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MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

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**TITLE: MARINE CORPS FOREIGN LANGUAGE CAPABILITIES: STRATEGIES TO  
MITIGATE CAPABILITY GAPS AND IMPROVE MISSION SUCCESS**

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT  
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF  
MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

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## Preface

Understanding how the Marine Corps, and the broader Department of Defense (DoD), develops its foreign language capabilities is a complex endeavor, and one which has been met with limited success. Foreign language capabilities require inordinate amounts of time to attain, and the wide diversity of languages which the force requires create an incredibly complicated problem, with no single, simple answer. The DoD, and therein the Marine Corps, has created a vast array of capability development programs, not the least of which is the central, flagship program centered at the Defense Language Institute. In recent years the DoD, in response to an increasingly chaotic global security environment, has turned to a contractor workforce to satisfy many of its requirements, with dollars spent on contracts outnumbering dollars on developing organic capabilities by a factor of nearly two-to-one. This reliance on contracted language capabilities has its advantages, but its disadvantages as well, and increasing calls for trained Marines result in a fundamental question: In a chaotic operating environment, which language capabilities, and in which amounts, should the Marine Corps produce? The Cold War era of a unitary threat, with its associated requirements for Russian language capabilities, has been supplanted by an uncertain global security environment, with a myriad of state and non-state actors presenting complex threats, and state fragility creating demand for security cooperation and stabilization operations to restore peace and order.

Foremost I would like to thank Dr. Lauren MacKenzie, Dr. Bill Gordon, and Lieutenant Colonel Owen Nucci for their guidance which helped me take on an academic effort as ambitious as this paper represents. Tremendous thanks go to Dr. Matthew Slater, who has helped me these past few years on Marine Corps capability development efforts and has really helped me frame my thinking on language, culture, and regional expertise education and training. I further thank Dr. Lon Strauss for pointing me broadening the scope of my vision to understand how the military creates forces in the face of war. Thanks also go to Dr. Donald Bishop for offering his perspectives and experiences on how language capability gaps have affected the national strategic goals, and, in particular, U.S. information operations. Mr. Scott Brokaw provided tremendous insight into the development of DoD and Joint Staff policies and force management mechanisms that are germane to this paper. I greatly appreciate Master Sergeant Ann Sagebiel for providing me with important historical research on Marine Corps program efforts; the materials she provided were critical to understanding the past of language capability development efforts. I also thank Master Sergeant Vincent Quinteros and Staff Sergeant Chris Davis for helping me to track down critical DoD and Marine Corps directives and policies, which were a key part of this paper's central focus. Finally, my greatest thanks go to Mr. Phillip Chudoba and Mr. Steven Ramp; their leadership and encouragement helped me take on this ambitious project, one which only marks the beginning of renewed efforts to solve this critical problem set.

Mr. John R. Durish

## Executive Summary

**Title:** Marine Corps Foreign Language Capabilities: Strategies to Mitigate Capability Gaps and Improve Mission Success

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**Thesis:** The complexities of the current and future global security environment is overwhelming the Marine Corps' ability to adequately account for foreign language capabilities necessary to support operational requirements. To mitigate future risk, the Marine Corps must conduct a comprehensive review of its Foreign Language Program in order to better match current programmatic efforts with extant requirements.

**Discussion:** The Marine Corps has a rich history of developing foreign language capabilities, with efforts before and during World War II, the Vietnam War, and the more recent conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan serving as key examples of capability development successes and failures. Understanding how the Marine Corps gets ahead of its requirements, and delivers capabilities in a timely and efficient manner, is best viewed through the lens of the external and internal environments of the force, and what factors contribute to and undermine its success.

**Conclusion:** The Marine Corps lacks an effective analytic process to support the development of capabilities which must satisfy a wide range of requirements. The chaos of the current and future operating environment will make it difficult to determine which capabilities should be developed when, and the current organization of language program efforts should be examined to determine if they are best postured to support Marine Corps mission requirements.

## **Introduction**

In 1924 General John A. Lejeune directed all Marine officers to learn Spanish and French, to enable expeditionary operations within the Western hemisphere.<sup>1</sup> He understood that the United States was on the cusp of becoming a global power and took many steps to ensure the Marine Corps would be able to support the nation's strategic goals. Nearly a century later, the nation's expeditionary force has executed operations on every continent, bringing Marines into contact with all manner of non-English speaking local populations. In recent years, Marine Corps strategic guidance has continued to stress the importance of language capabilities, along with cultural and regional knowledge, to ensure that the Marine Air Ground Task Force (MAGTF) can accomplish its missions. The Marine Operating Concept (MOC) captures the need to prepare Marines for the complex battlefields of the immediate and near future, ensuring that they understand the "human dynamics of the battlespace," and calls for improvements in education and training programs to "ensure Marines gain and maintain their language, regional expertise and culture (LREC) capabilities."<sup>2</sup> Language capabilities support a wide range of requirements across the range of military operations, from helping to ensure parity with peer and near-peer adversaries in conflict, to supporting a myriad of humanitarian and security cooperation related mission essential tasks. These capabilities, however, require inordinate amounts of time to create, and the wide diversity of languages which the force requires create an incredibly complicated problem, with no single, simple answer. Fortunately the Marine Corps does have significant resources in the form of DoD and Service programs that can develop LREC capabilities, with organic Marine Corps' programs focusing on cross cultural competencies, or "the ability to quickly and accurately comprehend and effectively interact cross-culturally."<sup>3</sup> The Marine Corps, however, has not fully succeeded in developing language capabilities to communicate

directly with foreign nationals or be fully operable in the information environment. In acknowledging that all skill sets – language, culture, and regional capabilities – are crucial to mission accomplishment, the Marine Corps must assess how well it creates these capabilities. It is the focus of this paper to better understand why the Marine Corps has historically failed to develop and sustain effective language capabilities.

There are three pertinent numbers which help frame the scale of this problem: The Marine Corps must plan for the possibility of operations in almost any of over 190 countries, inhabited by over seven billion humans, speaking over six thousand languages. These factors, and many others, have bedeviled the Marine Corps as it attempts to identify just which language capabilities it will need, when it will need them, and how many it will need. This problem will be exacerbated by the decreased lead times prior to operations, and the variance of regions in which conflict may occur. The complex problems confronting efforts to create foreign language capabilities do not lend themselves to a single solution, and the aim of this paper is to explore why the Marine Corps historically failed to develop, sustain, implement effective language capabilities, and provide recommendations to correct this issue. This is a problem with which all parts of the U.S. military have struggled, but perhaps it is most telling in the Marine Corps given its expeditionary nature.

***The complexities of the current and future global security environment is overwhelming the Marine Corps' ability to adequately account for foreign language capabilities necessary to support operational requirements.*** To mitigate future risk, the Marine Corps must conduct a comprehensive review of its methodologies to develop foreign language capabilities, in order to better match current programmatic efforts with extant requirements. This analysis aims to generate recommendations to for addressing this problem through a limited

usage of the Joint Chiefs of Staff familiar and comprehensive "DOTMPLF-P" methodology, assessing the most critical aspects of the programs' domains: Doctrine, Organization, Training, Materiel, Leadership & Education, Personnel, Facilities, and Policy.

To better understand these challenges, this paper will analyze the history of efforts to develop language capabilities in response to conflict, the external and internal environment of the Marine Corps and the DoD writ large, and some areas of improvement which can help to mitigate current and future shortfalls. As good as the Marine Corps may get at generating solutions to this problem, it is critical to understand the difficulties in figuring out exactly what the next conflict will require. General Gray, the 29th Commandant of the Marine Corps, perhaps put the problem of forecasting requirements most succinctly: "You cannot predict the future, but you can predict trends."<sup>4</sup>

### **The History of Marine Corps Language Capability Development Efforts**

There are three key historical anecdotes which illustrate the issues which the Marine Corp has faced when trying to grow adequate language capabilities to support mission requirements. First is the development of Japanese linguists for the island-hopping campaign during World War II. Just prior to World War II, the Marine Corps had no effective program to create Japanese language capabilities, nor was there a cohesive program within the U.S. military. Second is the development of Vietnamese linguists to support the increased mobilization of U.S. forces beginning in the mid-1960s. Immediately prior to the escalation of conflict in Vietnam, the Marine Corps did have twelve Vietnamese linguists, but this number would prove inadequate to support the scale of operations when the nation fully mobilized. Third is the persistent gaps in language capabilities following the terror attacks of 11 September, 2001, and subsequent and continuing operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. During this so-called "long war" the Marine

Corps, and the DoD writ large, has largely relied upon contracted Arabic, Urdu, and Pashto capabilities vice creating them, spending twenty dollars for contract linguists for every dollar it spends on language training programs for the General Purpose Force (i.e., Marines not service in specialized positions such as intelligence personnel and Foreign Area Officers).

## **World War II**

The issues facing the Marine Corps prior to World War II can be traced back to General Lejeune's era. The guidance which General Lejeune promulgated was quite astute, and necessary, for the times in which he published it. His desire to transform the Marine Corps into a truly expeditionary force would be supported by Spanish language capabilities that would enable operations throughout the Caribbean and South America. French, as the language of many colonies both in the Western Hemisphere and across Asia and Africa, would also allow for a truly global reach. Interestingly, it was also General Lejeune who would send Major Ellis on his incredible journey to prepare the Marine Corps to play a key role in the amphibious campaign to defeat the Japanese navy, as war planners were predicting conflict with that rising empire early in the twentieth century.<sup>5</sup> Unfortunately, executing a plan to create Japanese language capabilities would not occur until much later, and ultimately would occur almost too late to be of good use. Of the Services, it was the Navy's Office of Naval Intelligence (ONI) that was perhaps the most prescient of the need to create language capabilities necessary for their missions during the impending war. Navy intelligence officers had been learning Japanese as early as 1910 at the University of Boulder (they would become famously, in the linguist community, known as "The Boulder Boys"), but by 7 December, 1941, only twelve Japanese linguists were on hand in the U.S. military.<sup>6</sup> Shortly before the attack on Pearl Harbor, planning indeed had begun to grow the capabilities the Marines and other Services would need, but these efforts would be besieged by

an array of serious issues. Foremost were the issues faced by the national and military leadership to mobilize the nation for war. Detailed planning for World War II began as early as the 1930s,<sup>7</sup> but, largely in response to German aggression in Europe, a commitment to provide adequate resources to significantly increase the size of the Armed Forces would not occur until 1939, with the passage of the Fiscal Year 1941 budget.<sup>8</sup> In fact, it was the fluency of President Roosevelt in German which allowed him to make the key decisions which would fund the war planning effort: "On 12 September 1938, as the Czechoslovakian crisis intensified, Roosevelt listened to a radio broadcast of Hitler ranting at a Nuremberg party rally. The president was fluent in German and concluded that war was imminent."<sup>9</sup>

Besides the language learning at Boulder, Colorado, there are two key training efforts which best describe broader U.S. military and Marine Corps specific efforts to create the necessary language capabilities to defeat the Japanese. The precursor to the Defense Language Institute began humbly with a small class of students at the Presidio of San Francisco, on 1 November, 1941,<sup>10</sup> barely a month before the attacks at Pearl Harbor. It is important to note the incredibly difficult circumstances faced by the Japanese immigrants, or Nisei, who would comprise much of the capabilities the U.S. military would employ during the war. A scant year before 7 December, 1941, Japanese immigrants were seeking to take advantage of new pathways to citizenship by serving in the U.S. military. Parades for Nisei recruits would see streets lined with both the American and Japanese flags.<sup>11</sup> Immediately after the attacks the Japanese living in America faced swift prosecution; the Commander of the Fourth Army, General John Dewitt, visited the first class of Japanese language students when class began on 1 November, 1941. But it would be this same leader who would become "instrumental" in sending 120,000 Nisei to internment camps after the attack, declaring that "a Jap is a Jap."<sup>12</sup> It should be readily apparent

how further recruiting and training of Nisei to support military requirements would be hampered by the internment of Japanese Americans. Nonetheless, many Nisei “were recruited or conscripted for military service from behind the barbed wire of internment camps where their families remained confined.”<sup>13</sup> Further, General Dewitt was hardly alone in his viewpoints. As fears of further Japanese attacks mounted, Supreme Court Justice Owen J. Roberts implied in a report that he suspected the Japanese had used a “fifth column” to attack Pearl Harbor.<sup>14</sup> This report and other similar factors likely inspired various attempts to shutter the Japanese language training occurring on the West coast. The Army leaders running the training, however, persisted against incredible political and social pressures, but as a compromise moved the training away from the West Coast, where enmity was the greatest, to Camp Savage in Minnesota.<sup>15</sup>

Against the backdrop of broader U.S. military efforts to create the language capabilities to employ in the fight the Japanese, the Marine Corps struggled to gain its own linguists. Marine leaders “demanded” that ONI provide some of its language learners to USMC operations, but ONI was “struggling” to keep apace of its own requirements, and would not be able to apportion any personnel to the Marine Corps.<sup>16</sup> Fortunately, Marines within the 2D Marine Division took matters into their own hands, and USMC training began at Camp Elliott near San Diego on 20 June, 1942,<sup>17</sup> shortly before the Marines would begin their famous island hopping campaign across the Pacific. The initial class was small; only nine students took part.<sup>18</sup> These Marines would fulfill intelligence requirements and were trained to read captured maps and conduct “preliminary questioning of prisoners.”<sup>19</sup>

By the end of the war, both training at key locations such as the Army and Marine specific schools, and others such as the University of Boulder and Berkley University, would reach optimization at the end of the war. By early 1946 over 6,000 U.S. military personnel would

graduate some form of Japanese language training, a significant increase from the initially small classes that began at the outbreak of war. Besides the quantity of students produced and their successes, such as the translation of a captured order of battle that detailed the names of 40,000 Japanese officers,<sup>20</sup> there are other critical lessons from the ramp-up of training. In particular, the use of the Nisei, besides the persecution they faced and the disruption to training efforts, caused other critical issues. First, flawed assumptions about their capabilities hampered their effectiveness. Many had poor understanding of either English or their native language, hampering optimal performance. Second, on the battlefield they were easily mistaken for enemy soldiers; Nisei servicemembers required bodyguards to ensure they would not be killed.<sup>21</sup>

## **Vietnam**

In comparison with World War II, U.S. military planners had much more lead time to prepare adequate language capabilities for expanded combat operations in Vietnam. The U.S. had employed Military Advisor groups as far back as August of 1950,<sup>22</sup> and Marines with experience in theater brought the language skills they had gained interacting with the South Vietnamese back to training programs run by the Marine Corps.<sup>23</sup> Even with the excellent experiences of the military advisors, when the significant mobilization of Marine and Army ground forces occurred from 1964 to 1965, very few capabilities were on hand. These Marine instructors were deemed as highly effective, proving that non-native speakers could learn a language as complex and foreign as Vietnamese to be not only proficient enough to execute missions abroad, but also pass on their skills to other Marines via courses as short as 316 hours.<sup>24</sup> As regional and global tensions increased, “in 1963, Department of Defense (DoD) consolidated the separate Army, Navy, and Air Force language training programs into the Defense Foreign

Language Program and the Army Language School became the Defense Language Institute West Coast (DLIWC).”<sup>25</sup>

As the possibility of a full commitment of ground forces in Vietnam loomed, on 7 May 1964, the Secretary of Defense, Robert McNamara, tasked the Services to report on their efforts to create language capabilities, and how they managed them within their respective tables of organization and units.<sup>26</sup> The responses did not bode well. Across the DoD there were only 204 Service members proficient in Vietnamese.<sup>27</sup> Fortunately, whereas there were only twelve proficient Japanese linguists in the whole of the Armed Services just prior to 7 December, 1941, now the Marine Corps had its own twelve Vietnamese linguists; regardless, this number was extremely small considering the tasks which lay ahead. Across the force, there were over five thousand Marines with some measure of foreign language proficiency, but the majority of these capabilities were Spanish (2,162 Marines) and French (1,086 Marines).<sup>28</sup> Additionally, the policies for management of personnel with language capabilities were limited to only intelligence personnel, with provisions for positions designated for interpreters.<sup>29</sup> The vast majority of positions requiring language capabilities, 430 out of 497, fell under the G-2, Intelligence,<sup>30</sup> limiting the purview of language capability requirements to only a narrow sector of the overall Marine Corps’ workforce. Only eleven months after the Secretary of Defense’s query, on 1 April 1965, President Johnson would direct into action two more Marine Battalions, a Marine Aircraft Wing, and the 9<sup>th</sup> Marine Expeditionary Brigade’s headquarters, heralding the onset of full mobilization for the Vietnam effort.<sup>31</sup> Ready or not, the Marine language capabilities were going to war.

In the following years the Marine Corps and the other Services, assisted by an increased DoD capacity to conduct language education and training, would greatly increase the number of

Vietnamese language capabilities. By expanding class spaces beyond DLIWC, and opening training venues at Fort Bliss and elsewhere, the DoD was able to instruct 20,000 service members in Vietnamese by 1972.<sup>32</sup> This represents a hundred-fold increase in just eight years, but just like the growth of Japanese linguists for World War II, the hurried efforts of the Marine Corps and the DoD illustrate the breadth and extent of the requirements, which should have been identified by planners earlier, ideally before the conflict.

### **The Post 9/11 Operating Environment**

In the aftermath of the terror attacks on 11 September, 2001, the U.S. military was not able to plan in advance for operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, and therein plan for the types of languages it would need for missions there. The lack of adequate planning for language capabilities was particularly pointed, in the case of Iraq, where the original plan was to rapidly invade and defeat the Iraqi military. The ensuing sectarian violence and insurgent operations led to a “prolonged threat,” and a sustained rotation of U.S. military personnel followed.<sup>33</sup> As the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan continued, the DoD began to realize that it did not have adequate language capabilities. This shortage was highlighted in 2005, when Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz, upon reviewing detailed reports on the capability gaps, increased the budget for DLI via Program Decision Budget No. 753.<sup>34</sup> The reports that supported this decision indicated that while the number of Arabic and Urdu trained personnel had increased from 1995 to 2004, but the numbers of personnel trained in French, German, and Russian were higher. The reports further highlighted the military’s “band-aid” approach to the capability gaps<sup>35</sup>: Compared to previous conflicts such as World War II and Vietnam wherein the Services undertook massive efforts to create organic capabilities, the Marine Corps and the broader DoD had instead shifted to a contractor workforce to satisfy language capability requirements. In addition to increasing

the budget for DLI, the Deputy Secretary of Defense directed the DoD to develop a “language transformation roadmap.”<sup>36</sup> This roadmap was initially focused upon the requirements for Foreign Area Officers (FAO) and intelligence personnel, but a few years later the broader problem would come into view.

In 2013 the GAO determined that from 2008 to 2012 the DoD had obligated approximately \$5.2 billion dollars on contracting translation and interpretation services for contingency operations. The majority of these funds were not to support FAOs or intelligence personnel capability gaps as was highlighted in 2005, but rather to “allow U.S. military personnel to communicate and interact with multinational partners, security forces, and local indigenous populations.”<sup>37</sup> Separately, but almost concurrently, the GAO found that from 2005 to 2011 the DoD spent \$266 million “to provide general purpose forces with training support, such as classroom instruction, computer-based training, and training aids.”<sup>38</sup> These two separate funding streams, if compared in average terms for each year reported, equate to \$44M for GPF training, vice \$1.04B for contracted Services. In other words, for every dollar the DoD spent on trying to create organic capabilities, it spent \$23 contracting capabilities for the same requirements.

Why was the DoD spending over twenty times more on contracting capabilities than it spent on trying to create them? The simple answer is it is very hard to map out the requirements for the General Purpose Force, which performs a highly diverse set of tasks beyond those performed by FAOs and intelligence personnel. The difficulties in formulating the requirements were best highlighted in May 2011, when the GAO reported that the DoD “lacked an approach to integrate department-wide training efforts, which contributed to some fragmentation and

inefficiency in identifying requirements for language and cultural awareness training for ongoing operations.”<sup>39</sup>

In greater detail, the GAO explained how this fragmentation was, and likely still is, occurring: The DoD had yet to implement, particularly in the space of a decade since the beginning of operations in Afghanistan, Iraq, and globally to counter terrorism, any mechanism that could coordinate the training efforts of the Services and other DoD agencies, and therein help guide budgets to create capabilities and monitor the efficacy of said efforts.<sup>40</sup> The Marine Corps, reliant upon a centralized DoD training structure, with DLI at its core, is represents just one of many beneficiaries of such a potential mechanism, which is still lacking anywhere in the U.S. military.

This is not to say that the Marine Corps and the other Services have always failed to have adequate capabilities. The U.S. military has enjoyed the benefits of European and South American immigrants, and their language skills have been put to good use, but this has given the false impression that the Services have adequate capabilities in their inventory. The inadequacies of Service and Department level language programs have appeared when the U.S. became involved in conflicts outside of Europe and South America. This assertion is born out in the fact that the most significant shifts in DoD language training did not occur because of the Wars in Europe or the conflicts in South America. Rather, these shifts occurred because of languages less common in the U.S. populace such as Japanese in Vietnamese. The precursor to DLI was a result of rapid efforts to stand up Japanese language training, and the most significant consolidation of DoD language training efforts into DLI occurred after the end of the Vietnam War. As history shows, when the military must venture into new language territory, it fails.

As the Marine Corps looks to the establish capability sets such as Information Operations, it must understand how organic training and education programs, and those managed by the DoD, will impact its efforts. Joint Publication (JP) 3-16 describes how adversaries will be able to use social media as a weapon against the United States: Global social media provides adversaries with additional intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities, and challenge the operational security of U.S. and allied forces. The enemy is able to exacerbate mistakes that occur during operations, by publicizing them with a goal to denigrate U.S. foreign policy efforts. The JP 3-16 challenges future leaders to understand and account for how cultural factors will impact operations, or risk the legitimacy of their missions as public and international support are degraded.<sup>41</sup> To ensure that Joint Commanders, and therein MAGTF leadership, are able to mitigate hostile actions in the information environment, JP 3-16 states that forces must “[e]nsure there are sufficient qualified translators and personnel who are familiar with the local culture” to be able “to plan for and integrate information related capabilities (IRC) with information operations (IO) in order to inform and influence audiences.”<sup>42</sup> In light of this guidance, the Marine Corps must consider how it will enable the new Deputy Commandant for Information (DC/I) to properly execute IO. If the past is prologue, then ample lessons are available that illustrate how foreign language capabilities can support IO. For example, the Advertising Council, comprised of leading advertising companies in private industry, worked with the Department of State to craft a message “of inspiration and hope” that would support the Marshall Plan, which the U.S. military facilitated to ensure that Europe recovered from World War II. These messages were broadcast in several European languages, and were designed to both explain the goals of the Marshall Plan, and also oppose Communism.<sup>43</sup> In more recent times, the United States Information Agency shared American strategic messages abroad, via

television and radio broadcasts, cultural and educational exchanges, and other forms of mass media. The Foreign Service Officers who bridged the gap of “the last three feet” did so in their audiences’ own languages, not English.<sup>44</sup> Given the DoD’s recent shift to contractors to fulfill foreign language requirements, the Marine Corps must carefully consider whether or not this is the best strategy for IO. The conduct of military operations is quite unique from anything in the private sector, and there are key cultural differences in military and civilian thinking that can impede the right use of a foreign language. For example, in the Russian language, the word for Company, as in, a military unit which is subordinate to a Battalion, is pronounced “rota” (i.e., рота). Conversely, the Russian word for company, as in a private organization, is “kampaniya” (i.e., компания). Russian translators who have not particularly focused on the military specific terms of a given language, may not use the right terms, or may simply misunderstand and therefore make mistakes during their work. Examples of linguistic errors in IO are numerous. In one instance, Arabic linguists supporting Central Command (CENTCOM) efforts made a key error in attempting to establish rapport with a potential terror recruit: They misused the Arabic term for “authority,” and using the word in a way in which it could be translated as “salad” (i.e., “sultah,” or سُلْطَة). Both words appear to have the same letters, but how a speaker or writer uses them in context can cause confusion for native speakers of Arabic. This incredibly nuanced error led to widespread denigration of CENTCOM IO efforts, with jihadis labeling messages as “Palestinian Salad” (vice Palestinian Authority) whenever they suspect that CENTCOM was attempting to infiltrate and engage the terror networks.<sup>45</sup> It would be unfair to not highlight the true complexities of engaging in IO across linguistic barriers that other nations have faced. Even the Iranians, who have used IO campaigns to “vie for Arab hearts and minds” have fallen short in their efforts when “maladroit implementation,” including mistranslation, have undercut Tehran’s

propaganda goals.<sup>46</sup> Achieving the right force mix for IO will require an examination of education and training requirements, and the inherent modification of manpower management systems through the DOTMILPF-P process.<sup>47</sup> But exactly what languages such an IO workforce will need is still to be determined, and, more importantly, how well this language mix is determined will impact the efficacy of any IO campaign the Marine Corps employs.

### **Language Program Efforts: The External and Internal Environment**

Given the past and recent historical instances where the Marine Corps and DoD has failed to create adequate language capabilities, what are the factors that are contributing to these shortcomings? An examination of the external environment (i.e., the post-Cold War global security environment) and internal environment (i.e., the structure of Marine Corps and DoD programs) will help understand the underlying problems.

#### **External Environment**

There are two key aspects of the external environment which hold bearing on the Marine Corps' ensure it has adequate language capabilities. The first is the operating environment, and the second is the social fabric of America, from which the Marine Corps draws its personnel.

**The Operating Environment.** The Marine Operating Concept definition of the current and future operating environment is summed up most easily by one word: chaos. Lieutenant General Brent Scowcroft, USAF (Ret.) 9th and 17th United States Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs, described the challenges force development efforts excellently:

“During the Cold War, we were facing nuclear war if we screwed up. That was an incentive to get it right, to stay ahead of developments. Today, we have no strategy that covers the entire world – the changes that are coming. And there’s a lot of change going. For 500 years, we lived under Westphalian nation-state systems. But globalization has eroded borders. For the first time this world’s people are politicized, interconnected by technology. The nature of power is

changing. The nature of international cooperation is changing. The nature of conflict is changing. We're not evolving well to adapt. This world is not as dangerous as that during the Cold War, but it is much more complicated."<sup>48</sup>

Evidence of the impact of a chaotic, complicated environment's impact is apparent in the aforementioned analysis of the OIF/OEF language shortfalls. Compared to the efforts to prepare for World War II and Vietnam, the efforts to prepare for operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, in particular the lead time to prepare the right language capabilities required, was relatively non-existent. While the force that secured Baghdad in 2003 was arguably the most "capable of conducting classical military operations" in history, owing to expert leadership, highly trained personnel, and superior military technology, what followed the invasion, and will likely continue to occur around the globe, are challenges to the U.S. military's ability to secure peace, or, as more commonly known, the ability to conduct stability operations.<sup>49</sup> The chaos that comprises the current, and will likely comprise the future operating environment is a result of two key factors. The first factor results from the actions of revisionist states and non-state actors which seek to contest the norms of international order, and are willing to use any elements of power to gain an advantage over the United States. The second factor is the "persistent disorder" caused by weak states that are unable to maintain domestic order or exercise governance within their borders.<sup>50</sup> These factors will present challenges to the Marine Corps and the Joint Force across the range of military operations, as it conducts operations in a world where states do not have a "monopoly on violence and individual identities are no longer based exclusively on a sense of physical location."<sup>51</sup> Figure 1 depicts the most likely and most frequent types of missions in which Marines are likely to take part this security environment. The preponderance will be train/advise/assist, relief operations, nation building, and peace enforcement, requiring task organized forces to meet MAGTF commander requirements across a highly complex array of

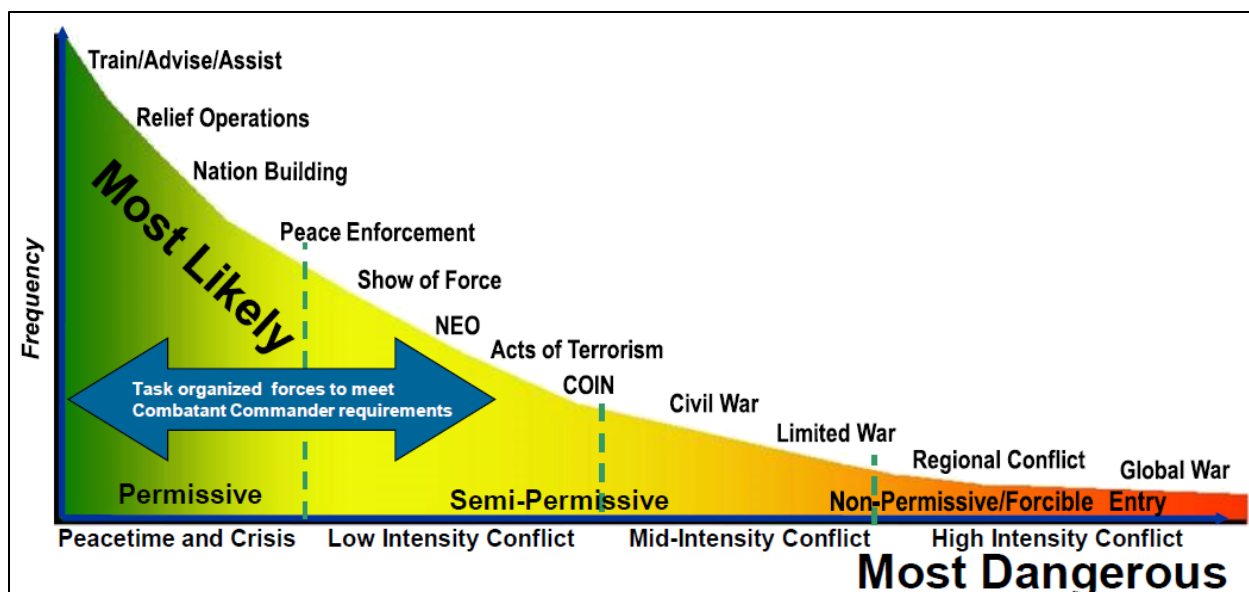


Figure 1: Most Likely Versus Most Dangerous Types of Operations<sup>52</sup>

mission sets, all of which will bring Marines into contact with local, foreign populations. The Marine Corps must also, however, maintain capabilities in case of conflict with a peer nation adversary. The broad range of language capabilities required to satisfy all types of operations, from the most common to the most dangerous, will stretch force development efforts thin. The breadth of the requirements creates an “ambiguous context”<sup>53</sup> for strategic planning of capability development, confounding efforts to ensure capabilities are developed just in time, particularly considering the significant amount of time required to both develop training and education programs, as well as run Marines through the training.

**The Social Fabric of America.** In addition to the potential mission environments in which Marines may find themselves, it is important to consider the external environment of the U.S. populace from which the Marine Corps draws its personnel. Within this social fabric, there are two wellsprings of language capabilities: the educational system in America, and the heritage speakers resident in immigrant communities. The performance of the Marine Corps and the other

Services is predicated upon the performance of the nation's public and private educational institutions, and the effectiveness of that performance depends on how well those educational institutions align with the tasks the military performs. In the past, when the U.S. Armed Forces were configured to face against the threat posed by the Soviet Union, the need for language capabilities to be generated by the education system was low. But in the modern era of asymmetric threats and stability operations,<sup>54</sup> how well the U.S. educational system imbues potential recruits with not just language capabilities, but the capacity to learn new languages, becomes increasingly important. Fortunately, there are some positive signs that the U.S. education system is doing just this. For instance, from 2007 to 2014, K-12 enrollments in foreign language courses increased 30%. Unfortunately, the United States continues to lag behind much of the world, particularly Europe and China, primarily due to a nationwide lack of qualified teachers who can develop diverse language capabilities.<sup>55</sup> The Marine Corps should be able to take advantage of the advances in foreign language learning in the education system, but there are no guarantees that the educational system will produce the rarer language capabilities the Marine Corps will likely require. Pashtun, for example, is taught in some colleges and universities, but in low numbers, and many programs are already in support of defense and national security programs.

The United States does have a very large amount of heritage speakers, offering another source of language capabilities. The U.S. Census Bureau only takes sporadic counts of how many non-English language speakers are in the country annually, but the most recent, done in 2011, indicated that of the roughly 290 million people in the nation, 60 million, or 21 percent of the population, did fit in this category speak languages other than English in their households.<sup>56</sup> As the historical example of World War II, illustrates, however, there are several shortfalls in

relying upon the ability to simply recruit from heritage speaking populations during times of conflict. First and foremost is the false assumption that heritage speakers will have adequate mastery of both a foreign language and English, and be able to readily translate or interpret between the languages. A recent survey of the largest block of foreign language speakers of Spanish, from the Latino community in America, found that younger Latinos were “gravitating” towards English. The decrease of 15 percent of Spanish heritage speakers among a younger generation<sup>57</sup> is likely indicative of the trends of other immigrant communities, decreasing the resource pool of potential candidates for military service. Second, the actual size of each potential pool of personnel in rarer languages decreases the odds that this resource will prove reliable. While Spanish is a highly prolific language in the United States, comprising over half of the foreign language capabilities in the nation (i.e., 37 million of the aforementioned 60 million heritage speakers), other populations are much smaller. Urdu speakers, a language spoken widely in Afghanistan, number over 370 ,000 in America. Pashtun, a language deemed critical by the DoD, does not even appear on the 2011 census data,<sup>58</sup> underscoring its rarity. Third is the dangerous assumption that during a conflict national sentiment about heritage speakers will not impede language capability development. As the World War II example highlighted, American public opinion can turn against immigrant communities dramatically. In the Post 9/11 operating environment, with the threat that violent extremist organizations pose not just abroad, but on the U.S. homeland, divorcing public opinion from capability development efforts (i.e., in the form of recruiting heritage speakers) can be very problematic. It is for these three factors – the trend of younger heritage speakers to gravitate towards English, the rarity of certain foreign languages, and public sentiment in times of crisis – that an over-reliance on heritage speaker communities should not underpin language capability development efforts.

## **Internal Environment**

The current DoD and Marine Corps efforts to create language capabilities occur within the broader context of the U.S. military's approach to force development. Ever since the fall of the Soviet Union, and the singular, monolithic threat it represented, the DoD has transformed from a "threat-based force" to a "capabilities-based force." This process of transformation began shortly after Desert Storm, when significant budget reductions and an inability to focus analysis on a "quantifiable threat" forced the DoD to take a new approach to capability development.<sup>59</sup> It was not until after the invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq, however, when the DoD would publish a Defense Language Transformation Roadmap in 2005. This roadmap was primarily the result of pressure from then Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz as part of efforts to improve the language capabilities of the intelligence and FAO communities,<sup>60</sup> but to a lesser extent, in response to broader shortfalls in General Purpose Force foreign language capability requirements. Chief among the actions prescribed in this roadmap were the appointing of a DoD Senior Language Authority, and an executive level Defense Language Steering Committee<sup>61</sup> via which the Services and Defense Agencies would coordinate Defense Language Program efforts. The tenets of the Defense Language Transformation Roadmap were codified in a series of DoD Directives and Instructions, all of which are designed to help coordinate efforts across the Department. Ultimately, however, DoD regulations stipulate that each Service and component (e.g., the Marine Corps) is responsible for ensuring that their personnel "deploying to foreign territories ... possess or have access to an appropriate capability to communicate in the languages of the territories of deployment and at least have a rudimentary understanding of the region and associated culture(s)."<sup>62</sup> It is then up to the Marine Corps to determine the amount of language capabilities, and in which languages, as part of its Title 10 responsibilities to man, train

and equip its forces. Conversely, the DoD level leadership is only responsible for helping to coordinate the efforts that create those capabilities, such as providing executive level oversight of the training at DLI.

In following the guidance of the DoD, the Marine Corps has established a robust set of programs which manage the various requirements of the force, divided amongst four key organizations. First, intelligence related requirements are under the purview of the Director of Intelligence, who also serves as the Marine Corps' Senior Language Authority, coordinating with the DoD Senior Language Authority via the DLSC. The rationale for this appointment is simple; the mainstay of language training in the DoD is still DLI, and the majority of the Marine students attending this school fulfill intelligence requirements. Second, Foreign Area Officers fall under the Deputy Commandant for Plans, Policies, and Procedures, with the Deputy Director of this organization also serving as the Deputy Senior Language Authority of the Marine Corps. Again, the rationale for this is also very simple; after intelligence personnel, FAOs drive many of the training requirements satisfied by DLI. Third, the Center for Advanced Operational Cultural Learning, while providing language, culture, and regional training for all personnel, serves as the proponent for the General Purpose Force language requirements. Fourth and finally, the Marine Corps Special Operations Command maintains its own distinct language program, and is designed to support requirements that are generally aligned to the U.S. Special Operations Command. Given these disparate organizations, and the disparate requirements of each community they support, what are the mechanisms available to predict which language training requirements will be the most critical?

DoD guidance on how to identify language requirements appears in two primary ways. First, the DoD Directive points the Services and Agencies towards the development of languages

which appear on the “Strategic Language List.”<sup>63</sup> The goal of this list is to ensure that the entire DoD has the capabilities it needs, but it does not provide specific guidance on what amounts of capabilities are required, for what tasks, or for what job- related activities or positions. Second, the DoD directs that the Combatant Commanders the use of the Language, Regional Expertise, and Culture Capabilities Based Requirements Identification Process (LREC CBRIP)<sup>64</sup> as a standardized mechanism to capture capability requirements;<sup>65</sup> the actual force development, however, falls upon the Services. There are no directives which mandate that the Services actually use the data that the Combatant Commanders may capture in the LREC CBRIP. Additionally, the word task has a very broad meaning in the DoD directives, entailing everything from intelligence related tasks such as Communications Intelligence, to engagement with local leadership in a foreign country. While the guidance for the LREC CBRIP is incredibly detailed, none of the DoD guidance clarifies how the information from the LREC CBRIP should be used to forecast training requirements, or how many positions each Service should maintain to achieve its mission requirements. This is quite normal given the Services’ Title 10 responsibilities, but this gap in policy highlights a lack of any forcing function for the Services to use an analytic process which can unify DoD workforce development efforts.

Within the Marine Corps, the primary method for determining job-related activities involves examining the Marine Corps Task List, and using the DOTMILPF-P process to assign the completion of those tasks to, in the case of language requirements, select personnel. The Marine Corps uses a detailed system of Military Occupational Specialties (MOS) to both identify which positions (commonly referred to as billets) will require the capability, as well as assigning those MOSs to personnel who meet the minimum qualification standards (e.g., attaining minimum proficiency standards on foreign language tests, in the case of MOSs requiring

language capabilities). As stated in Marine Corps doctrine, it is the task of the Marine Corps Senior Language Authority, in coordination with the Deputy Commandant for Marine and Reserve Affairs, and the Commanding General, Marine Corps Capability Development Command, to manage the requirements for language capabilities. This includes ensuring that qualified personnel receive the necessary training and education, and are employed in positions that make the “best use” of their capabilities.<sup>66</sup> The USMC LREC Strategy: 2016-2020, has directed the Marine Corps, in accordance with DoD guidance, to include the LREC CBRIP into its manpower generation processes,<sup>67</sup> but how this will occur, and which organizations will perform the analysis required, does not appear as of yet in doctrine.

This description of how the DoD and Marine Corps currently identifies language requirements and generates solutions is as detailed as appears in policy. The GAO, when it noted that the DoD “lacked an approach to integrate department-wide training efforts, which contributed to ... inefficiency in identifying requirements for language[s] ... for ongoing operations”<sup>68</sup> was highlighting the significant lack of guidance on how the DoD and Services can bridge the gap between mechanisms such as the SLL and their own manpower management systems. Doctor William J. Olson, in describing how interagency coordination occurs within the DoD, would likely describe the inefficiencies in language capability planning that the GAO discovered as a “fog of bureaucracy”; in his view this gap would be “inevitable,” breaking down the outcome, theories, and practices from what is originally desired.<sup>69</sup>

### **Recommended Workforce Requirements Forecasting Methods**

Force development, as a form of workforce development, is a complex process for any organization or community therein, such as the various communities of language capable personnel performing military missions. Workforce planning is fortunately hardly an issue facing

just the Marine Corps, and further, new efforts to utilize artificial intelligence to maximize this planning are underway. The foreign language enabled workforce can best be understood via a form of “demand analysis (i.e. forecasting the future workforce demand) in workforce planning. Workforce demand forecasting techniques can be classified into two broad categories: qualitative and quantitative. Generally, quantitative techniques are used to forecast workforce size and mix, whereas, qualitative techniques forecast competency requirements.”<sup>70</sup>

All workforce planning begins with a “strategic plan, reliable and structured workforce data, a strong internal and external environmental scanning, and a keen awareness of trends.”<sup>71</sup> Each of these four components of workforce planning, as relates to forecasting foreign language capability requirements, bears some examining. First, the Marine Corps has good strategic plans, such as the MOC and the USMC LREC Strategy: 2016-2020 with which to begin this planning. Second, the Marine Corps has a very detailed and reliable set of workforce data, greatly improving the prospect of any workforce planning efforts. Third, the research contained in this paper can add to the strength of an internal and external environmental scan, but more work is necessary. The most significant gap, however, is the fourth area: “awareness of trends.”<sup>72</sup> Given the chaotic nature of the post-Cold War and post-9/11 operational environment, planners need innovative solutions, not to try to predict the future, as General Grey warned, but to predict the trends which will help steer workforce planning. It is in this area that artificial intelligence may be able to help the most.

In its most basic form, artificial intelligence can use machine learning to “keep improving its performance without humans having to explain exactly how to accomplish all the tasks it’s given”<sup>73</sup> such as mapping out foreign language requirements. An analytic tool that uses machine learning in effect is learning “from examples, rather than being explicitly programmed for a

particular outcome.”<sup>74</sup> One example of how machine learning is applied in the private sector by stock market trading bots, which use historical market data as an input, and then outputting future market data.<sup>75</sup> Traditional machine learning systems, however, have been hampered by how much data they can analyze. Newer, more advanced “deep learning algorithms” can make incredible use of data sets of significant size, and it is in this field that the Marine Corps may find benefits in trying to forecast requirements for foreign languages and steer its efforts accordingly. Andrew Ng, one of the leading AI scientists, believes that deep learning algorithms, also known as deep neural nets, do not run into the same problems that traditional machine learning algorithms do when trying to process large data sets. In fact, quite the contrary: “More data leads to better and better predictions. Some very large systems are trained by using 36 million examples or more.”<sup>76</sup> Given the fact that Marines may deploy to any of over 190 countries, inhabited by a global populace of over seven billion people, speaking over six thousand languages, to perform a dizzying array of missions and perform the multitude of tasks associated with each mission, finding a deep learning algorithm, managed by a form of artificial intelligence, may be the only way to forecast the trends required to create workforce planning models.

How would this work, in theory? One possible method occurs in four phases, overlapping the components of workforce planning. First, the organization identifies the key parameters which are necessary for the workforce parameters (e.g., missions and tasks). Second, these parameters are broken down into relatively simple questions. Third, the AI developers would render the responses to the second step’s questions into a numerical data set (e.g., number of positions and the roles and functions of those positions). Fourth and finally, the system developers and analysts support a form of “decision tree,” to develop future workforce

requirements. Most importantly, the data that is produced by the third step would be used continuously to train and test the outputs of the fourth step,<sup>77</sup> and AI developers would update the system based upon analysis of the AI's performance. There are several types of data which may be used for an AI that would help Marine Corps workforce planning. These include but are not limited to: the types and current numbers of positions currently dedicated to perform language related tasks, the data compiled via the LREC CBRIP, the fiscal years development program and likely associated budgets, and finally, global threat indicators such as proprietary, intelligence related data, as well as publicly available data such as the Failed States Index and other security related databases from the United Nations and other key think tanks.

It is important to remember that machine learning and other artificial intelligence systems likely cannot entirely replace the current Marine Corps processes for force generation. These systems must “complement human activities,” and seek to make the outcomes of that work “ever more valuable. The most effective rule for the new division of labor is rarely, if ever, ‘give all tasks to the machine.’ Instead, if the successful completion of a process requires 10 steps, one or two of them may become automated while the rest become more valuable for humans to do.”<sup>78</sup>

### **Recommended Organizational Changes**

This final section will attempt to provide recommendations via the "DOTMPLF-P" methodology, assessing the most critical aspects of the Marine Corps foreign language programs' domains: Doctrine, Organization, Training, Materiel, Leadership & Education, Personnel, Facilities, and Policy. The three most critical areas are Doctrine, Organization, and Training. First, the current doctrine does not reflect the desired outcomes of the USMC LREC Strategy: 2016-2020. The authors of the strategy itself recognized this fact and ensured that it provides guidance to rewrite key policies such as MCO 1550.25. Additionally, the strategy calls

for the establishment of an LREC Operational Advisory Group (OAG), comprised of the leadership of the disparate communities within the Marine Corps that require foreign language capabilities, as well as cultural knowledge and regional expertise. What the framers of the USMC LREC Strategy: 2016-2020 did not foresee, however, was the creation of the DC/I, and the increased attention on IO, with its myriad tasks which may require language capabilities. Any future policies must be informed by the policies which govern IO, be they from within the Marine Corps (i.e., as published by DC/I), or from the DoD or Joint Chiefs of Staff.

The second critical area, organization, must reflect the changes in doctrine and the organizational shift of the Intelligence Department to fall under the auspices of DC/I. Further, given the very broad reach of IO efforts, to include the realignment of intelligence and non-intelligence organizations within the MEF Information Group (MIG), the Marine Corps should consider whether how well the office of the SLA is postured, given its current positioning under the auspices of Intelligence Department, to ensure the coherency of various Marine Corps LREC programs. Given the complexities of utilizing AI driven workforce planning systems, and the management of capabilities requirements and manpower data, the office of the SLA, if it is to use such systems, must both have resident personnel who can employ AI, and translate its data into prudent manpower management decisions. Consideration must also be given to the role of MARFORCOM, PP&O and the supporting establishment organizations in force development, and the transition between them from supported to supporting, and as well as the longer-term force development efforts between CD&I and Deputy Commandants, Supporting Establishment, Directorates, and the Operating Forces.<sup>79</sup>

Third and finally, as the lessons of history illustrate, at no time prior to OIF/OEF has the force abrogated its mission completion to a contractor force as it has for those conflicts. The

Marine Corps must address, in concert with the DoD SLA, whether spending twenty times more on contracting than on the creation of organic capabilities is the most prudent course of action. As the historical examples of World War II and Vietnam illustrate, during times of significant combat operations the Marine Corps was well served by developing and executing its own, organic language programs. Ever since the end of the Vietnam conflict, however, the Marine Corps has largely abrogated its efforts to the U.S. Army, but with suboptimal results, as illustrated by the significant reliance on a contractor workforce to fulfill mission requirements.

### **Conclusion**

For the Marine Corps to succeed in its missions, the future foreign language capability development efforts must learn from its history and explore new and novel ways to achieve an effective end-state. The lead times to conflict have shrunk drastically since World War II and Vietnam, and the persistently chaotic nature of the current and future operating environment will mean that Marines will likely have no advanced warning of where they will deploy, and exactly what language capabilities they will need when they get there. While there is hope that the educational system and heritage speakers that are a part of the American social fabric may produce some capabilities, there are no guarantees that these will satisfy Marine Corps mission requirements, particularly when operations occur in relatively obscure regions of the globe. The DoD for its part has a robust language capability development system, but it must satisfy the total, Joint Force, and it is often focused on the most significant threats to national security, and designed to ensure that the intelligence community, not the General Purpose Force, has the capabilities which will ensure parity with a near-peer competitor. For the Marine Corps language, regional expertise, and culture capability development efforts to succeed, it must

consider whether its current program efforts are optimally aligned, and whether a more robust analytic effort is necessary.

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<sup>13</sup> McNaughton, 25.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

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