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ASD PA Clarke Meeting with Bureau Chiefs**Presenters: Victoria Clarke, ASD (Public Affairs)
February 27, 2003**

(Bureau chiefs meeting. Also participating were Bryan Whitman, deputy assistance secretary of defense for public affairs (media operations), Rear Adm. Steve Pietropoli, Navy chief of information, Capt. T. McCreary, Joint Chiefs Of Staff Public Affairs, and Col. Jay DeFrank, director, Press Operations.)

Clarke: I actually have nothing to say at the start other than, as usual, thanks to everybody. Tim Blair here and Bryan Whitman are doing all the heavy lifting as are all of you, but I've talked to several of you as individuals, some in small groups. Again, we're going to have lots of problems and lots of challenges, but people's willingness to devote so much time to this effort has really helped.

So I'll just start by saying thank you and then turn it over to Bryan. And this is really nice, that we're the only ones with water and coffee. [Laughter] So Bryan Whitman.

Whitman: First of all, thank you for coming here. It's never easy to get to the Pentagon, I know that. And especially in the middle of the day. You're busy people.

I just want to piggyback on what Torie said, though. A lot of that heavy lifting's been done by you guys out there. I really appreciate the time, energy, and really the investments that you've made in particularly the embedding process here and the resources that you've committed to this because I see all of your names coming in and I know the number of embeds I've given every organization, and you guys have really stepped up to the plate. I know that it's not easy even in your world of what sometimes seems to us as unlimited resources. I know that you have a finite ability out there and --

Clarke: What's the thing about telescopes? Has anybody ever heard this, how people at the State Department have said if you think about how we view the rest of the world and how the rest of the world views us. We look through a telescope and off in the distance we see what looks like a lot of different things [inaudible] and they look through the other end of the telescope and it looks huge and enormous. So perspective's everything.

Whitman: It is.

I think we are well on the way. I think that there are some things that I want to address only because they're common questions that have come up. I think most of them have been resolved but there was some early information that confused some people, too. I think I just want to go through a couple of those and then get it opened up for questions as quickly as we can.

Having commended you for allocating so many resources to this I have to tell you that we're not at the end of the embed process. There will be additional embed opportunities that become available as more forces deploy to the theater, so just something to keep in mind as you look at these things. Some of you I know have had to turn back some embed opportunities, and that's okay. We certainly have other news organizations that are looking for more. But I guess as you accept more, do it with the understanding that as more forces get deployed, additional opportunities will be coming up too.

Having said that, there's been a lot of questions about some of the air embeds. And as you've gone out and contacted your points of contact, you've learned at least in a couple of cases where you can't get to that part of the region just yet, I have to tell you that working these issues every day, this week I am encouraged by some of the progress that we've made with respect to the air embeds. We've had troubles in some other areas but we're working through those even today. But it's not time to panic and it's not time to be worrying about, "Okay, I want to drop this embed and use this person somewhere else." Certainly you can do that if you want to, but I would encourage you to hang on to what you've been given in those particular air embed opportunities because if they come to fruition, and most of them will I think, will be good opportunities.

Not every embed, of course, will happen. As you know, we discussed this last time. Undoubtedly there will be a country that does not allow foreign journalists, which we all will be to them, of course, into their country and you just have to be prepared for that because we didn't take anybody off the table when we started down this road, and it's kind of a good thing we didn't because, like I said, a lot of these things have opened up which initially, if we had just written off countries for not putting embeds in there, we would have started with a much shorter list and I think we're doing quite well.

We are losing some flexibility, though, with being able to change names, swap out people, and we've been trying to work with you one on one with those, and hopefully we've accommodated you to the greatest extent that we can. But as we go down the process of getting inoculations now, as units start to deploy that haven't deployed, as journalists start linking up with their units, our ability and our flexibility to do the individual swap-outs is kind of rapidly coming to an end.

I know there will be unforeseen things that occur with your own personnel, but it's going to become more difficult for us to be able to do those swaps and switches now.

I have today for you as you leave another updated point of contact reference sheet that I'd like to provide to you. On it what you'll have is you'll start to see some additional numbers, telephone numbers and e-mails for units that have not yet deployed but already know, for example, what their satellite phone will be in theater. We want you to have that information. It might not be activated yet, for example the 101st, if you try that sat phone today it's not going to work. But once forces start to flow into the theater then you'll have another way of staying in touch with them and staying in contact with them. So there's a new sheet that, in fact, if you want to Tim you can pass those out for folks if you like.

There was some confusion early on about letters and the fact that your journalists would need a letter from us authorizing you or stating that you were an embed. That myth has actually persisted for a little longer than we would have liked it to. But no letters are required. Each of your gaining units has a list of who the reporters are that they are expecting to contact them and to show up at their unit. So if you still think there's a requirement for a letter from us, it's not true. And we're sorry for the confusion that some units had out there.

Clarke: Are there any questions on that?

Q: Chuck Lewis from Hearst.

Could you go back to the first point you made about air embeds and summarize for us the countries that are not allowing embeds to come aboard?

Clarke: Let's not. We're working on them. We had a conversation with one country --

Q: Why not?

Clarke: Because of sensitivities. Because of our longstanding policy that we'll let countries talk about what they want to talk about publicly and what they don't we'll deal with that. But we're working it and our policy people are engaged. We're having a conversation this morning with one embassy in particular.

Q: Sandy Johnson with the AP.

A follow-up on that, in Qatar I don't understand the problem with the air base because there are thousands of journalists already swarming the country. Can you explain that?

Clarke: I can't. Can you, Bryan?

Whitman: I can.

Whitman: The question has to do with a particular air base at Qatar, Al Udeid. I think the reason that we really don't want to have those open discussions at this point is that we don't want to do anything, whether it's through the publishing of this transcript later on today and our discussions of it that will in any way impede our ability to open up that access for you, and we are in active discussions with every place where we've encountered any resistance at all. And like I said, I think particularly in the one that you mentioned, there's reason to hold promise in that, to be encouraged by the discussions that we're having. And I just don't think at this point to get into those kinds of details will necessarily aid us in being able to help you get access to those places.

Q: Clark Hoyt, Knight-Ridder.

Following up on the letter issue, could you just summarize for us exactly what each correspondent heading for an embed should have in their possession in the way of identification, the releases and so forth? Could you just run down --

Whitman: That is a good question. I know that my instruction letter had a lot of material in it and it might have been confusing to some people.

There is only one document that your embedded reporter has to show up with when he comes to his unit and that is the hold harmless agreement. He must present a hold harmless agreement signed by himself and by your news organization in order to be accepted into that unit.

The other times that you need any sort of documentation is if you have your reporter show up to any one of the medical treatment facilities to receive an inoculation. At that time they will have to show and provide a copy of the universal hold harmless agreement as well as they will have to sign an individual hold harmless for each inoculation that they get. Those each inoculation hold harmless agreements are at the medical treatment facility. They'll provide them, they'll sign them, they'll keep them at the medical treatment facility along with a copy of your hold harmless.

But the only thing that your reporters need to go into theater is something that identifies them as who they are and what news organization they're with as well as the universal hold harmless agreement.

Clarke: Any variation on services? Okay.

Whitman: Let me touch upon visas just real quick because some people have some questions and there's one issue I just want to make you aware of.

I think everybody's proceeding with getting their visas. Not any particular problems with respect to visas with the exception that remember that if you go into a country like Kuwait, and as long as you're with U.S. forces you'll be okay going into Iraq or coming back into Kuwait. Kuwait does not issue currently dual-entry visas, though. So make sure that as you're doing your own planning that you don't put your reporter in a position out there in which they're trying to get back into Kuwait but they're not able to get back into Kuwait because there is no entry from Iraq into Kuwait unless you're embedded with U.S. forces. That's the only kind of variance I know on visas right now.

As we learn some of these things, and actually as you learn them and tell us about them too, we'll pass along that information for everybody's benefit.

There have been guidelines on reporting that have gone out to the field. I think most of you are aware of those. They give the overarching ground rules for reporting from the field. Those are the guidelines that we've sent to the field we'll make available to you if you want to see them. Some of you actually helped us in developing those and certain aspects of those.

I guess there's only one that I would want to actually touch upon and that has to do with casualty reporting. It happens to be probably the most sensitive from the government's perspective --

Clarke: Bryan will get it up and then I'll say something. I want to ask T. [Capt. McCreary] to speak to this as well because it's something that we're going to ask you to be extraordinarily sensitive to. And this has to do with the identification of people who are injured and killed, military as well as media. So you can express the concerns better than I can.

Whitman: The issue has to do with the timing and identification of casualties. In the ground rules your reporters will see that reporting on casualties obviously is permitted but there are safeguards and conditions within the ground rules to try to prevent identification of battlefield casualties in real time. In other words, the sensitivity here is trying to allow the next of kin procedures to be able to get to family members and notify them of injured or killed family members prior to the first notification of it being in real time in the television coverage or a news story or a wire story that goes out there.

So we've tried to strike a balance that allows you to cover those varied realities of warfare and combat. But we've asked you to do it in a way that is sensitive to our needs to be able to communicate to our family members those type of tragic incidents that might occur on the battlefield.

Clarke: Just to give you a flavor of this, this was -- of all the things we've been working through, we on the DoD side of the fence are in total agreement on almost everything. On this issue some very strong opinions were expressed by people who have been in the military for a long time, some of whom wanted very stringent restrictions on the reporting and coverage of casualties. And some have pushed back hard, but if you feel comfortable doing it, expressing those views.

McCreary: Yeah, if you don't mind, although this is a little bit on the inside baseball track if that's fair enough.

We've gone from a med embed situation and access from -- you know the Army's old crawl, walk, run -- we've gone from the pre-crawl stage in some cases to the sprint stage and kind of skipped all those let's try things in between. But one of the things that unit commanders, warfighters on the ground, are extremely sensitive to is not only taking care of their troops, but taking care of their troops' families. So even though the ground rules state what they state, at any time if identification of a person is shown, and I'm not talking about the fact that you might shoot a casualty and all the horrors that go along with that, or the deaths on the battlefield, I'm talking about the recognition of a face and everything else. You are going to have families who will be very, very distraught, who will probably contact or get back to their commanders or get to the commanders in the bases, and that will go out to the field, and that will be a very, very big struggle I think for the operational commanders to come to grips with that because that is to them -- putting families, individual families, the idea that that is going to be shown and be very very problematic for people. And I quite frankly can't tell you how those commanders on the field are going to react.

So I think it's something we all have to be aware of. I know I've talked to some media organizations who are also very sensitive to that. I know it has the opportunity to involve the political side of the house from the Hill, those representatives who represent those families, if they get involved. So I think that's an issue that is still out there as a potential landmine as we work through this. Is that fair?

Clarke: Yes, thank you.

There's no perfect resolution to it but there were some who wanted us to severely restrict the guidelines when it came to what you could cover in terms of casualties and we said no, but we did say we would make a special appeal, and I think most of the people that you will have out there will be extraordinarily sensitive to it. But we are making a special appeal that people really, really think through the implications of what we're doing here.

Q: Carl Leubsdorf, Dallas Morning News.

How specifically, if you know, are we going to be informed of casualties? Are announcements going to be made here? Somewhere in the field? And I assume what you're talking about here is if your reporter is out there and sees something happening, how he reports that.

Clarke: Right.

Q: That's part of it, but the rest of it is names and home towns and places and --

Whitman: What we were really referring to is how it might involve from an embedded reporter's standpoint. The next of kin notification procedure is pretty well known I think to most people here. Then what happens is on deaths, on service members that are killed, the individual services make those next of kin notifications and once those are completed they bring that to the Department of Defense, to our office basically, and we publish a news release that will announce that with their names once that next of kin notification has been done.

Q: How will we get that?

Whitman: The normal process that you get all our news releases. They'll be released out of the press office as quickly as next of kin notification is completed.

Q: But here, as opposed to --

Whitman: Here in Washington, yes.

Q: Howard Arenstein from CBS Radio.

A related question. In Afghanistan you asked us not to identify family names of people in the field. Have you put out similar restrictions this time?

Clarke: Just in the general course of reporting first and last names and hometowns? Actually, we did not ask you to do that. Individual unit commanders might have asked that. Individual service members may have asked for that. But we the Pentagon did not say that. We said work it out at that level.

We had a big discussion about this at the last meeting, I think. Come find me afterwards and I'll give you all the gory details.

Q: Deborah Orr, New York Post.

Is what you're asking is that you do not want us to use any casualty names in any reports until they've come out of the Pentagon? In other words, if we get something from the field that says something happened, and we have not seen that name in a release from the Pentagon, you're asking us not to use that name.

Whitman: We're asking you not to report the names until we make the notification and the release from Washington. That's the only way that we ensure -- it's not just the names, it's also images that make that person identifiable.

Q [Sandy Johnson, AP]

What sort of operating rules are you sending to the field on that? At Gitmo [Guantanamo] we all became very familiar with you can use this kind of lens to shoot from 200 yards, but how does that work on the battlefield?

Clarke: It's in the guidelines.

Whitman: Specifically it states that no identifiable photos or images until next of kin notification is completed or 72 hours.

Johnson: But if the camera is far enough away and you see --

Whitman: That would not necessarily be an individually identifiable picture. So there are ways in which in the field you could still be able to cover casualties in near real time. It's just that we're asking you to do it in a way in which a husband, wife, brother, sister, uncle isn't learning about that for the first time through your images or through your reporting, because you'll have a reporter there and he may know the individual service member's name. So all we're doing is asking you to give us the opportunity to notify the next of kin before you make that identify known.

Q [Clark Hoyt, Knight Ridder]

I just want to underline, you added an important addition there that I hadn't heard before which is notification of next of kin or 72 hours.

Whitman: Right. That hasn't been without some controversy also. We believe that in 95, maybe more percent of the cases, next of kin notification will be completed within the 72 hour timeframe. We realize the difficulty sometimes in your reporting on the ground knowing that next of kin identification has been completed, so that's why the provision for 72 hours. So that at that point in time they can start including some of that information in their reporting.

So again, very sensitive on our side of the house here and we just ask that you try to be sensitive to that.

Pietropaoli: The exception to this would be, if it's a wounded, not a killed and the individual is being interviewed, obviously they can consent that if my family sees this interview before they find out I got shot in the arm. But it's for killed and wounded, you don't want recognizable photos coming back so the wife or the mother finds out that her son's lost a leg by seeing it on television or hearing it on the radio.

Q: Clark Hoyt again. I don't mean to belabor this, but I just want to be sure we all have clarity. When you say photographs not coming back, what you're really talking about is photographs not disseminated. They can come back to an editing desk, for example, and they would hold them --

Clarke: Right.

Q: So there shouldn't be any effort in the field to say don't send that back to your editor if --

Whitman: You're right.

Q: You don't want us to disseminate it until notification or 72 hours.

Whitman: You're absolutely correct.

Q [Deborah Howell, Newhouse News]

Is that any kind of wound? Any kind of small -- I can see how somebody who got slightly wounded might be somebody we'd want to be interviewing, and --

Whitman: If the individual service member has agreed to an interview, then certainly that's not an issue at that point. That falls into what Admiral Pietropaoli was talking about.

Pietropaoli: A person might have lost a limb but still want to be talking about what happened on the battlefield, and they're giving you their consent to -- if they haven't called home yet, they may find out this way. That's all we're trying to avoid. And all of you want, some of you have had this in the past. The news media organizations take a tremendous negative backlash if one family reports that they found out about it on the radio in the car. It's just bad all the way around. This is to protect all of us.

Whitman: I've got a couple more issues and then we can maybe hit some more of your questions.

One has to do with reporter safety. We've talked about this with you before but I don't think we can emphasize it enough. The battlefield's a dangerous place and it's going to be a dangerous place even embedded with our forces. It will be even a more dangerous place, though, for reporters that are out there not in an embedded status, that are moving around the battlefield, as I call it, running to the sounds of the guns. And I guess we can't caution you enough as to the dangers that that presents to a U.S. military force in combat, moving across the ground, coming across reporters that may or may not have armed guards for their own security out there. So I think it's important at any time we meet that we would stress how dangerous we believe that is not only to forces that are out there engaged, but to the reporters that are out there that could find themselves in that situation.

The other issue I think is reporters in Iraq, that are in Iraq right now, particularly reporters that are in Baghdad. I'll let my colleagues talk in greater detail. I guess to some of this perhaps.

We cannot tell you that Baghdad is a safe place to have reporters right now. We cannot give you any assurance that there will be a point in time when we can tell you, pull your reporters now. We don't know what Saddam Hussein may do or when he may do it. So we would be irresponsible I think if we don't give you that very clear warning today that we don't believe that Baghdad is a safe place to have reporters.

We know that you have to make those decisions and we know that they're your decisions to make. But don't look towards us -- I'm telling you that you can't look towards us for any sort of guaranteed safety or any sort of specific warnings when it comes to your reporters that are in Baghdad or any other Iraqi city should it come to conflict.

Clarke: Let me just pile on there, and then T [Capt. McCreary] and anybody else who wants to. On several different levels. One, journalists operating independently of an embedding status. We cannot guarantee their safety and I think most of them recognize that and most of you all recognize that but it's worth putting up on the table.

And Baghdad specifically. It's not a good place to be now, it will not be a good place to be if there is indeed military action. Remember, we preface all these conversations with no decision has been made.

This will not be anything like 1991. In 1991 the purpose was to get them out of Kuwait, limited targets in Baghdad, and not to go into any great detail, but this will not be like 1991. For instance, communications targets in Baghdad are very obviously something we would like to take out.

The issue of human shields. The Iraqi regime is recruiting them now, they continue to recruit them. Tariq Aziz attended a conference in 2002 that was specifically about this topic of human shields. There is no reason to believe that journalists would be excluded from that category.

So we can't make business decisions for you but we can tell you how extraordinarily dangerous we think it is to have your people there. And you're going to have to make the decisions and your news organizations are going to have to make decisions about what you want to do.

T: anything?

Let me just say one more thing and T can decide to pile on if he wants to or not. We talk about this issue every single day with Secretary Rumsfeld and the Chairman and General Franks and the people at that level. Absolutely every single day. I've had conversations with people in this room. There have been other conversations one person at a time, or two or three people at a time with very senior people at the news organizations and we will continue to do that going forward because that's how seriously we are taking this.

[I know from conversations I've had, there are -- I had one correspondent tell me, well, "I am going to be the face of this war, and that's why I have to be there."] [Laughter]

Clarke: Honest to God, verbatim quote.

If there is military action it is going to be a really, really bad place to be and we can't give you a sense of timing and we can't tell you within 72 hours or 48 hours or whatever. But it's a bad place to be. T?

McCreary: I guess we've struggled with this from two perspectives because I know, and I'll be frank, I've heard some expression from some different media outlets that is this just a ploy somewhat for us to not have anybody there. And I've got to tell you from a pure military perspective, it's a great benefit for us to have cameras behind what could potentially be enemy lines and I'll just lay that to you flat out because we can pick up stuff off of just your normal, every day broadcasts that would help us.

But there's a tradeoff here as you deal with the moral conundrum that we always deal with in targeting, about the potential of killing innocent civilians who are not engaged on one side or the other as combatants. I've got to tell you, I know you hear a lot of things like this war will be different, and all these things. But I've got to tell you, the difference in the kinetics will be extreme if this would ever come to pass. I think that those issues, I think Torie mentioned communication facilities, whether they be military or the way he can communicate and control his populace are always of interest to a military operation. You can pull that out of any military doctrine you want or any open source you want so I'm not giving away the farm on the types of things you would look at. But I think that makes it very very dangerous for people who are either operating in the region or forced to operate out of certain areas that you may become tools of a regime that really doesn't give a damn about your safety.

Q: Jon Sawyer, St. Louis Post Dispatch

What is your view of reporters working independently in Northern Iraq?

Clarke: If there is military action being out there on your own is not a safe thing to be doing. I don't make any distinctions.

Q: Frank Csongos, Radio Free Europe

What kind of help can you provide to our journalists, some of the may be independently [inaudible] in Iraq, who might want to cross back into Kuwait and happened to hit upon an American unit. Would you say I'm sorry, you're not embedded? Or would you say of course, come and join us?

Whitman: The question had to do with an independent reporter out there, and I'm paraphrasing so tell me if I get it wrong. An independent reporter out there that comes in contact with a military unit out there, what would our reaction be upon coming upon that reporter?

Upon coming upon that reporter, I suspect that the military commander would treat that reporter like he would treat any civilian casualty on the battlefield. I think it would be unlikely that he would be able to take on another embedded reporter because we will have already maximized his opportunities with all of you folks and your reporters that are out there. So in all likelihood, they would be treated just like any other civilian person found on the battlefield.

So if there is some thought process going on that "Well, I'll put my reporter out there, I'll just link them up with a unit as they come into Iraq and then embed that way." I would tell you that is an unlikely scenario that will unfold.

Csongos: Let's say you have a reporter embedded in units two and three, okay? And let's say they venture out to do some independent reporting and get separated from their embedded unit, but come in contact with unit three instead of two. Will they say to them, I'm sorry but you're in a different unit?

Whitman: Again, the question has to do with a hypothetical, what if my reporter goes off and does independent reporting from his unit. First of all he won't be permitted to do that. An embed is precisely an embed. You stay with that unit and you stay with that unit for as long as you want to stay with that unit. If you want to leave that unit the military commanders out there have been instructed to provide you with the means to get back to the first point of disembarkation or the first point in which you can get commercial transportation to get you out of the theater. Or back to one of the media centers where your reporter, you may assign your reporter to cover from there or you may be sending them there because you want to try to get another embed opportunity somewhere else.

Again, it's a very hypothetical situation but I would disabuse anybody of the idea that you can go out in embed status and then when you get tired just do some independent coverage out there and then perhaps link up with another unit or accidentally even run into another unit. You would in all likelihood either be, like I said, treated just like another civilian found on the battlefield, or evacuated back to the first point in which you could get commercially available transportation out of the theater or to one of our media centers.

Csongos: One final question. What happens if you accidentally separate [inaudible] and then you manage to get to safety?

Whitman: The question has to do with accidentally getting separated from your unit. Again, very hypothetical because I don't think that our units are going to let your reporters, and vice versa. I don't think your reporters are going to get too far away from their unit. But should that happen of course we're going to try to obviously try to get them linked back up. A division is a very big piece. The division will know all the reporters that are in that particular division and so if all of a sudden you got separated and found yourself in the division rear or in a different brigade of that division, they would be able to quickly identify where you're supposed to go and get you linked back up with the appropriate unit that you're with.

But yes, we certainly hope that doesn't happen. And I don't think that there's a high chance of that happening.

If I could address one other reporter safety issue, it's a casualty issue. It's one that I've gotten a lot of questions from you on so I just kind of want to get everyone having an understanding of the way that we perceive that this would occur.

In the unlikely event that you have a reporter out there that is injured, or God forbid killed in an action, the way in which we are going to work that kind of notification is back through the chain of command, through the public affairs chain of command. So that Torie Clarke or Bryan Whitman will call you as your points of contact for your news organizations so that you then can handle it in the way that you feel is most appropriate in notifying the families of your journalists.

So that's our plan for how we intend to notify you should one of your individuals get hurt, or like I said, God forbid, killed on the battlefield.

Clarke: Any questions on that?

Steve Pietropaoli is going to talk about some very practical things going forward in the next days and weeks.

Pietropaoli: Just one thing on the ship embeds. We always have presence out there on the carriers both in the Mediterranean and the Persian Gulf now on the other ships. But we expect the embedded reporters to start going out there in some numbers, the middle of next week, end of next week.

About that same time, I don't know a date certain yet but it will be sometime next week, we're going to impose the arbitrary and capricious reporting windows rule. I think I spoke about this once before.

The challenge we have here is that we would like to afford you guys the opportunity that you've had for the last several weeks to be out there at sea reporting about the things that are going on day in and day out, but at some point, and we've had this in the past with every military operation, if you're on the ship at sea, preparations for a significant military action become relatively apparent to any good reporter out there on an aircraft carrier. The pace picks up, the adrenaline starts to flow, more ordinance on deck. What happens is the commanders invariably shut down the reporting window in order to maintain some level of tactical surprise, and then the 24 hour news channels or wire bureaus or what not are unable to get hold of their correspondents for four hours, six hours, eight hours, and you start getting stories about something must be happening because I can't talk to my reporter on board the USS *Neversatt*. [Laughter] And this is basically an intractable problem for us to maintain some level of tactical surprise and yet let you be out there in real time.

So what we've hit upon, and if anybody has a better idea I'm happy to hear it, but for years we've thought of this and not come up with any better way to do it. So starting next week we're going to just roll the dice and you'll be able to hear from your reporter and then you won't be able to hear from him for two hours or 24 hours or 12 hours or whatever it is. And that way you back here at the bureau, your assignment editors and what not shouldn't and won't read anything in particular into not being able to contact your woman or man for eight hours.

It is clearly an amfice and we're not crazy about it, but quite frankly, the alternative is to send them out there at some point and just shut down reporting until some military action kicks off and I don't think that benefits anybody. So this is the way we're going to try and do it. This should go into effect for the first time, I think we've actually done this wholesale. It will be that way across the Mediterranean and ships in the CENTCOM area of responsibility. Although they haven't decided yet whether or not they'll let individual ships decide the windows. Frankly, I think that's what it will come down to. The individual ship will decide how many dice to roll.

If there's any questions on that I'm happy to take them and if there's any better way to do it I'm happy to listen.

Q: Do you have a day that will begin? We'll want to try to get a report out before that.

Pietropaoli: Your guys on the scene will work it out. Again I think they're looking at beginning to flow the bulk of the embedded people are starting to show up in the Mediterranean, a lot of them are already in Bahrain, they just haven't put their hands up with the embeds. Everybody's trying to game when you go out there.

Q: But you're estimating.

Pietropaoli: 4th or 5th of March, somewhere around there.

Q: And then will there be a series of hours -- I'm sorry, Janet Leissner [CBS]: If hostilities were to start, will there then be a blackout period?

Pietropaoli: My expectation is this and this is a little bit evolutionary, too. One, people have said I want to be on the ship that's going to be allowed to report first after something happens if the President should decide to do it. Pretty much when the lid comes off I think after military action the lid will come off simultaneously everywhere. There's not going to be one ship, we're not going to rotate the ship reports.

Secondly, once we are in around-the-clock military operations from the deck of the carrier, you're not going to regain tactical surprise so at that point I think we should be able to do cyclical operations. There may be timeframes when you don't want to report specifically they're leaving, we're now at this particular point in the ocean, the planes are marshaling overhead now because that might provide some tactical advantage to the enemy air defense system. But by and large after that begins and you're in round-the-clock operations, you should be able to report whenever the tactical situation permits and the atmospheres allow you to get the reports out.

Q: Kim Hume, from Fox [News]: I just wanted to clarify [inaudible] rolling arbitrary blackout so that we can't tell when --

Pietropaoli: You won't be able to read anything into lack of availability.

Q: Bill Gertz, Washington Times.

On the general policy I got the impression from this discussion that there's no halfway between being embedded, and being an independent reporter. Does that mean that for example, if we had someone in the area that didn't want to be embedded but wanted to cover some aspect -- like to get out to a ship or to see a unit, that they are not able to do that unless they're embedded?

Whitman: That's a good point and I'm glad you brought it up. I kind of agree with the first part, but then not really. [Laughter] You either are embedded or you're not embedded. That's correct.

There will be opportunities, we hope and we anticipate that there will be opportunities for coverage from our strategic centers of gravity for the media. Whether it be out of Kuwait, whether it be out of Qatar or wherever it happens as the battle unfolds and troops move. And in those particular cases there may be opportunities for either some pools to go out of those media centers or for even large numbers of reporters to go in and cover for short periods of time in a unilateral, independent way a particular activity that's occurred if the tactical situation allows us to get a number of reporters in.

Jim Wilkinson at CENTCOM is looking at ways to do that and should the tactical situation allow for us to bring some reporters in after a significant event or because forces have moved in such a way that, I can think of a hundred different things, but there's a press conference from a commander in the field, a major commander in the field at some point in the battle, we would try to get some independent reporters in there that didn't have the opportunity to perhaps embed and of course then they would be taken back to those pieces once that event's over with.

Clarke: And I think also, who knows what the duration will be? Who knows what all the activities will be? But there clearly will be opportunities above and beyond what we're planning on.

Gertz: So there is some flexibility beyond being embedded or being independent. Will the decisions for that be made in the area or --

Whitman: Yes. The question is, if everyone didn't hear it, how will reporters that are in the region be able to take advantage of some of these opportunities. Is that about right?

Those decisions will be made in the region. They'll be made at those various nodes that you're becoming aware of -- Kuwait right now, Qatar right now, but there will be more later on. And to the extent that we can execute those as independent, unilateral trips to various places they would be. If the demand is so high they may have to put together a regional pool to go in and do that.

McCreary: But somebody who is embedded, and they choose to go independent, they've completed their embed.

Janet Leissner [CBS News]: They can get another embed if they go back?

McCreary: If they go back and an opportunity arises, if an opportunity arises.

Tim Phelps [Newsday]: They can go back if an opportunity arises?

Whitman: No. What they can do is if an embedded reporter, if you decide that it's time to pull your embedded reporter out or your independent reporter just raises their hand and says "okay I'm done here, I'm finished," they'll be taken back to the place where they can get commercial transportation or back to one of the media centers, one of the CPICs or sub-CPICs.

Howard Arenstein [CBS Radio]: They cannot return to the embed?

Whitman: They would be unlikely to be able to return to the embed because the intent is to give you the opportunity to stay as long as you want to. Once you no longer are interested in that there may be another news organization that has a reporter that hasn't had a chance to embed, and to the extent that the logistics and tactical situation will allow us to, we would certainly want to give that reporter that opportunity.

Q: Debra Howell, Newhouse.

I asked you after the last meeting about sending photographers and you said there's just one embed or one [inaudible] and I said what if we give up one, we like to send a reporter and a photographer together. Can I get your thinking on that?

Whitman: We're still at the point where all these embed opportunities are single embed opportunities. The television ones are two person, and I know there are some news organizations that would prefer to, if they were given two embed opportunities to take them into one unit as opposed to two units, but I've got to tell you that the majority of you out there have fallen on the other side of the fence in that you don't want half as many opportunities that you would be afforded by doubling up, and that most of you have elected to express your desires to us to give you the maximum amount of opportunities even if they're not in the same division. So they still are currently one person embed opportunities. A lot of you have done some very interesting and creative management in terms of -- that's good -- in terms of your relationships with other news organizations, and the way that you have arranged to have reporters and journalists from different news organizations work together in the same unit and vice versa in a different unit.

So I think from what I can see the majority of those issues have been resolved. Not all of them. But I would say that probably 90 percent of you that have looked at working with other news organizations have accomplished that.

Q: Robin Sproul, ABC News.

You've touched on this generally in the past, but to get specific: if there's some sort of a dispute on whether it's ground rules or casualty identification or anything in the field and we're getting a satellite phone call from somebody and it's sort of a deadline situation, are you going to set up a 24 hour kind of hotline or do we just go through regular channels or what?

Clarke: Two things. Sorry, the question is, if there is some sort of dispute on the ground in a situation, someone's on deadline, whether it's over-identifying casualties or something else and you're getting satellite phone calls from your correspondents, what do we do?

The first question they need to be asked is did you talk with the PAO? Did you talk with the unit commander? Did you try to work it out at that level? And 99 percent of the time when there are issues they do work them out at that level. Then if they say yes, we've tried and we're still at an impasse here then bring it up the food chain and yes, we will be on duty 24/7.

Sproul: So just -- you won't have a single number, just contact --

Whitman: What we really want to do is encourage these things to be resolved at the lowest level. We can't be the arbitrator of every perceived dispute out there and I really believe that the type of reporters that you're putting in the field, from what I can see so far, the maturity and the professionalism, and the amount of time they've been in the news business, along with the maturity and experience of our commanders out there are going to really resolve 99 percent of any of these issues that come up.

I think it will be rare, and when it is the mechanisms are in place within your own news organizations as well as within the military chain of command to get those raised very quickly and adjudicated as necessary.

Q: Just to follow up: Sandy Johnson, AP.

There's an eight-hour time difference. Let's say there's an issue that crops up as Robin says, at midnight. Is there going to be a number where we can always reach one of you? Or do you want us calling you at home?

Clarke: People certainly took advantage of that in the past. I'm sure they will going forward.

Whitman: Nobody's ever had a problem finding my telephone number. [Laughter]

DeFrank: The press office is open 24 hours.

Clarke: The press office answers 247. There's a duty officer on call all the time. They've got excellent judgment on these sorts of things.

I'm not inclined to have the 1-800-I've-got-a-problem [laughter] because it makes it too easy a default. People should have the responsibility and the maturity, our people and your people, to try to work this out and they need to make a conscious decision, work it up the food chain. You and I had several conversations, but not as many as people might think.

So people know how to move up the food chain if they need to. I just encourage you to really push down on your people and we will do the same. Be prepared to work these things out at your level.

Q: Tim Phelps, from Newsday.

Is it your intention that reporters be allowed to file in real time even when a battle or an activity is underway? Or do we have to wait until it's all over?

Whitman: Are you familiar with the ground rules? Have you seen the ground rules?

Q: I've seen them. I'm not sure I've seen all the details.

Whitman: What we can do is, if it's helpful to you in this transcript I will even provide as an attachment the public affairs guidance that's gone to the field. I think that will pretty much answer your question.

There's no specific restrictions on when you can report. There are conditions under which real time reporting will not be permitted. The guidelines are broad guidelines and overarching guidelines. But clearly we don't want reporters reporting in real time if the tactical situation is such that it's going to compromise the mission or endanger the personnel that are involved in it. Or endanger a reporter that's out there with that unit. That's the broad guidance but it might be helpful if you actually read the guidelines.

Q: Cissy Baker, Tribune Broadcasting.

Are there any targets in or around Baghdad that you would like to suggest that perhaps it would be dangerous for reporters to be around? Besides the communications systems?

Clarke: I would like to suggest that it will be a very dangerous place. There are some obvious ones such as communications facilities, but we're not prepared to sit here and go through target by target by target. But it will not be a safe place.

Q: Jack (John) Ferre, Boston Globe [inaudible]

It started out as a very small, limited number of pools and then as things developed the opportunity to go [inaudible] grew exponentially. Should we be preparing five, six, seven, eight more reporters for the idea that at some point down the road you're going to have a lot more embedding opportunities?

Clarke: It's unknowable. As the Secretary and the Chairman like to say, you don't know, if there is military action if it will be four days, four weeks, or four months. You just don't know. Be adaptable, be flexible.

Q: Can I follow up to that? Bill Gertz, Washington Times.

Do you have any intention of activating the national media pool?

Whitman: As you know [the national media pool --

Clarke: Before I do we're going to activate the DoD national media pool. [Laughter]

Whitman: There are conditions in which the national media pool --

Clarke: It might be to my house, but we're going to activate the DoD national media pool.

Whitman: There are conditions in which the deployment of the national media pool is appropriate and to the extent that those conditions would be met we would certainly look at deploying the national media pool but beyond that I don't think I want to comment on it.

Clarke: But if the conditions are met we will deploy it and we will deploy it so happily and I'm going to be making the phone calls to those of you who are on the list.

In Iraq there will hundreds and thousands of reporters from every major news organization there. So if something unusual and unexpected comes up, which it will, then we will do what worked very successfully in the past, which is come to a quick agreement as to some pool arrangement and get it in there. It would not be precluded, it would not be in your interest in that case to activate the DoD national media pool coming out of Andrews. But if the conditions exist, we will deploy it happily.

Gertz: The reason I ask is because obviously Special Forces is one area where that could conceivably come into play, where there is a lot of restrictions on coverage [inaudible]. Obviously there's been a big emphasis on Special Forces since Afghanistan.

Clarke: Sure. And there are also lots of other restrictions on what Special Forces do. It often has to do with the nature of the work, it often has to do with the small number of people involved at the time. But the important thing is if the conditions are met, the DoD national media pool will be deployed.

Ferrell: To follow that up, does that mean if something were to happen in the Philippines or North Korea that's how you would get people there?

Clarke: If the conditions are met, we will deploy the DoD national media pool.

Chuck Lewis [Hearst]: Can somebody e-mail the new contact list to us, please?

Whitman: What we can do is we can make that an attachment to the transcript also and you can have a paper copy of it up here if you'd like also.

Clarke: We will re-e-mail to all of you all the contact numbers. I don't know if we want to put on the web for the world to see --

Whitman: Oh [Laughter] I envisioned when I put it up it would be put up to the e-mail list that I send to all of you. It's not for the whole world, no. Then you'll never get through. If you've having trouble getting through on these one-telephone satellite communications when 60 news organizations are trying to contact them. If we gave it to the world you would never get through.

Q: Can you tell us how many embeds you've placed? How many news organizations you've placed in embeds?

Clarke: We could. What we'll tell you is there's about 200 individual news organizations.

Whitman: It's well more than 200.

Clarke: The numbers will, like a lot of things that have to do with military action in Iraq, if there is military action in Iraq, things will ebb and flow. It could go higher, it could go a little bit lower, it depends on the circumstances, but there are about 200 news organizations thus far represented.

Q: Patrick Paxton, National Journal.

Say you have a reporter who's with a ground unit and say they're with a brigade headquarters, division headquarters, battalion headquarters, something like that. If they're embedded with that headquarters unit are they going to then be able to go into the individual units that report to that brigade on some events and activities?

Whitman: Really, you know, some of those things are things that your reporter's going to have to discuss when he gets to his division and based on what type of coverage you want to do.

When we made the decision to centralize this process we made that decision because we wanted to make sure that the right news organization and across the spectrum of international, domestic, and all forms of medium got properly represented on the battlefield. But we made a conscious decision to do that down to the division level where there is a public affairs officer and a division commander, where you can express then your desires on the type of coverage you want to do.

There may be a strong desire to report from a command element. There may be a strong desire by your news organization to report from a company or platoon environment. So those are things that your individual reporters will be expected to express their interest with when they link up to their unit.

Clarke: I'll throw out the wild card. What are we not thinking about that we ought to be thinking about?

Q: Sandy Johnson, AP

We heard from a couple of places out in the field that they don't have enough NBC gear. Has that been resolved?

And secondly, Torie, your favorite question: Have you worked out any sort of a briefing schedule?

Whitman: I am not aware from any of the command elements, from any of the units out there, I do not have any identified shortages. That's not to say that your reporter may have been told something by somebody, but the people that are in charge of distributing those masks and suits and making those available, I have had nothing come back. So if you have specific cases maybe you want to raise them to our attention, through an e-mail, and we'll address them back down the other way. But as far as I know there are no issues in terms of not being able to receive that equipment.

Clarke: On briefings, you'll have them from Qatar, you'll have them from here. You will have probably not as much as I would like but you will have the unit that's doing something particularly interesting and newsworthy and if the technology holds up that unit commander will brief from that location.

We're looking at things like gaggles, but there will be a surplus of briefings.

Whitman: I guess what I'd like to leave you with is as we go forward the success of this is really going to be dependent on not only us but also of the individuals that are here in the room. It really is a two-way street and there is some mutual responsibility on the part of both you and us to make this work.

We have put an awful lot of confidence and trust in the news organizations as well as our commanders out there to make this relationship work. I believe our commanders really do understand the importance and the responsibilities of the press out there, and I think that working together, particularly in an embedded situation like this, that it has all the promise of both the military and the media being able to accomplish their very important missions should it come to conflict.

Stay in touch with us. As problems arise that you think need to be brought to our attention, please do it so we can resolve them. Encourage your reporters that you're sending to the field to work closely with their commanders on issues that arise that can be resolved at the unit level. And if there are no other questions I have nothing else.

Q: Cissy Baker, Tribune Broadcasting

Do you foresee any other bureau chiefs briefings like this before and if there is some military action?

Whitman: That would be a timing issue, wouldn't it?

Clarke: Sure. [Laughter] We try to respond to what we think the need is and if we've got real information and things that are useful for the entire group to hear as a group, so we'll just see how the days and weeks go because I can't help you with a sense of timing.

Every once in awhile I think I remember in '01 and '02 we did some conference calls when we wanted to address something quickly. So the next one can't tell you, but definitely anticipate another one.

Thanks everybody.

Q: Do you want to end this by telling us who the face of the war is going to be? [Laughter]