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# DEFENSE LANGUAGE AND CULTURAL AWARENESS TRANSFORMATION

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES, SUBCOMMITTEE ON  
INVESTIGATIONS AND OVERSIGHT

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## HEARING CONTENTS:

### Opening Statement

**Vic Snyder** [[view PDF](#)]  
Subcommittee Chairman

### Witness Testimonies

**Richard Brecht** [[view PDF](#)]  
Executive Director, Center for Advanced Study of Language, University of Maryland

**Andrew F. Krepinevich, Jr.** [[view PDF](#)]  
President, Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments

**Montgomery McFate** [[view PDF](#)]  
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Defense Analyses

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**Statement of Subcommittee Chairman Vic Snyder  
Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee  
Hearing on Defense Language and Cultural Awareness  
Transformation: To what end? At what cost?**

July 9, 2008

“Good afternoon, and welcome to the Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations’ hearing on Department of Defense efforts to improve its language and cultural awareness capabilities.

“Not only is this a historic challenge, but this is an area with profound implications for our success at adapting to the new realities of war in the 21st Century, with the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan as prime exhibits. But our goal here is not to hash over what has or has not been done in those theaters, or what steps DOD has or has not taken. Instead, my expectation is that we can look ahead and consider the larger question of what capabilities our military needs to have and to sustain for its role in national security – to take advantage of opportunities and to respond to threats.

“Before I turn to our witnesses, I have two examples of the enduring need for this capability – both from World War II.

“The first is from a film called the Untold True Story of Guy Gabaldon, which depicts Marine PFC Gabaldon’s single-handed success in persuading over 1,500 Japanese soldiers to surrender on Saipan in 1944. This is followed by an audio-only excerpt from a news report originally broadcast on NPR’s Morning Edition on April 25, 2008.

“The second segment is from Ken Burns’ film The War and an interview with Senator Daniel Inouye about his wartime experiences in Europe.

“We are joined today by:

- Dr. Richard Brecht, Executive Director at the University of Maryland’s Center for Advanced Study of Language, who has extensive experience in the best ways to acquire and sustain language skills.
- Dr. Amy Zalman, who is an expert in how cultural awareness factors into successful strategic communications.
- Dr. Montgomery McFate, who has worked to develop a framework for employing anthropologists and other social scientists to support deployed forces.
- And, Dr. Andrew Krepinevich, the President of the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments who will discuss the capabilities our future military force will require.

“Welcome to all of you and thank you for being here. After Mr. Akin’s opening remarks, I’ll turn to each of you for a brief opening statement. Your prepared statements will be made part of the record.

“On an administrative note, I’ll remind our members that we will use our customary five-minute rule today for questioning, proceeding by seniority and arrival time.

"With that, let me turn it over to our ranking member, Mr. Akin, for any statement he would like to make."

**“The End State of Language Capability for the U.S. Department of Defense:  
The Country’s First ‘Globalized’ Workforce”**

**Prepared Statement before the House Armed Services Subcommittee on Oversight and  
Investigations  
July 9, 2008**

**Richard D. Brecht  
Executive Director  
University of Maryland  
Center for Advanced Study of Language**

## Executive Summary

The “end state” of language and culture capability in the DoD is a “globalized total workforce” built and maintained by enhanced recruitment, more targeted training, rigorous warehousing, and effective management. This organic capacity is buttressed by force multipliers consisting of outsourced, localized, and reach-back resources accessed anywhere and anytime through a networked resource access system.

Such an end state must be comprehensive, cohesive and collaborative, as it cannot depend on DoD efforts and resources alone. The programmed support of other government departments as well as the academic, business, and heritage sectors must be brought to bear in an efficient and effective manner.

## Summary Conclusions and Recommendations

- The end state is a “globalized total force,” with defined organic capabilities supported by force multipliers based on outsourcing, localization, and reach-back.
- The core to this capability, the Defense Language Transformation Roadmap (DLTR), must be completed and its funding and programs maintained or enhanced.
- Successful recruitment depends ultimately on vastly improved language education at the K-12 level, and the DoD should continue to support and serve as the “bully pulpit” for improvement in the nation’s schools, colleges, and universities.
- A national coordination point for language, similar to the Office for Science and Technology Policy, should be created in the White House and charged to provide guidance in integrating the national architecture upon which this end state depends.
- A network-based language and culture resource access system should be developed that is capable of locating and providing needed language and cultural resources anytime and

anywhere, leveraging the extensive USG investments in language and culture as well the resources of academe, industry, and the nation's heritage communities.

- A concentrated effort should be made in the areas of African and Asian languages and cultures.
- Finally, a short term solution should be a priority, specifically the creation of the network-based language and culture resource access system

## **Introduction**

In the Defense Language Transformation Roadmap (DLTR), the Department of Defense (DoD) has laid out an unprecedented, comprehensive plan to meet the language needs of the nation's military and has made impressive progress in implementing that plan. Two questions, however, remain: What is the appropriate "end state" for a DoD language and cultural awareness capability? What are the next steps after the DLTR to get us there?

## **An End State Scenario**

In 2021, a severe draught in northern Niger is taking the lives of thousands of men, women, and children. The United Nations and the African Union have agreed to provide humanitarian assistance. The U.S., through AFRICOM, has contributed, among other resources, an infantry battalion, which is responsible for crowd control at food distribution centers in an area where a radical insurrectionist element operates. Tempers flare, and troops and local populations are endangered. Language tasks arise and are met with the following capabilities:

- **Organic language capabilities:** As part of their training, all troops of assigned to the Northern Region of the AFRICOM mission area are aware of the language and culture issues they will face in the field. Many have basic phrases in the principal languages of Niger, while others can perform at the 2-level in the two African "core" languages (out of the fifteen "core" languages of Africa) spoken in the Northern Region: Fulfulda and Hausa, as well as in French (the official language of Niger) and in Arabic. Thus, there is successful communication between American and community leaders, while people on the street are addressed using Voice Response Translators (VRTs) programmed on-site via satellite in the above languages for crowd control.
- **Outsourced capabilities:** Operating in conjunction with the African Union's African Standby Force, Northern Region, U.S. commanders can assume that villages, whose populations speak the other principal languages of Niger, Djerma, Kanuri, and Tamajaq, will be handled by the ASF. The battalion's communications management specialist, by the way, has been assigned to provide on-going training to units at the battalion, company, and platoon levels.

- Reach-back: Given the history of past ethnic conflict in the area, the commander reaches back in the pre-deployment stage into the African Title VI center at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign for the latest information on tribal and cultural issues pertaining to Niger and surrounding countries. Meanwhile, on site a prisoner is speaking an unrecognizable dialect of Arabic, and the interrogator goes on-line to access the Arabic Variation Identification Aid (AVIA) developed by the University of Maryland Center for Advanced Study of Language. Having identified the Arabic variant as Shuwa Arabic and aware that this capability is not organic and localization is unreliable, the interrogator accesses the Army Language Line Services, which provides telephonic interpretation during questioning. Also, many local populace interviews must be conducted in Hausa, and so assistance is sought from National Language Service Corps, which has dispatched a set of fluent speakers for the mission. The text for the battery of information and rescues leaflets in all 12 of Niger's languages has been provided by the African Languages National Resource Center at the University of Wisconsin, Madison.
- Localization: Intelligence units of the Niger military provide valuable information to company and platoon leaders. French and Arabic are vital to this channel of information. Officers in these units are skilled in communications management and feel comfortable that they are getting the information they need.

This combination of appropriate organic language capabilities together with the force multipliers, provide the capabilities needed in future scenarios like this.

## The Problem

The problem of defining and reaching an appropriate end state is particularly “wicked,” given the fact that the 2006 *Quadrennial Defense Review Report* envisions a future dominated by “uncertainty” and “unpredictability” and focuses on “capabilities and agility” more than specific threats from specific countries.” Particularly challenging is the fact that the language needs of the Department are real and critical, but at the same time they appear to be so daunting that immediate and practical work-arounds seem more attractive than anything that is proposed under the guise of a long-term solution. With troops moving around the world on short-term (1 or 2-year) deployments, with hundreds (if not thousands) of languages in play, and with many funding priorities competing, a comprehensive end state of a language competent and culturally aware total workforce simply looks out of reach.

That having been said, the focus of this testimony is to attempt to lay out an attainable end state of required language and cultural awareness capabilities, along with the challenges that threaten it and the opportunities that it promises. My underlying assumptions are:

- First, that the existing Defense Language Transformation Roadmap is the most sophisticated language plan this nation has ever seen and lays the foundation for building the first ever language and culture-competent “globalized work force” based in the United States.
- Second, the investment this roadmap has required must be protected and the job must be finished, in spite of some significant challenges that can impede progress and threaten attainment of the end state.
- Third, in spite of the magnitude of the problem, a practical end state can be reached. However, this task will not be accomplished simply, easily and quickly, as it will depend on a comprehensive, cohesive, and collaborative total language system.
- Fourth, short term practical steps can be taken that offer immediate return on investment and, perhaps more importantly, demonstrate that the language problem is not intractable and that long-term solutions are possible.

## **The End State: A “Globalized DoD Workforce”**

The lessons learned over the past two decades have made clear that language and cultural knowledge must be a force-wide capability. Accordingly, the end state we seek is a “globalized workforce” in which every unit and every individual will have the ability to deal on an appropriate level with allies as well as enemies anywhere in the world. This globalized workforce comprises: all military and civilian personnel with adequate communications management skills; a sub-set of this total force with language skills at all levels and in all relevant occupations; a cadre of language specialists capable of performing at the highest levels; and, a set of force multipliers available on demand. Targeting “capabilities and agility” to meet “uncertainty” and “unpredictability” assumes that all levels of the workforce have the globalized mindset, the prerequisite knowledge of what this means, and a language and culture resource arsenal available on demand.

*A. Communications Management Skills.* The Defense Language Transformation Roadmap has as one of its goals that “...the total force understands and values the tactical, operational, and strategic asset inherent in regional expertise and language.” Not only must “...the total force understand and value...,” but it must be able to *use* the “...tactical, operational, and strategic asset...” Whether or not the personnel on the ground themselves have language skills or adequate cultural knowledge, training must ensure that all personnel have basic “communications management,” which means that they have some basic knowledge of when human and/or technology-based language capabilities are needed and what value they bring, what resources are available and where they can be obtained, and whether the language and culture resources put against the problem are sufficient. Essentially, members of a globalized workforce are armed with the ability to pose and answer the questions: Do we need language skills and culture capabilities? What specifically do we need? Will technology suffice, or do we need human resources? Where and how soon can we get the necessary resources? Are they working?

The communications management training that is called for here, to the best of my knowledge, is not available. Cultural briefings, sensitivity training, and short, intensive language courses and

programs, while certainly required, are not sufficient to equip the total force to deal with the range of language and culture issues they will face in the field. *However, before such training can be developed and implemented, a picture of all language capabilities available to a unit must be drawn and an access network must be developed that is capable of deploying the appropriate resources on demand.*

### *B. Organic Language and Culture Skills*

Strategic planning of the Department of Defense as well as the White House, Intelligence Community, the Department of Homeland Security, and other relevant entities, will determine the language readiness map defining: the languages, the levels of proficiency and performance (from basic to sophisticated), the skills and tasks required, the number of language and culturally-competent personnel; and, the mix of human and technological assets.

Given the global involvement of U.S. military, the inevitable first question that arises is: Which languages and dialects are to be included in the organic capabilities of the Department, given the fact that there are approximately 7,000 languages in the world, with tens of thousands of dialects? The current approach of identifying and projecting “Immediate Investment Languages” and future “Stronghold” languages needs is very reasonable, given the enormity of the task. The question, however, is: How can or should more languages, even dialects, be included in the end state? Clearly, building a workforce competent in hundreds, not to say, thousands of languages is not feasible.

The solution lies in a system with strategically planned, organic language capabilities augmented with outsourcing, localization, and reach-back capabilities. These organic language capabilities have to be carefully constructed against what might be called “language futures,” that is, an analysis of which languages and dialects will be in use by which populations in twenty years in regions of the world of inevitable interest. Which are *lingua franca* languages in those regions? Which languages are widespread among relevant sub-populations and sub-regions in the future? If, then, combatant commands can be configured to minimize inter-regional deployments, units assigned to specific areas should have *lingua franca* capabilities, perhaps even down to sub-regions. For example, a recent Cape Town study asserted that, since Africans as a rule are

multilingual and speak two or three languages, there are 15 languages that are spoken by 85% of Africans. If the continent were divided into 5 regions, as the African Union has done, then the number of languages each AFRICOM unit assigned to those regions would have as its organic capability would be manageable.

And how do we build this carefully expanded organic capability? Clearly, the DoD language training programs will remain the primary provider, with the DLIFLC in the lead. However, it is possible that, in the long term, DLIFLC will be able to hone its on-campus mission to higher levels skills in critical languages by drawing from a recruitment pool enriched by better language programs in schools, community colleges and universities as well as in heritage community language schools. (See Appendix B, where a map of the national pipelines in language education and training is sketched out.) In the meantime, the transformation of the DLIFLC to higher level outputs in critical languages, now underway, must be supported to completion. In addition, across the Department language training would be more targeted on job performance with life-cycle training available across the workforce, most likely largely through mobile training teams and on-line courses like those of the SOCOM, with support from technology-enabled learning systems like GLOSS & LangNet. Life-cycle training means that language learning would be an ever-present, career-long endeavor, and management would focus on employing these skills to keep them from atrophying. And finally, once the language skills and professional experience are acquired, they would be “warehoused” in data bases, reserve elements, and the National Language Service Corps, to be available in time of need. All this represents the organic capability of the DoD.

### *Force Multipliers*

However, such an organic capacity has to be supplemented by force multipliers, like the following:

*Outsourcing.* Clearly, some reliance on contractors for language services across the board will continue, although more organic capabilities are needed. The language abilities of our coalition partners are another important source of rare linguistic and cultural expertise. However, the

quality of these end state outsourced capabilities requires standards and evaluation processes to be developed that ensure the quality of their performance. These standards, at some level, would become part of the communications management training described above.

*Localization.* The necessity and disadvantages of hiring local populace translators and interpreters are well known to the military. Here again, standards must be brought to bear, as part of the communications management of all personnel deployed abroad. Industry understands localization very well, and the military can learn from firms forced into markets on which they have little experience, not to say expertise. The importance of standards in localization efforts cannot be overestimated. (It is particularly noteworthy that one of the principal industry organizations in this area is the Localization Industry Standards Association (LISA).)

*Reach-back:* There are USG- sponsored capabilities that cannot be deployed in the field but, given global information transfer in today's world, can be accessed on demand, but only if their availability and usability are known. Such language resources include: the National Language Service Corps (NLSC), the National Virtual Translation Center (NVTC), The Language Flagship (TLF), and, presumably, a government contracted telephonic interpretation services like industry's Language Line Services.

In sum, while outsourced and localized resources can be valuable, the weaknesses are clear. War fighting cannot be outsourced or localized, although large elements of stabilization and reconstruction can. Once again, though, leaving aside cost, the value of such non-organic resources depends upon their quality, which ultimately depends upon standards against which to judge performance.

A word about technology: Human Language Technology (HLT) came into its own when it acknowledged its limitations and targeted its strengths. To this observer, the ability of Human Language Technology (HLT) to match human expertise in processing complex texts is a long way off. Nevertheless, HLT has a definite role to play in the end state; in fact it is critical to it. Processing large volumes of information at relatively low levels sophistication is its strength. In the field it has a role in low level tasks, like traffic control and the like. However, the future

globalized workforce must be armed with the knowledge of what the task is, what the capabilities of the technology are, and how the delta, if it exists, can be filled by human expertise. As mentioned above, this kind of training is a critical component of the universal communications management training called for above.

In sum, the end state envisioned in the Roadmap, with some elaboration here, can be represented by the chart in Appendix A.

### **National Capacity Architecture**

The construction and maintenance of this end state capability in the DoD depends upon a national architecture that is comprehensive, cohesive, and collaborative. The charts in Appendices A & B represent such an architecture, which presumes collaboration among the sectors constituting the nation's language capacity: academic, federal, heritage, industry, and overseas. They are meant to indicate that any solution to a language need as broad as that faced by the DoD is complex and cannot realistically depend on a total workforce trained in the languages spoken in the approximately 130 countries in which we have troops. Moreover, the basic premise here is that the DoD cannot reach the appropriate end state on its own, as department leadership has frequently asserted and the Defense Language Transformation Roadmap clearly implies. However, I would argue that the end state is indeed reachable, provided that the proposed broad collaboration is integrated into a system and supported as a whole.

Whereas industry in the form of private contractors is recognized as a vital part of the DoD's total workforce, close ties particularly with the academe sector are not yet a generally acknowledged and accepted part of the DoD strategic plan for language. That being said, there is no question that academe is envisioned as an integral part of the most recent QDR, and that vision can be broadened. Putting DoD end state functions of Appendix A against the national human resource pipelines reflected in Appendix B gives the following picture of how the end state might work:

First, The Language Flagship of the NSEP was launched in order to dramatically enhance the pool from which language expertise could be *recruited* into the government. This program directly provides to government entities skilled professionals with certified high level language ability in critical languages. In addition, the intent of this program is to strengthen language education across the country by involving leading language programs that demonstrate how language instruction in the education system can become more effective and by disseminating the model to other institutions. This unprecedented program, along with recruitment from heritage communities, ultimately will enable the DoD's principal language school, the DLIFLC, to focus more of its mission on higher levels and on critical languages and missions.

Second, in the area of *training*, federal funding has enabled the academic sector to collaborate in providing long-term career language enhancement through on-line systems like LangNet and DLI-developed GLOSS, critical language learning materials catalogued in UCLA's Language Materials Project (LMP), and broad access to authentic materials from across the globe through SCOLA.

Third, with regard to *warehousing*, the National Language Service Corps (NSLC), along with reserve elements, can become the nation's primary vehicle for preserving hard-won language skills and making them available on demand in time of need. The NSLC can and should draw upon the best academic language programs in the United States, as documented in CASL's *LinguaVista* system, to maintain and enhance its members' language and culture skills. This same service is available to DoD personnel wishing to enhance language skills on their own or through USG-sponsored programs.

Fourth, in the area of *outsourcing*, various accrediting organizations can be of assistance in establishing standards for selection and performance assessment of contracted interpreters, translators, interrogators, and the like. (See, for example, The Commission on English Language Program Accreditation (CEA) and American Society for Testing and Materials (ASTM).)

Fifth, *reach-back* may be seen to comprise a number of services, including translation, interpretation, cultural behavior advising and training, as well as research on immediate and long-term problems in language training, performance, and assessment. The NLSC, the NVTC, and a military telephonic interpretation service—all staffed by many professors and graduate students—can provide just-in-time on translation and interpretation services. The reach-back capabilities of Human Terrain Teams in the field might be extended to include experts in regions and areas of the world from Title VI National Resource Centers. In research and development, the Title VI National Language Resources and the University of Maryland Center for Advanced Study of Language can be called upon.

Sixth, *localization* can be effective, provided that managers of such efforts are themselves trained in what we are calling communications management so that they can know what skills they are looking for, what options are available, and how well the localized efforts are performing.

### **Academe as a Core Asset**

It should be clear that many of these capabilities depend on the academic sector maintaining expertise, programs, and teachers in languages of all regions of the world. In fact, academe, as opposed to government and industry, is best positioned to extend and maintain expertise in all areas of the world without having to justify its practical application. Indeed, the strength of academe lies in its “knowledge for knowledge sake” approach. However, there are a number of critical considerations that arise here.

The core of this capability to develop and maintain expertise is the *language field*, which can be analyzed as comprising, for any given language or language area, foundational elements (expertise base, research, national organization, strategic planning, national resource centers), infrastructure (teacher training programs, in-country immersion programs, publications outlets, assessment instruments, etc.), as well as exemplary national programs. This field architecture, supported principally on the federal side by Title VI/Fulbright-Hays of the Higher Education Act, is critical to all aspects of the federal language enterprise. This is particularly true given the

fact that language fields as a rule pay attention to a broad range of languages in their area, devoting graduate and undergraduate education to critical linguistic and cultural aspects of the discipline unavailable anywhere else. This field structure is critical to much of the end state architecture described here.

Now that culture is receiving its due in the Department, academic researchers can be very helpful in laying out the parameters that have to be considered and the theory that can guide any practical training, whether it be in the area of cultural sensitivity or on specific cultures. This is particularly important when attempting to consider culture separate from language. Furthermore, regional or area studies, as opposed to culture research, is a major strength of universities, and the National Resource Centers funded by Title VI are the major repositories of this knowledge in the world.

Another consideration is that the integration and collaboration called for here among government and academe depend on a clear vision and a strong will across federal agencies responsible for national security. Language is a national problem, and ultimately the globalized workforce called for here will be reached most easily if and when this country's education system produces "globalized citizens." It is a fact that K-12 language education is a DoD issue in that its globalized workforce ultimate depends on it. To the extent that the DoD can continue to advocate for the broader, strategic, language education needs of the nation, the more its direct requirements will be met most efficiently and effectively.

## **Summary Conclusions and Recommendations**

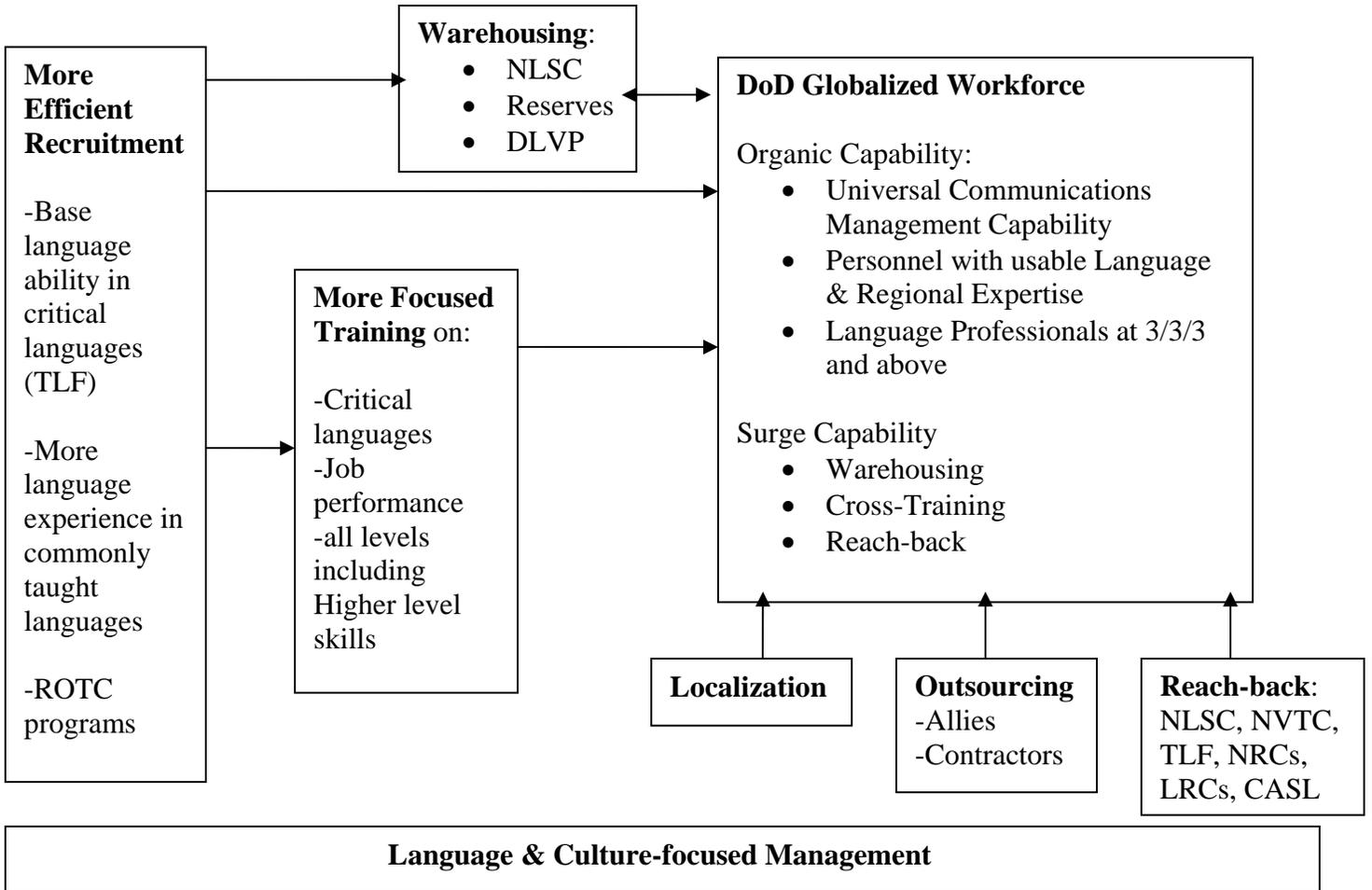
- The "end state" for the DoD of a "globalized total force" is attainable, but only if viewed as comprising a workforce universally informed about the value of language and culture capabilities and about how to bring appropriate language and culture resources to bear when needed. This basic communications capability is the foundation upon which will be built cadres of personnel skilled in languages at all levels, all supported by a full array of force multipliers including outsourcing, localization, and reach-back.

- Hard won ground must not be lost; the significant investment made by the Department in language and culture must be protected. The DLTR must be fully implemented, and its funding and programs must be maintained as the core to this capability.
- A language and culture resource provider system should be devised that is accessible anytime and anywhere. This system must incorporate all aspects of in-house resources (human or technology), as well as outsourced, localized, and reach back capabilities; and it should include resources across government, academe, and industry. This approach is in line with the “Net-Centricity” vision of the 2006 QDR Report, which is intended to harness “the power of information connectivity” to enable “critical relationships between organizations and people.” (p. 58)
- Along with adequate assessment processes and instruments, standards should be developed that would apply across all outsourcing, localization, and reach-back capabilities. Such an effort could leverage the 15 billion dollar language services industry, if these businesses would participate with academe in the development process.
- A concentrated effort should be made in the area of African languages. Just because the task is formidable does not mean that it should not be attacked. An initial step would be a major effort to compile language corpora for targeted areas of the continent, which would enable training and research and development of critical technology tools. Also, being a Russian specialist, I would be remiss not to point out the graying of the field both inside and outside our government. A capacity built over decades is in danger of being seriously weakened, just when Russia is emerging once again as a very important player in the world. Finally, the languages of our friends in Europe and Japan are critical to our security, yet they do not garner the support that currently more pressing languages do.
- Efforts should continue and be strengthened to instill appropriate cultural behaviors and understanding in the DoD workforce. Cultural sensitivity is critical as a basis for all cultural training, as there is a danger that very short term training on specific cultures can

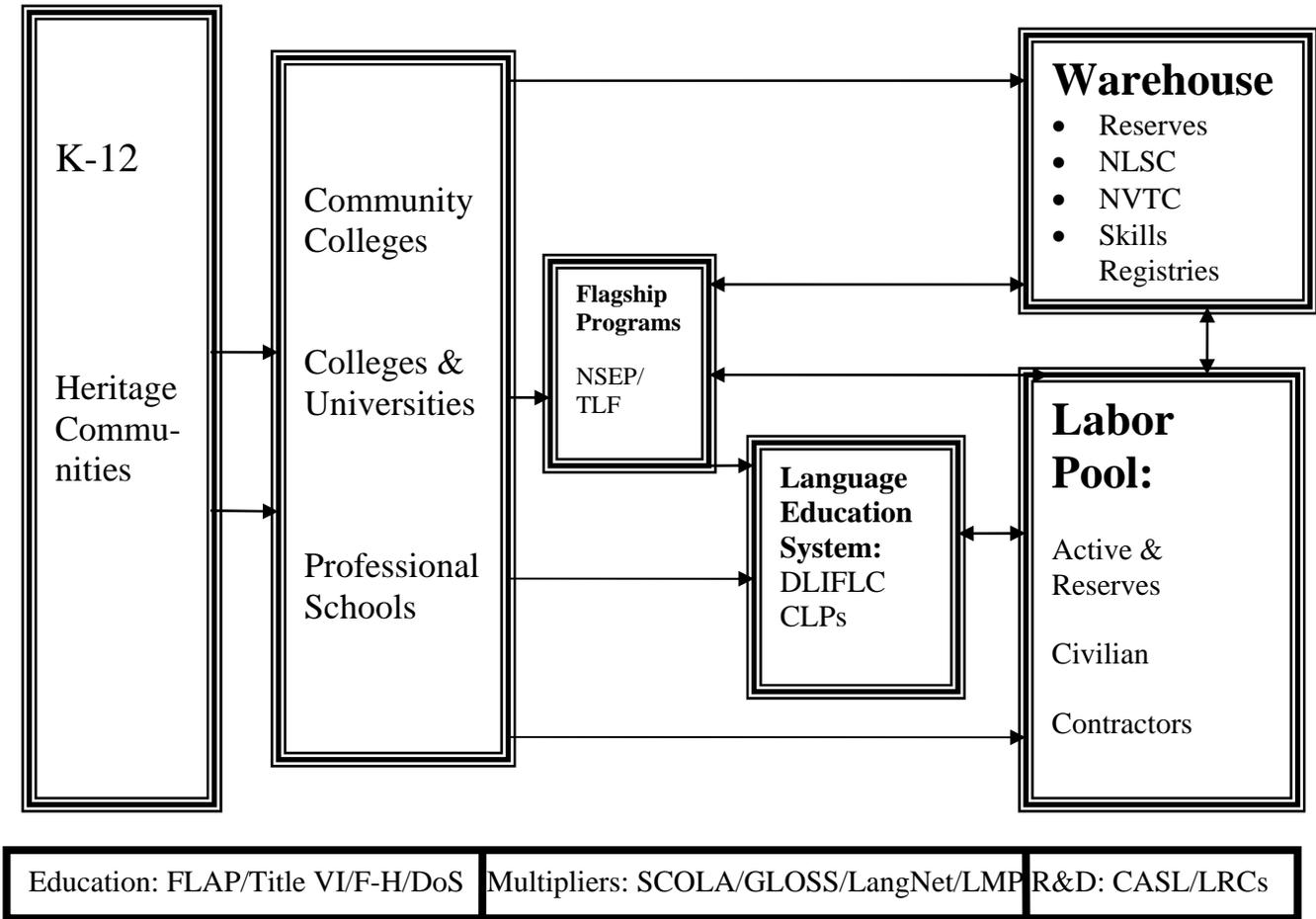
cause more harm than good. Communications management entails awareness of the value of cultural knowledge along with the ability to find resources and expertise when needed.

- The comprehensive architecture proposed here requires cohesion and collaboration across agencies and sectors. Ideally, a coordination point for language established in the White House, similar to the Office for Science and Technology Policy, would provide guidance in this direction. Equally importantly, such an office would argue for a national language education policy for the schools, colleges, and universities in this country, thereby providing a longer term solution to what is clearly not just a military problem.
- Finally, a short term result should be a priority. While the end state envisioned here does not involve a total workforce able to speak the languages encountered in global deployments, it does propose a workforce capable of dealing with the communication requirements of their job through access to a range of language capabilities that include human and technological, on- and off-site, and owned and leased, made and bought. A shorter term solution is to build the data base of resources and the delivery system as well as the communications management training components required across the services.

## Appendix A: DoD Language Supply Architecture



**Appendix B: DoD National Language Capacity Architecture/Pipelines**



**Abbreviations:**

CLPs: Command Language Programs; CASL: University of Maryland Center for Advanced Study of Language; DLIFLC: Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center; DoS: Department of State; FLAP: Foreign Language Assistance Program; GLOSS: Global Language Online .....; K-12: Kindergarten through twelfth grade; LangNet: The Language Network; LMP: Language Materials Project; NLRCs: National Language Resource Centers; NSEP: National Security Education Program; TLF: The Language Flagship; NLSC: National Language Service Corps; NVTC: National Virtual Translation Center; SCOLA: .....; Title VI/F-H: Title VI of the Higher Education Act, Fulbright-Hays.

July 9, 2008

## DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE LANGUAGE AND CULTURAL AWARENESS TRANSFORMATION

Testimony of Andrew F. Krepinevich, President<sup>1</sup>

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for the opportunity to appear before you today, and to share my views on the value of cultural awareness and language training for the United States armed forces. My remarks are intended to place this issue in a broader strategic context, in the hope that this will allow the subcommittee to evaluate its significance better. I will discuss the likely shape of the future security environment, the types of challenges the U.S. military should be prepared to confront, how it might respond to these challenges, and what all of this suggests about the importance of cultural awareness and language training. In addition, I will address the issue of possible tradeoffs that might be required if the Services expand their focus on these types of training.

### INTRODUCTION

*...asymmetric warfare will remain a mainstay of the contemporary battlefield for some time.*

*...arguably the most important military component in the War on Terror is not the fighting we do ourselves, but how well we enable and empower our partners to defend and govern their own countries. The standing up and mentoring of indigenous armies and police—once the province of Special Forces—is now a key mission for the military as a whole... The same is true for mastering a foreign language...and building expertise in foreign areas.*

*Army soldiers can expect to be tasked with reviving public services, rebuilding infrastructure, and promoting good governance. All these so-called “nontraditional” capabilities have moved into the mainstream of military thinking, planning, and strategy—where they must stay.*

Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates  
Remarks to the Association of the United States Army,  
October 10, 2007<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Before the United States House of Representatives Committee on the Armed Services, Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee.

<sup>2</sup> Accessed at <http://www.defenselink.mil/speeches/speech.aspx?speechid=1181> on July 2, 2008.

In order to assess the value of any particular piece of equipment or form of training, it is necessary to have a sense of what tasks the armed forces will be asked to perform, and where they will be operating in the years to come. During the 45 year-long Cold War the U.S. military focused primarily on structuring, training and equipping itself for conventional combat against the Soviet Union and its allies on the European continent and at sea. Following the Cold War, our armed forces have found themselves conducting operations, often irregular and protracted in character, in places such as Somalia, Haiti, Bosnia, Kosovo, Afghanistan, and Iraq that to some would have seemed highly implausible only months before they were undertaken. If the experience of the last seventeen years tells us anything, it is that we are likely to continue to find our armed forces deployed, often for protracted periods of time, and typically in operations among the indigenous populations, rather than around them. As I will discuss presently, it is not only past experience, but strong current trends that argue for this conclusion.

Consequently, as we look ahead, the U.S. military should be prepared to confront a more diverse array of opponents, including third-tier rogue powers, transnational terrorist organizations, indigenous insurgent groups, as well as potential great power rivals. Rather than focusing on one particular geographic area, U.S. forces will likely be required to prepare for contingencies in widely dispersed locales. Moreover, U.S. soldiers, marines, sailors and airmen will increasingly be asked to perform a range of tasks quite different from those associated with conventional combat operations.

## **THE FUTURE SECURITY ENVIRONMENT: A DISORDERED WORLD?**

What will the future security environment look like? Although it is impossible to say for certain, a number of trends suggest that the United States may be on the verge of confronting a “disordered world” in which the principal threats to U.S. security are more likely to emanate from irregular forces and ungoverned spaces than they are from the great power rivals that posed the gravest threats during the last century. These trends include the continuing use of irregular tactics and strategies by state and non-state adversaries alike; the empowerment of non-state opponents due to a revolution in communications and the proliferation of increasingly advanced weapons; and the growing prospects of internal instability, state failure, and even state collapse in a number of fragile nations due, in part, to worrisome demographic trends.

### **The Rise of Irregular Warfare**

The current trend toward irregular warfare did not begin with the counterinsurgency (COIN) campaigns that the United States has undertaken in Afghanistan and Iraq. In fact, the entire post-Cold War era has been dominated by irregular warfare contingencies. To be sure, the First Gulf War in 1991 and the conventional combat operations phase of the Second Gulf War in 2003 involved major, combined-arms air and ground operations. However, both of these conflicts vividly demonstrated the enormous overmatch that exists between the United States military and those that might choose to

challenge it by waging conventional warfare, as Saddam Hussein's military did not once, but twice.

The U.S. military's performance in irregular warfare campaigns has not met with the same success as it has enjoyed in conventional combat. The difficulties encountered should not have been a surprise. Following the Vietnam War ground our armed forces were optimized for conventional warfare. The catchphrase "No More Vietnams" reflected the military's desire to avoid protracted, ill-defined conflicts. General William DePuy, one of the Army's leading thinkers, viewed the 1973 Middle East War as a godsend of sorts, as it enabled the Army to reorient itself back toward a more familiar, almost comfortable threat to U.S. security: the Soviet Army in Central Europe. The "No More Vietnams" attitude was heartily seconded by the American people and civilian leadership. It spawned the Weinberger and Powell doctrines of the 1980s and the "Exit Strategies" discussions that preoccupied political and military leaders during the deployment of U.S. ground forces in the 1990s. The U.S. military became increasingly structured, trained and equipped to fight short, conventional wars. When this proved unworkable, the intent became to set clear limits on the duration of U.S. force deployments to avoid "another Vietnam."

Unfortunately, as our generals are fond of reminding us, "The enemy gets a vote," and many of our enemies—especially those espousing a violent radical Islamist creed—have "voted" against taking on the United States with conventional forces, opting instead for irregular warfare.

There are three primary reasons for this:

- First, as noted above, the U.S. military has overwhelming dominance in conventional warfare;
- Second, and consequently, even if they wanted to confront the United States conventionally, most of our enemies simply lack the human and material resources to build conventional forces on anything like the scale and level of sophistication required to pose a serious challenge to our military; and
- Third, and perhaps most important, the U.S. military, and other first-rate militaries like Israel's, have proven far less effective in combating enemies waging irregular warfare than those engaged in conventional war.

To buttress their line of thinking, our enemies can cite from an impressive run of successes by non-conventional forces, including the U.S. defeat in Vietnam, and the withdrawals from Lebanon in the 1980s and Somalia in the 1990s; Soviet losses in Afghanistan; and Israel's inability to prevail over the Iranian-backed irregular forces of Hezbollah in the Second Lebanon War. Given these factors, it seems likely that the U.S. military is destined to face adversaries waging irregular conflicts unless these adversaries gain an advantage in conventional warfare (an unlikely occurrence in the

foreseeable future), acquire nuclear weapons, or the U.S. military demonstrates an ability to deal effectively with the irregular warfare challenge.

### **The Diffusion of Information and Military Technology**

Not only should we expect that many existing and prospective opponents will resort to irregular warfare well into the foreseeable future, but we should also assume that they will be able to do so more effectively than in the past. This is due in large part to a revolution in communications that has diffused to the lowest levels of society, as well as the growing availability of advanced weapons and military technologies.

Terrorist groups and insurgent forces have already demonstrated their ability to use mass media and information technology skillfully to communicate, recruit and organize new members, create and disseminate propaganda, and share “lessons learned” from their efforts. Moreover, the diffusion of advanced military technology (such as rockets and missiles, precision-guided munitions, advanced explosive charges, etc.) is significantly enhancing the capabilities of irregular forces, a trend that is likely to continue for some time. Perhaps most worrisome are the efforts of groups such as al Qaeda and the The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) to acquire weapons of mass destruction.

### **Demographic Trends and Instability in the Developing World**

While the proximate causes of disorder are likely to be the deliberate actions of terrorist groups, insurgent forces or rogue nations, the underlying causes of instability can often be found elsewhere, for example in demographics. At present, many nations in the developing world are at risk of experiencing increased instability due in part to one or more demographic trends.

One such trend has been termed the “youth bulge.” The fertility rates in developed states, to include the United States and its traditional allies in Australia, Canada, Europe, Japan, and South Korea, have been declining for some time and are now quite low. Along with the increased longevity characteristic of most developed nations, these low birth rates have led to rapidly aging populations. By contrast, many nations in the developing world have high fertility rates that have only recently begun to decline. As a result, young adults make up an unusually large portion of these populations. Youth bulges are heavily concentrated in sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East—an area stretching from Morocco to India. The other main high concentration of youth population runs from Mexico, through Central America, and along South America’s northwest coast.

What is the strategic significance of these youth bulges? A disproportionately youthful population, especially when combined with high levels of unemployment and increased urbanization, tends to give rise to higher levels of instability in comparison with societies not experiencing youth bulges. In fact, a number of studies have demonstrated that nations

experiencing youth bulges are far more likely to suffer civil conflict than those that are not.<sup>3</sup> The reasons for this are relatively straightforward. In societies where the economy cannot absorb large numbers of new workers, frustration often ensues. Unable to find work or life stability, young men in particular often feel alienated from society. In countries with urban populations, the incidence of these men forming associations based on their common hostility toward society increases. Furthermore, their generally low level of education contributes to making them easy prey for radical elements looking to exploit their anger.

Consider, for example, the case of Nigeria. Despite its potential wealth from its rich oil resources, Nigeria's demographic profile remains in a classical pyramid shape with an enormous youth base narrowing to a small percentage of elderly at the top. Specifically, an astonishing 44 percent of Nigeria's population is under the age of 15. When combined with rampant poverty, little to no public infrastructure in many parts of the country, an uneducated population, and endemic government incompetence and corruption, Nigeria is a prime candidate for state failure.

Sex ratios present another demographic trend of concern. Worldwide, the ratio between boys and girls has historically stood at roughly 103-105:100. That is, for every 100 girl births, between 103-105 boys are born. In parts of Asia and the Middle East this balance has been disrupted for a number of years. In China, for example, the male-female birth ratios have climbed from 109 males per 100 females in 1982, to 116 in 1995, to roughly 120 in 2000.<sup>4</sup> The reasons for this deviation include the enduring cultural preference for sons, low or sub-replacement fertility (due in part to Beijing's "one child" policy), and the general availability of gender-based abortion.

How much does this surplus of males matter? Some argue that as the male demographic increases, and as males enter the 15-34 age range, they have the potential to cause considerable internal instability. This age group is known to be responsible for the preponderance of violence in societies; moreover, the majority of this group's acts of violence are perpetrated by unattached males. If this is true, then parts of Asia and the Arab world could be entering a particularly long and tense period.<sup>5</sup>

A third demographic factor likely to contribute to disorder and instability is the HIV/AIDS epidemic. At present, this epidemic is largely concentrated in Sub-Saharan Africa, where over two-thirds of the planet's estimated 30.6 million infected adults (aged 15-49) reside. Correspondingly, this region

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<sup>3</sup> Richard P. Cincotta, Robert Engelman, Daniele Anastasion, *The Security Demographic* (Washington, DC: Population Action International, 2003), p. 48; and Henrik Urdal, "A Clash of Generations? Youth Bulges and Political Violence," *International Studies Quarterly*, 50 (2006), p. 617.

<sup>4</sup> Nicholas Eberstadt, "Four Surprises in Global Demography," *Orbis*, Fall 2004.

<sup>5</sup> Valerie M. Hudson and Andrea Den Boer, "A Surplus of Men, A Deficit of Peace," *International Security*, Spring 2002, pp. 5-38.

accounted for 1.6 million of the estimated 1.9-2.4 million adult and child deaths worldwide from the disease in 2007.<sup>6</sup> The most severe outbreaks are in Botswana, Zimbabwe, Swaziland, Lesotho, Namibia, Zambia and South Africa. Over 20 percent of these countries' populations are infected with HIV, and each country is losing between 10 and 18 percent of its working-age population every five years.<sup>7</sup> The result is a downward spiral in which economic growth is difficult to sustain and pressures on the government purse—to generate new skilled labor, treat those suffering from the disease, and care for children left orphaned—threaten to destabilize the already fragile regimes that characterize the region. Should this eventuality be realized, the international community may be faced with a humanitarian crisis on a scale never before seen.

Because of the prevalence of these three worrisome trends and the high probability that they will continue to escalate in the foreseeable future, they must be considered significant contributing factors to an increasingly disordered world. In other words, these demographic trends have the potential to cause a great deal of instability in the years to come, possibly in regions (like the Middle East) or nations (like Nigeria) where the United States has significant strategic and economic interests. Moreover, the possibility of state failure or state collapse—whether due to demographic trends alone or in concert with other factors—magnifies the problems discussed above, as irregular forces could benefit from these developments by gaining new sanctuaries and recruits to augment their strength.

## **IMPLICATIONS FOR THE UNITED STATES MILITARY**

Given this partial assessment of the future security environment, what implications can be drawn for the U.S. military on the value of cultural awareness and language training? Perhaps the most important, overarching observation is that, as noted by Secretary Gates, irregular conflicts stand to be far more common in the years ahead than conventional wars; this being the case, the need for cultural knowledge and language skills within the U. S. armed forces becomes increasingly clear.

Before discussing recommendations to this effect, however, it is important to note that the rising prevalence of irregular warfare is likely to affect the ground forces—the Army and the Marine Corps—disproportionately, as they will be the Services that are most involved in conducting counterinsurgency and stability operations, and advising and training indigenous forces. The Navy certainly has a significant, albeit limited, role to play, both in terms of building partner capacity and conducting operations in littoral areas. Of the four Services, the role of the Air Force, while still important, is likely to be comparatively modest. That being the case, efforts to increase cultural awareness and language training should focus primarily, but not exclusively, on the ground forces and to a lesser extent the Navy.

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<sup>6</sup> UN AIDS 2007 estimates, accessed at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/AIDS\\_pandemic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/AIDS_pandemic), on April 17, 2008.

<sup>7</sup> Richard P. Cincotta, Robert Engelman, and Daniele Anastasion, *The Security Demographic* (Washington, DC: Population Action International, 2003), p. 63.

## **Retain and Improve the Military's Ability to Conduct COIN Operations**

Given the experience of the past six-plus years, in addition to the previously-discussed trends that are likely to shape the future security environment, it seems only prudent to make sure that the U.S. military remains capable of successfully executing counterinsurgency operations and other forms of irregular warfare.<sup>8</sup> The need to do so provides one of the most important reasons for the Services to emphasize cultural awareness and language training. As the authors of the Army's recently published counterinsurgency field manual argue:

Successful conduct of COIN operations depends on thoroughly understanding the society and culture within which they are being conducted...Thus, effective COIN operations require a greater emphasis on certain skills, such as language and cultural understanding, than does conventional warfare. The interconnected, politico-military nature of insurgency and COIN requires immersion in the people and their lives to achieve victory.<sup>9</sup>

## **Emphasize Building Partner Capacity as a Core Military Mission**

Counterinsurgency operations are manpower-intensive and often take a decade or more to achieve their intended goals. The American public, however, prefers wars to be short, decisive, and successful, while it tends to tolerate protracted engagements only if the perceived stakes are high and sufficient progress toward victory is being made. The prospects of an increasingly disordered world suggest that the number of terrorist groups, insurgent forces, and similar threats could multiply in the years to come. These factors, when taken together, and in conjunction with the size limitations associated with a volunteer military, provide a strong argument in favor a U.S. strategy that emphasizes "building partner capacity"—training and equipping indigenous military forces in countries threatened by radical elements, and the forces of our allies and partners. This line of thought acknowledges America's finite resources, manpower limitations, and political constraints, and promotes cooperation with allies and partners to supply the forces required for sustained irregular operations. Because building partner capacity requires U.S. forces to work closely with host nation forces or other indigenous groups, cultural awareness and language skills will be increasingly valuable in the years to come.

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<sup>8</sup> Irregular warfare comprises insurgency; counterinsurgency (COIN); unconventional warfare (UW); terrorism ; counterterrorism (CT); foreign internal defense (FID); stabilization, security, transition, and reconstruction (SSTR) operations; strategic communications; psychological operations (PSYOP); information operations (IO); civil-military operations (CMO); intelligence and counterintelligence activities; transnational criminal activities, including narco-trafficking, illicit arms dealing, and illegal financial transactions, that support or sustain IW; and law enforcement activities focused on countering irregular adversaries Briefing, US Special Operations Command, SOKF-J9 Futures Directorate, "Irregular Warfare JOC," January 2007. Accessed at [www.dtic.mil/futurejointwarfare/strategic/cdeday1\\_iwjoc.ppt](http://www.dtic.mil/futurejointwarfare/strategic/cdeday1_iwjoc.ppt) on July 5, 2008.

<sup>9</sup> U.S. Army Field Manual 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*, pp. 22-23.

### **Nontraditional Tasks Will Become “Conventional”**

To the extent that the U.S. military will increasingly be expected to engage in irregular warfare operations, U.S. service men and women will also be expected to perform tasks that have traditionally been considered outside the domain of conventional combat operations, but which are vital in these types of environments. As Secretary Gates noted, this may include reviving essential services, rebuilding public infrastructure, promoting good governance, and all of the various tasks that fall within those broad categories. This in turn suggests that the military must be prepared to operate “among the people” much more than in the past. Language training and cultural awareness will therefore be critical enabling capabilities.

### **General Purpose Forces Must Become More “SOF-Like”**

Insofar as special operations forces are distinguished in part by their linguistic skills and knowledge of specific regions or nations, the need to increase the language skills and cultural awareness of the rest of the military suggest that they must, in a sense, become more “SOF-like.”

This will especially be the case if general purpose forces increasingly take on the mission of building partner capacity—training and advising indigenous forces—so that SOF can focus more of their time and effort on direct action missions, which remain a significant aspect of counterinsurgency operations and the broader war on terrorism.

To summarize, as the security environment changes, the U.S. military must adapt as well. Many of the changes the Army and Marine Corps are undertaking, and should continue to pursue, highlight the importance of language training and cultural awareness. Moreover, because the trends that are now shaping the security environment are likely to persist for some time, the value of increased instruction in these areas will likely only grow over time.

### **TRADEOFFS**

If the military is to expand its focus on cultural awareness and language training, what tradeoffs will it have to make, both in terms of time and resources? While specific recommendations are beyond the scope of my testimony today, I would like to suggest that the military’s continuing relatively high emphasis on conventional operations is to some extent misplaced, and thus provides an area where resources and personnel might be divested, with relatively minimal risk to the nation’s security, in order to support language and cultural training, as well as other “soft” skills that are particularly useful in irregular warfare.

At present, the ground forces are increasing their active end-strength by 92,000 troops—with 65,000 going to the Army and the remainder to the Marines. The Army plans to utilize the additional soldiers to create six brigade combat teams (and associated combat support and combat service support elements) in addition to the 42 currently planned, for a total of 48. The Marine Corps plans to use their end strength increase to stand up a regimental combat

team to round out their three division-wing teams.<sup>10</sup> Although these forces are advertised as being “full-spectrum” capable, both moves suggest that the additional U.S. ground forces will be trained and equipped primarily for conventional, high-intensity ground combat operations. Is this the best use of these additional forces? If experience since the end of the Cold War is any indication, the answer is: not likely.

In response to proposals that ground forces specialize to a greater degree in irregular warfare, the Army and Marine Corps are quick to note that, given the potential stakes and effects of major combat operations (MCOs), they cannot ignore conventional war contingencies. However, this argument, while valid, carries far less weight than it did during the period following Vietnam, when Soviet armies posed a threat that far exceeded that of any rivals pursuing irregular warfare. The evidence strongly suggests that no one wants to play the role of Saddam Hussein’s Republican Guard, either now or in the foreseeable future. One searches in vain through the pages of military journals to find stories of countries assembling tank armies to oppose us. Truth be told, the two countries most often cited by our military leaders as opposing the United States in major combat operations involving large-scale conventional forces—North Korea and Iran—lack even a Republican Guard mechanized force, let alone a Soviet tank army.

As members of this subcommittee well know, the threat from North Korea stems from its budding nuclear arsenal, ballistic missiles, special operations forces and artillery (perhaps armed with chemical or biological agents) positioned in caves and mountains near the demilitarized zone (DMZ). Moreover, the mountainous DMZ itself is perhaps the most heavily fortified territory in the world, with both flanks anchored on the ocean. The South Koreans have both the incentive and the resources (a population twice that of the North and an economy dozens of times greater) to field ground forces capable of blocking any attempt by North Korean forces to advance south—a concept Pyongyang seems ill-disposed to execute in any event.

Iran, having witnessed first-hand the American military’s quick victory over Saddam Hussein’s conventionally armed and organized militaries, and the subsequent difficulties that same military faced when confronted with irregular operations, would not likely be attracted to Saddam’s method of challenging the U.S. Moreover, it is the Iranians who have armed and trained groups like Hezbollah and Hamas, and who are providing support for Iraqi irregular forces like the Mahdi Army. Discussions of Iranian military power center on Tehran’s quest for weapons of mass destruction, its terrorist networks, and its ability to close the Strait of Hormuz to shipping traffic by developing anti-access/area-denial capabilities. Were the U.S. military to confront Iran in a major combat operation—now or a decade from now—

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<sup>10</sup> “DoD News Briefing with Under Secretary of Defense David Chu, LTG Stephen Speakes, and LTG Emerson Gardner from the Pentagon,” US Department of Defense Transcript, January 19, 2007, available at <http://www.defenselink.mil/transcripts/transcript.aspx?transcriptid=3871>.

Tehran's conventional forces would almost certainly be a secondary consideration.

Put another way, given the overwhelming success of our ground forces in conventional warfare operations, and the shift of rival militaries and nonstate entities toward irregular warfare, orienting 48 active Army brigades, 28 National Guard brigades, and three Marine Corps divisions primarily on conventional warfare operations would appear to reflect a desire to prepare for the kinds of challenges we would prefer to confront, rather than those we will most likely encounter.

To be sure, our ground forces must remain dominant in conventional (or what the 2006 QDR calls "traditional") operations. However, it does not follow that the Army and Marine Corps must be principally, or even primarily, devoted to this task. Consider that, thanks to the gains in effectiveness realized by our armed forces, improvements in their ability to fight as a joint force, and the U.S. military's enormous advantages in advanced capabilities (e.g., precision munitions; C4ISR), only one heavy Army division was needed to defeat the Iraqi army in the Second Gulf War.<sup>11</sup>

Simply stated, while the Army and Marine Corps have clearly placed an increased emphasis on irregular warfare capabilities, to include language and cultural training, they nevertheless remain predominantly focused on conventional combat operations. Should it be necessary to make tradeoffs in order to support enhanced cultural awareness, language training, or other skills that are particularly crucial to winning an irregular warfare campaign, drawing resources away from conventional capabilities is an option that should be seriously considered.

## **SUMMARY**

In an era dominated by irregular warfare challenges, the United States military is more likely to undertake missions requiring irregular warfare capabilities rather than traditional large-scale ground combat operations. A key component of military readiness will be the ability to understand the cultures of, and communicate with, people from many regions of the world. Increased language and culture training will ultimately prove to be a powerful weapon in the American military's arsenal. As the development of institutional language and cultural expertise requires significant time as well as resources, I commend the committee for raising awareness on this important issue and encourage it to continue exercising its oversight responsibilities by supporting the military's efforts to create sufficient language and cultural awareness capacity to meet both existing contingencies and those that are likely to emerge in the coming years.

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<sup>11</sup> One Marine division was also involved in the major combat operation, as was the Army's 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division (Air Assault) along with some brigade-sized maneuver elements.

**STATEMENT OF:  
DR. MONTGOMERY MCFATE, JD, PhD  
BEFORE THE  
HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE, OVERSIGHT AND INVESTIGATIONS  
SUBCOMMITTEE**

**UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
110<sup>TH</sup> CONGRESS, 2<sup>ND</sup> SESSION  
HEARINGS ON  
THE IMPORTANCE OF SOCIO-CULTURAL KNOWLEDGE TO THE US MILITARY  
9 July 2008**

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ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE**

## Introduction

Mr. Chairman and Ranking Members of the Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee of the House Armed Services Committee, thank you for this opportunity to testify on the importance of socio-cultural knowledge to US military personnel in Iraq and Afghanistan. I am appearing today in my personal capacity as a cultural anthropologist vice my official capacity as the senior social science adviser to the US Army's Human Terrain System (HTS). As such, my comments should be construed only as my own conclusions and not official Department of Defense or US Army policy.

I have spent the majority of my professional career trying to understand the relevance of cultural knowledge to the military, and seeking ways to deliver that information. Socio-cultural knowledge is a critical enabler for Stability Operations and irregular warfare. Stability and reconstruction operations pose a tremendous challenge to US Government personnel because they require different skills, knowledge, training, and coordination than those tasks commonly required by major combat operations. At a minimum, the short-term tasks include providing security to a local population, restoring essential services, and addressing immediate humanitarian needs. The long-term tasks include encouraging a viable economy, developing the rule of law, promoting democratic institutions, and assisting in the creation of a robust civil society.

Unlike major combat operations, stability and reconstruction operations must be conducted among, and with the support of, the indigenous civilian population. Working effectively with local civilians in order to rebuild a country requires knowledge of how the

society is organized, who has power, what their values and beliefs are, and how they interpret their own history, among other things.

Experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan over the past few years have demonstrated the benefits of having this knowledge, and the drawbacks of not having it in terms of lives, money and mission success. I want to provide you with a short, simple example from one of our Human Terrain Teams (HTT) in Iraq that shows what a difference a little cultural knowledge makes:

In October 2007, two members of an HTT provided support to a maneuver company conducting an operation in a small rural village, known to be an area in which al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) operates. During the operation, an elderly Muslim man was wrongly detained. The HTT facilitated his release and coached the company commander on how to remedy the insult by offering a public apology in front of witnesses from his village. On the day following the release of the elderly man, a sheikh from a local tribe came to the patrol base and said that the "respectful" nature of the current operation (and the release of the elderly man who turned out to be his uncle) had prompted him to seek Coalition assistance in securing his village from AQI. He offered to provide over 100 local fighters to oppose AQI, and requested air to ground recognition to prevent fratricide. At the conclusion of the meeting as a gesture of good will, the sheikh told the company commander and the HTT the specific location of a deeply buried IED in front of the mosque and the location of five other IEDs. In the words of the company commander: "The combination of cultural sensitivity and the

assistance of HTT on the mission to ... was the reason for our success. If I had the opportunity I'd definitely use them again."

A critical question is how US forces should acquire or access this knowledge. There are multiple possible means, to include: education, training, advisors, and databases. An additional question concerns the optimal amount of socio-cultural knowledge that US military personnel should have, and the trade-offs in terms of time, money, and manpower that acquiring this knowledge entails. After all, making every soldier and marine into a social scientist is neither feasible nor desirable.

Professional military education (PME) is a long-term solution to ensuring that the US military has the requisite level of knowledge about foreign cultures and societies. Lessons learned, insight gained, and skills acquired in a classroom influence how problems are conceived, solutions are developed, and decisions made in subsequent professional positions. Most professional military education institutions in the US face a number of challenges in meeting this need, to include: lack of qualitative social sciences within curricula; inadequate attention to developing inter-cultural and cognitive skills; limited opportunity for civilian graduate education; few social scientists on staff and limited research opportunities for students.

Recognizing that socio-cultural knowledge has improved the effectiveness of operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, all branches of the US military have begun cultural pre-deployment training programs. In addition, the Combat Training Centers have developed scenario-based role-player training simulating operational conditions in Iraq and Afghanistan. Creating training programs were initially a "bottom-up" movement in response to lessons learned, rather than a "top down" push resulting from official DoD

requirements. As a result of this process, cultural training varies widely in content, structure, and time allotted. However, the Army and other military services are now developing comprehensive cultural and language strategies

Collecting socio-cultural information in a computerized database is another means to provide US forces with information about the local population in their area of operations. This is not a new idea: such a cross-cultural database was designed and built in the 1940s by the US military to prepare for war in the Pacific. However, when the Operation Iraqi Freedom began, there was no such ready-made repository for the collective knowledge about a given local area: each brigade stored information differently in its own local files, and transferred that information haphazardly to successor units. Because brigades had no system to store, sort, organize, or effectively transfer this information, much of it was lost during transfer of authority between units.

Recognizing this issue, the DoD made an effort to develop such a database in 2004, known as the Cultural Preparation of the Environment. Subsequently, in field-testing this database, we discovered that data needed to be geospatially referenced; and commanders and their staffs had little time available to use such a tool and little inclination to do so. What commanders actually wanted was an advisory staff element that would be attached 24/7 to the brigade, who could develop, use, and maintain such a database. Thus, the Army's HTS includes both a database, called the Mapping Human Terrain Tool Kit (MAP HT), and teams of advisers.

Operating forces can also acquire the requisite knowledge about the local population through the use of cultural advisers. At the present time, the US Army's HTS is probably the best-known example of an adviser program. The HTS mission is to

provide commanders in the field with relevant socio-cultural understanding in order to assist them in developing courses of action that are better harmonized with the interests of the local population, and which entail less kinetic force. This mission is achieved through 5-8 person teams of mixed military reservist and civilian personnel who are attached on orders to the military unit they support. The team does not rotate out with the brigade at the end of their tour, but remains in place. For example, the HTT in Taji will remain in Taji as long as US forces do. Individual team members are rotated out on a staggered basis, ensuring the continuity of socio-cultural knowledge and enabling each brigade to start their tour at a higher place on the learning curve. In addition, HTS supports the teams through a Reach-back Research Center and a network of subject matter experts, who are able to conduct complex research and analysis in support of a commander's requirements.

Currently, there are eight HTTs attached to brigade combat teams in Iraq and three in Afghanistan. By the end of September 2008, there will be a total of 24 teams deployed. In FY09, two additional teams will also be deployed.

Solutions to the military's immediate socio-cultural knowledge requirement have been ad hoc, bottom up, and developed by the respective military services in response to their own perceived needs.

For any of these solutions to be sustainable beyond the immediate conflicts, they should be rationalized, coordinated, and institutionalized. Otherwise, the capabilities will be lost and will have to be rebuilt yet again. After WWII, for example, much of the foreign governance and administration capacity within the US military was dismantled.

Similarly, after the Vietnam War, the institutional capacity of the US government to conduct stability operations was lost, leaving the US with little institutional memory about how to meet cultural knowledge requirements at the present time.

Statement of  
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*before the*

Committee on Armed Services  
Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigation

United States House of Representatives

July 9, 2008

*on the topic of*

Department of Defense Language and Cultural Awareness Transformation

Chairman Snyder, Congressman Akin and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to discuss the future direction of language and cultural awareness in the United States' military. It is a privilege to be able to contribute. This statement reflects my own assessment and independently conducted research, and not that of my employer.

**The Current Challenge**

The U.S. military confronts particular challenges with respect to cross-cultural awareness. The majority of deployed forces rotate from one distinct linguistic and cultural arena to another with relative frequency. It would be implausible for all regular forces to become area or linguistic experts in one region, let alone several.

Second, warfighters lack the luxury of time to reflect on, or learn organically from, their surroundings. They may find themselves thrust into situations in which they must make decisions rapidly, with life-and-death impact.

To make matters more complex, members of the 21<sup>st</sup> century military are likely to find themselves in situations other than war, and engaged with civilians. Humanitarian assistance, counterterrorism or counterinsurgency support, peacekeeping and other operations will be successfully achieved by way of negotiation, suasion and collaboration more than they will sheer force.

These conditions suggest a paradox. The military at all levels has a vital need for cultural awareness. Yet these same conditions constrain the practical ability of many military members to acquire it.

Moreover, the current turn of events arguably has distorted the path the DoD may take to forge a long-term cultural awareness strategy. I would suggest that a preoccupation with the September 11, 2001 attacks as a point of historic departure and the subsequent focus on Islamic societies has led to a habit of confusing *knowledge of particular cultures* (e.g. Afghan and Iraqi) with *cultural awareness* in a more comprehensive sense. This habit can be found within and beyond the military.

The 2001 Al Qaeda attacks did not compel the need for a culturally aware military. Rather, they reflected trends in evidence since the end of the Cold War, including globalization and the revolution in communications technology.

The Soviet collapse permitted deferred ethnic-nationalist agendas and regional conflicts to emerge. The globalization of markets and media promoted new, hybrid forms of culture and community, both transnational and local. And a communications revolution ensured rapid, dynamic shifts within cultures. Transcultural networked communities with fluid boundaries emerged. These are the conditions that in combination have created the need for a more culturally aware military. In such circumstances, the warfighter armed solely with demographic facts or customary behaviors is at best minimally prepared to evaluate his surroundings.

It is worth briefly emphasizing that globalization impacts every society. This is so even if to the American eye a community appears to be barely on the brink of modernity, and even if its own inhabitants proclaim their pure traditionalism.

The U.S. expectation that the globe's inhabitants live in two separate worlds dominates the military mindset, and affects its approach to cultural awareness. In the 'two worlds' mindset, Western democracies are modern, high-tech, secularized, and rational. Adversaries in the Middle East, as well as friends, come from and have access to a more slowly modernizing, religious, traditional and potentially less rational world. We use bank transfers; they use *hawalas*, for example. To accommodate this worldview, the military has often approached cultural awareness as consisting of knowledge about that second world, or of traditional societies

This 'two worlds' model has led to substantial cultural miscalculation, however. By way of example, consider the extended confusion over how Usama bin Laden could appropriate both modern and anachronistic symbols and strategies to suit his purposes. Substantial time and energy could have been saved by understanding at the outset that these appropriations do not present bin Laden, nor his adherents, nor the societies they function in, with much of a paradox.

For the purposes of cultural awareness, it would be more effective to understand that we all live in the same world. At the strategic level, we will grasp that our predisposition to divide the world into two reflects our own cultural habit of mind.

At the ground level, these mindsets matter. A soldier seeking to make sense of an unfamiliar situation will rely on her own cultural habits. A soldier looking over a village landscape, whose inhabitants wear what she views as old-fashioned or traditional clothing, may make many other assumptions about what these inhabitants know and don't know, and how they function. The same can be said of a soldier looking out over a London street.

The military has tended to define "cultural awareness" as 'facts about other cultures, especially those that appear on their face to be least familiar.' However, because regular forces cannot be expected to accumulate nor process nearly enough information to make this definition useful, another framework is required.

### **Resolving the Challenge: Cultural Awareness an Element of Force Transformation**

This Subcommittee has already revised the dominant paradigm by incorporating cultural and linguistic awareness into the broader concept of Force Transformation. The Transformation framework offers a productive conceptual vehicle for the defense community to elaborate what it means to have a culturally aware military. This strategic elaboration may then flow into practical steps in the education and training of the military.

The absence of cultural and linguistic awareness from even recent statements on transformation indicates that there is work to be done. The 2003 document, *Military Transformation*, calls for "processes to enable innovation and adaptability," arguing that, "if we do not transform, our enemies will surely find new ways to attack us." Despite the claim that "no aspect of defense should be left untouched if we are to maintain a competitive advantage in the information age," the cultural aspect of defense is left untouched.<sup>1</sup>

As a result, existing cultural training processes and products, whatever their specific uses, reflect an increasingly obsolete understanding of the nature and role of the military. The use of wireless technology, voice recognition software, gaming technology, or other information age technologies does not indicate a transformed notion of cultural awareness. They simply transport information about specific cultures to their audiences more speedily and potentially more effectively. Recruiting native speakers from heritage communities, while it also has uses, also does not indicate a military moving toward what the Army calls Cultural Proficiency.<sup>2</sup> (Multilingual military members do not come with

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<sup>1</sup> United States Department of Defense, *Military Transformation: A Strategic Approach* (Washington DC: Office of the Secretary of Defense), Fall 2003.

<sup>2</sup> United States Department of the Army, *2008 Army Posture Statement Information Papers: Cultural and Foreign Language Capabilities*. Available online at:

fewer biases, or with less need to be trained in cultural awareness, than English speaking members).

Transformation's key concepts align well with those of cultural awareness. The DoD's definition of transformation as "a process that shapes the changing nature of military competition and cooperation through new combinations of concepts, capabilities, people and organizations . . ." <sup>3</sup> will easily incorporate a parallel process to situate the changing role of cultural interaction in military endeavors, and to prepare for it through new combinations of concepts, capabilities, people and organizations.

The directive to "enable innovation and adaptability" is perfectly attuned with a 21<sup>st</sup> century cultural awareness paradigm. In this case, however, it is people—members of the military, from regular forces to their top leadership—who must be enabled to innovate and adapt. To that end, a new paradigm will correspond to the operational landscape, where human communities—cultures—are also innovating and adapting to new technological, social, material and other realities of this millennium. Culture, in a new paradigm, will be seen as an element of human interaction, and less so as only inert terrain to be observed from afar.

Finally, transformation will also offer a framework for strategizing relevant changes in the organizational culture within the U.S. military. Indeed, cultural awareness cannot be conceived without engaging its key ingredient, human individuals and communities. The military community is the starting point for cultural awareness.

In the transformation paradigm, although a Marine may be called on to deploy in three different arenas in as many years, he will recognize in all three that he must be watchful for his own and his interlocutors' habits of interaction. He will have enough elementary knowledge and language to enter into interactions, and he will have had training that gives him the cognitive tools to innovate, adapt and learn more as his interactions deepen. He will not be allowed by a responsible leadership to deploy culturally unarmed.

### **Action Items en Route to a Culturally and Linguistically Aware Military**

Circumstances do not permit the luxury of working out a cultural and linguistic transformation strategy, and then implementing it. However, it is likely to be counterproductive and costly in terms of opportunity to begin to plan next steps without any governing framework. A well-constructed roadmap for next steps could condense and combine strategy and implementation to good effect.

Very loosely, here are some of the practical steps toward cultural and linguistic transformation. Although I have primarily folded foreign language learning into the broader cultural awareness rubric today, it is probable that there are supporting activities related only to the special activity of language acquisition that should be undertaken.

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[http://www.army.mil/aps/08/information\\_papers/transform/Cultural\\_and\\_Foreign\\_Language\\_Capabilities.html](http://www.army.mil/aps/08/information_papers/transform/Cultural_and_Foreign_Language_Capabilities.html).

<sup>3</sup> *Military Transformation: A Strategic Approach*, 2.

- **Develop a cultural and linguistic awareness transformation strategy.** This document will elaborate what is meant by cultural awareness, develop the relationship between cultural awareness and force transformation, and develop a high level strategy for its achievement, in a coordinated way, across the defense community.
- **Conduct a Cultural Awareness Training and Education Audit for Congress.** Resource planning requires a clear picture of the current state of cultural awareness. Cultural and language training and education take place in a variety of settings, through a variety of means. The programs at TRADOC, the USMC Center for Advanced Operational Culture Learning (CAOCL), in the military academies, and elsewhere; the products such as games and informational material produced by or on behalf of the military; and the processes in and outside of the United States should be catalogued and evaluated in order to get a clear picture of the state of cultural awareness training. Courses, products and materials may be scored against the goals of a cultural awareness transformation paradigm; they may also be evaluated on their own terms.
- **Find a home base for cultural awareness and linguistic transformation planning, or create room for one within existing organizational structures.** If an existing organization is selected to house and direct next steps, it should be open to the idea of cultural awareness as an element of Force Transformation. It may be useful to develop a network or academic partnership to contribute to planning and programs. A team from a range of disciplines may be useful to consult. At the minimum, the social sciences and the humanities, various disciplines engaging pedagogy, including psychology, and cross-cultural management and organizational behavior will prove useful.
- **Design and test a requisite first "layer" of cultural awareness learning that will be required of all military members in the future.** In the near future, all military members should be trained in cultural awareness as a portable skill as a prerequisite for learning about any particular culture. It will be useful to plan when and where in the larger cycle of education and training this layer will be inserted, and whether and how it will differ for different career tracks within the military. It may also be useful to contemplate a similar course for civilians who will be working alongside the military.

Finally, it may be kept in mind that the creation of a culturally aware military is a function of a broader strategic communication strategy for the U.S. government as a whole. Culturally aware forces will both reflect and model the kind of engagement, in speech and action, that the U.S. intends to have with the rest of the world through its diplomatic, economic and cultural engagements. Thank you again for this opportunity.