or guides? And specifically, have they been given training, perhaps, in how to assist in negotiating the surrenders of Iraqi soldiers?

Barno: To answer the second part first, they've not received any training that would direct them to have a capability in that arena. They do have the language skills, obviously, that would assist them in acting as interpreters. The commanders in theater will have the ultimate say-so on the employment of the volunteers that are sent to them, so they have the ability to use them in many different facets. But the fundamental purpose of the training program is not to

train them to accompany front-line units as much as it is to work in a relief supply, working with civil-military organizations that are beginning to flow into the theater. So it's really a little bit different from, perhaps, what I saw some of the initial reports some months ago on the program. I think it's more accurate to describe their role as being primarily in a humanitarian sense in assisting in working with our U.S. and coalition civil-military affairs organizations once combat has passed through an area.

Q: General, this is Jim Garamone from American Forces Press Service. What changes did you make in training these people from the lessons that you learned in the first cohort?

Barno: That's a very interesting question. We -- as you can imagine, I brought a group of trainers who are used to training U.S. 18- and 19-year olds in basic combat training, for the most part in Fort Jackson, South Carolina, over here to train a very different group and a very different purpose. Some of the same basic fundamentals apply, but there are some significant differences.

We did find out a couple interesting things. Some of them are cultural, some of them are age-related. With an average age of 38, the stamina and fitness of the group is a bit different than 18- and 19-year olds. But when "lights out" comes at 10:00 at night, we have no problem putting anybody to bed here. They're ready to go to sleep and not wake up when we wake them up in the morning.

From a cultural standpoint, we found some interesting things in terms of the use of peer pressure and rewards. We found that providing various visible steps with symbolic importance to them as they progress through the training program as a group was very important; we've reinforced that with our second group. We also found that there is some sensitivity to receiving any kind of individual, I guess, recognition, and it's more appropriate to give them group recognition.

So those are some somewhat minor things, but by and large, I would say that the principles that we're applying with the groups here are very much in line with what the U.S. Army does every day in training American soldiers. And it's been very successful. We've adapted; we do after-action reviews or critiques, if you will, essentially on a daily basis and make the minor adjustments based upon those. But most of the issues, I think, have been cultural.

Q: This is Will Dunn (ph) with Reuters. Can you tell me, in what countries were they living before they volunteered for this? And how many different countries? And can you tell me also how much are they getting paid?

Barno: I'm not sure I can give you a country laydown.. I will say that the first group was primarily recruited from North America. And the second group was primarily recruited from Western Europe. So that's kind of the big picture, and that's out of a number of different countries in each case.

In terms of payment for the volunteers, they're receiving a very limited stipend to cover essentially their expenses. And they're also -- they receive certain additional pays based upon skills that they can bring to the equation, such as language skills, educational levels; they receive a certain allowance if they have dependents or family members. But their overall salary, collectively, is -- which is really a stipend to defer expenses -- is much less than a brand new U.S. soldier would receive, just to give you a frame of reference.

Q: General, Tom Bowman again, Baltimore Sun. Do you have an ethnic breakdown for this group? Are you seeing more Sunnis, for example, than Shi'a? And also, are there any Kurds involved?

And one other thing, too. Will they also -- these folks, once they get with U.S. units, will they help search for chemical and biological weapons, as well?

Barno: On the ethnic breakdown, we have a diverse group. Both our first and second cohort was -- consisted of Sunnis and Shi'as, individuals who had ties back to various parts of the country. We do have Kurds in each of the different groups. One of the very important aspects of this program is that they all train together. There is no breakout by certain ethnic category. You know, they form as teams representing all part of Iraq in the training program. We think that's important. We demonstrated that very successfully with the first group. They came together very cohesively, despite all their varied backgrounds from different parts of Iraq, different ethnic and religious sect categories, and that was a great success.

On the second part of your question, again, our training program is designed to have them work with civil/military organizations in provision of relief supplies, coordination with international organizations, assisting displaced persons. That's the only focus we have for them.

Q: General, Jim Mannion from AFP again. Is there any concern that these people may be infiltrated by Iraqi agents?

Barno: We have an extremely robust screening process that each of these individuals has to go through and complete successfully before they every arrive on my doorstep here. And that is lengthy; it is involved; and it is a program I'm



very satisfied with to the extent that I feel very, very confident that the individuals that complete that and arrive here to be trained are absolutely trustworthy. And I'm very comfortable with that program overall. I think it's working very well for us.

Q: Hello, General. Chris Wright from Fox News Channel. This might be beyond your sphere, but are there any other free Iraqis who would accompany would-be liberators of Iraq, front-line combat units, to your knowledge?

Barno: I don't have any knowledge on that. It's possible, but I personally don't have the knowledge.

Moderator: Sir, we're moving the mike around the room. Just a second.

Barno: OK.

Q: Sir, this is Jim Garamone again. When they go through the civil/military training, are there trainers from the NGO's or the U.N. assisting, or are the American trainers getting tips from those people?

Barno: Well, we have very highly specialized and experienced civil/military operations trainers here that are part of actually U.S. Special Operations Command. These are the folks who actually do it for a living. The majority of my CMO trainers have got experience, having done this in the real world out there over the last 10 years in various places. So they're very, very well qualified to perform this mission. They've actually done it in many cases in a real operation, and they are superb, just the right people to be doing this. So I've got a great deal confidence in that being a very effective and applicable program for what our volunteers may see down the road.

Q: General, this is Lauren Marco (ph) from The State newspaper out of Columbia, South Carolina. How much help do you have with you from Fort Jackson? And what do you have to say to the folks back there?

Barno: Well, the core of our program, the centerpiece is the trainers that we brought from Fort Jackson, South Carolina, centered around 1st Battalion, 61st Infantry, which in its normal life is a basic combat training battalion that trains thousands of U.S. 18- and 19-year-olds every year at Fort Jackson. And they're really the centerpiece of the program, and we built much of the program around that core organization. Lt. Col. Steve Yackley, the battalion commander; Command Sergeant Major George Duncan, the sergeant major of the outfit, great, great Americans doing a phenomenal job for us, have had a huge impact. And

that particular group, in fact, is overall in charge of the entire training program and has all the other trainers working for them. So they're doing wonderful work.

For the great folks of Columbia, South Carolina, we're getting terrific support from the community down there, and you'd be very proud of your soldiers from Fort Jackson. They're doing something that's never been done before, that I'm aware of, in the United States Army, which is a basic training unit and the trainers from the training side of the Army who have deployed overseas on very short notice and conducted a very effective training program for exiles from -- that are going to a foreign country. Very great success and great regard for our soldiers from Fort Jackson.

Q: General, Tom Bowman again, Baltimore Sun. Could you give us the range in ages of these folks? And also, give us a sense of what they did in civilian life, what kind of jobs.

Barno: Yeah, the range on both cohorts is in the 18 to 55-year-old range, and the average age of each was about 36 to 38 years old. So again, we've got some folks here that are a little bit older than I am, in some cases; we've got a number that are over 50. And we have some younger folks as well. So it's a pretty diverse group. The good news there is they're very mature, they're very focused, they understand exactly what they signed up for, and they're incredibly committed to this effort. So that, I think, is great.

Could you repeat the second part of your question again?

Q: What kind of jobs did they do in civilian life? Can you give us a range of the jobs they had?

Barno: I don't have a lot of knowledge on that. There's a variety. Some are business owners, some are in the education side of the house. From an educational background, I can tell you that we have folks with Masters degrees. In this current program, I have one with a Ph.D. Lots of college graduates. So it's, again, a diverse group, pretty well educated, though, and people that have made a very deliberate decision at this point in time in their lives to join this program because of how important a free and democratic Iraq is to them personally and to their families.

Q: General, Nick Childs, BBC. Can you say if you've actually had any dropouts from the program, people who haven't been able to complete the training for any particular reason, and if so, what the reasons for them departing were?

Barno: A very small number -- in fact, three, the total dropouts we've had so far, which is, from my judgment and my experience in my normal job training U.S. soldiers, a very, very small number. And those have been for personal and medical reasons in each case. So we've been very, very -- absolutely delighted with the tremendous commitment that we've seen on the behalf of all the folks that have gone through this training to complete it and to move on into the theater.

Staff: Well, General Barno, it looks like we've run out of questions here. We appreciate you taking the time. We know that you're very busy and that it's getting late there for you. And we appreciate you taking the time to be with us today.

Barno: I'd just add one thing, if I could, which is we're extremely grateful to the nation of Hungary for their support on this operation. They stepped forward, when asked, to provide this phenomenal training facility for us. Our troops are being extremely well taken care of. We've got a great relationship with the Hungarian military. And this is almost an ideal training location, from my standpoint here, largely through the great support provided by the Hungarian government and their military. So we owe them a salute of thanks. And I want to make sure that everybody heard that from me, because this has gone extraordinarily well, and they're a large reason behind that.

Staff: Thank you very much, sir.

Barno: Thank you

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