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**NAVAL WAR COLLEGE
Newport, R.I.**

**COMBAT LITERACY
CREATING A COMMAND CLIMATE WITH GREATER APPRECIATION
FOR THE OPERATIONAL ROLE OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE**

by

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A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

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ABSTRACT

Success in contemporary warfare is as dependent upon life-giving information as it is on lethal firepower. Understanding the language and culture of the battle space is critical to effective operational design. Analysis of steps taken by the U.S. military to provide the linguistic means to pursue operational and strategic ends indicates that programmatic solutions are favored, although a proper assessment of the requirement highlights the need for a shift in the institutional mindset and command climate to emphasize language as a critical operational skill. The problem should be framed as a leadership question. Leaders should be the examples of language skill and instill in all echelons an ethic of putting language in its critical operational perspective rather than treating it as a peripheral specialty. This paper argues that all forces need some level of remedial language skill to effectively achieve operational objectives and a vastly increased number need extensive training to apply the art of communication to the human-centric operations of today. The full range of language effectiveness calls for more consistent leadership and senior-level advocacy.

INTRODUCTION

War is a form of dialogue. Just as diplomacy is the art of communicating across national boundaries (usually with non-lethal intent), conflict is a blunt mode of inter-community discourse. Fundamental to that discourse are the languages of combatants, their enablers, and innocent populations among whom they operate.

The role of two-way communication in modern conflict is vastly underestimated, as leaders often fail to acknowledge the intricate impact of real time human discourse – in both directions – on local populations. An effective operational commander calibrates the message he wants a particular population to hear, feel, and react to. He and his forces speak clearly in a voice, tone, and context the local constituency understands. They assess reaction on the spot. They seek to outsmart adversarial messengers attracting the population to the enemy cause. There is no way around the fact that language is the tool required to perform these operational tasks. Forces must constantly communicate, or perish.

Two consistent concepts permeate the discussion of foreign language skills in the U.S. military: language is critical and training is hard. As the military seeks to reconcile the inherent dilemma of a necessary skill that is difficult to achieve, a vast number of well-intentioned programs have been designed to overcome the deficit.¹ These efforts are heroic in their attempt to equip U.S. forces with the linguistic means to achieve operational (and strategic) ends; nonetheless, the United States has not sufficiently cracked the language barrier. Greater appreciation for the language gap is needed at all echelons, matched by more resources (time, funding, and senior-level advocacy) throughout the military establishment focused on language. The thesis of this paper is that the information superiority needed to

achieve operational objectives in modern conflict requires a cultural shift beginning at the leadership level; all forces should be trained to some level of language capacity, and many more personnel should be equipped with highly tuned language skills.

The methodology of this paper draws upon perspectives from U.S. military personnel with field experience as articulated in a broad pool of literature on the subject. A natural emphasis falls on ground forces who interact extensively with local populations. The need for more language proficiency is apparent. Department of Defense sources are analyzed to assess emphasis on foreign language learning as a required operational skill. Analysis of current efforts to address the linguistic gap is accompanied by recommendations to overcome it. The goal is a general increase in language skills and a healthy balance of diverse levels of training.

Language is critical on today's battlefield. Communication has always been a factor in warfare, making a grasp of the opponent's language one measure of effectiveness. The modern battle space puts an even greater emphasis on communication – with combatants, proximate civilians, local officials, and societies as a whole. Operations IRAQI FREEDOM and ENDURING FREEDOM are but two examples of conflicts in which illiteracy in the local language impedes the achievement of U.S. objectives as much as unfamiliarity with one's personal sidearm threatens the safety of the soldier. Operational goals are out of reach without strong two-way communication between U.S. personnel and native interlocutors. Comments from those with battle experience reinforce this point.

One commentator drawing comparisons between Vietnam and Iraq notes that “American cultural preparation,” to include “an insufficient number of people with language skills” was a common factor in the challenges faced in both insurgencies.² Another simply

states that “Foreign language skills are mission-essential for an expeditionary army,”³ while a Marine returning for a second tour in Iraq notes that Arabic “could turn out to be his best weapon” as he seeks to “use the language to prevent hostile situations from escalating.”⁴ The importance of language was not lost on America’s historical adversaries, as the Soviets found language skills “especially important for officers stationed abroad” and key to their “principle struggle for the minds of men.”⁵ Language skills also strengthen bonds of understanding with coalition partners, who are vital to achieving operational objectives.

Language is not a mere convenience, but a matter of survival. One interpreter lamented that soldiers die because they misunderstand combat zone cultures and customs.⁶ Many recognize that overcoming such communications barriers can be “the difference between life and death.”⁷ Although bland in its presentation of the need for language skills in the force, the doctrine of *Joint Operational Planning* (Joint Publication 5.0) notes that language and regional skills are “integral to joint operations,” adding that “this force-multiplying capability can save lives and is integral to successful mission accomplishment.”⁸ A skill that “can save lives” deserves more attention. Indeed, “In military operations, miscommunication...can generate animosity, or even lead to unintended hostilities.”⁹

“To know your enemy you have to be able to get inside his head, but you can’t unravel someone’s thought process if you don’t speak his language or understand the cultural context.”¹⁰ That may sound intuitive, but it belies the fact that armies train how to direct fires much more than they train to communicate to avoid them. “Foreign language skills can be as vital to battlefield success as any weapon – but they’re a lot harder to acquire and maintain.”¹¹ One astute observer highlighted the need for “cultural intelligence” as a war-fighting imperative.¹²

Contract interrogators were implicated in the strategically costly man-made catastrophe of Abu Ghraib, which begs the question of whether better trained U.S. personnel with requisite language and communications skills might have accessed the needed intelligence from detainees yet prevented the disaster.¹³ A higher standard should be expected of uniformed professionals with highly tuned cultural awareness. One can only imagine how many lives were lost as a result of this blow to American credibility in the eyes of the Iraqi people, and the world. The nation pays a dear cost for the lack of a professional communicative interface.

Language training is hard. The recognition of a critical need for language skills among U.S. soldiers does not make the training any easier. Those who grasp the imperative and try to incorporate training into pre-deployment planning invariably confront the difficulty of a complex skill set. Training schedules are already full to overflowing, and language requires great amounts of time, mental focus, practice opportunities, retention exercises, and cultural understanding. With acquisition and retention of some of the more difficult languages almost a full-time occupation, one might easily despair that a language requirement for soldiers is simply too hard. Even for individuals with a clear aptitude that should be cultivated, the tendency is often to focus on other combat skills.

Commanders naturally resist time- and resource-intensive obligations to send troops for long-term language training. Some suggest that the active duty force is overwhelmed and seek more linguists in the reserves. A Colonel in the Army Reserve counters that language is not a part-time training function and distracts from other requirements during very limited reserve training windows – making the reserves poor stewards of language skills.¹⁴ Quite

understandably, no one wants an added training burden. The task appears difficult, but American interests (and lives) don't afford the luxury of giving up.

HOW MUCH TRAINING IS ENOUGH?

Opinions vary regarding how much language training is needed to prepare troops for victory on today's "irregular" battlefield. Somewhat on the optimistic side, the *Small Wars Manual* of 1940 states that "knowledge of the character of the people and command of their language are great assets...If not already familiar with the language, all officers upon assignment to expeditionary duty should study and acquire a working knowledge of it."¹⁵

The manual insists that a "satisfactory" level of problem solving demands familiarity with language at all echelons and emphasizes that along with learning the terrain in their sectors, infantry troops should "gain a working knowledge of the local language as quickly as possible so that they may dispense with the employment of native guides and interpreters."¹⁶

The *Small Wars Manual* sets the bar high, as if the goal is "every soldier a linguist." A senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations reiterates that the United States needs "soldiers who can interact and understand local populations without a translator."¹⁷

Recent guidance designed to counter asymmetric threats, in the Department of the Army's 2006 *Counterinsurgency* manual takes a different approach. As if acknowledging that training an organic capability may be a bridge too far ("there are never enough linguists") the COIN manual recommends that commanders "consider with care" how to employ scarce language resources, which "are battle-winning assets."¹⁸ The relevant appendix focuses on how to improve communication through an interpreter rather than highlighting language as a training necessity.¹⁹ In focusing on interpreters, the COIN manual

unfortunately implies that language as a skill can be “contracted out” rather than being integral to the combat unit. Another commentator articulates the sobering reality – soldiers have little choice but to use outside interpreters because they “are not likely to encounter one” wearing a U.S. uniform.²⁰ Where the *Small Wars Manual* and the COIN guidance agree is in acknowledging that foreign language is vital to achievement of operational objectives.

Milan Vego’s comprehensive treatise on operational warfare highlights “information” as a critical operational requirement.²¹ Vego stresses that time, space, force “and, increasingly, information are pivotal in making sound decisions at all levels.”²² Highlighting “human space” as operationally critical, Vego notes that information’s “decisive impact on the application of operational art” is indisputable and growing; proper evaluation of key factors “simply cannot be done without accurate information.”²³ Information logically connects with language capacity, the conduit for gaining or dispensing real-time situational awareness. Language unlocks the critical insights that give troops timely and battle-relevant information. It is a critical enabler of information superiority (or at least mitigation of information inferiority). A 2006 analysis of the primacy of information in war suggests that information is more important than fires in deciding many contests.²⁴

Striking a balance. Given the difficulty of training to the ideal of “every soldier a linguist” and the dangers of relegating language to a peripheral “contract” function, the challenge is how to strike a healthy balance. The answer lies somewhere in the middle, with some highly trained personnel literate in the nuances of the local language, many translators carefully selected as force multipliers, and all troops in the battlefield trained in at least the rudiments of culture and a few basic phrases in the local language, with follow-on training in

theater. That balance, however delicate, can be struck if leadership properly focuses on this critical operational requirement.²⁵

Train each tongue in the force. As a basic goal, some level of language skill, however remedial, should be a pre-deployment requirement for all personnel. In many units it already is.²⁶ Even if limited to a few phrases (related to cultural insights trained at the same time), basic greetings or warnings prepare each soldier mentally to acknowledge the foreign context within which he or she must operate.²⁷ In-theater training should build on this baseline capacity. Hopefully the ongoing consideration of language helps soldiers overcome the tendency to assume that “smart” people speak English in any country – allowing them to appreciate communication challenges and local perceptions better. Even an hour or two of initial training, if done in the right spirit and frequently reinforced after deployment, can break down stereotypes and gives soldiers a basis on which to function more smoothly overseas.²⁸ This simple training needs the reinforcement of leaders at all echelons.

Train some for fluency. For a certain number in the force – which should constitute an increasing number over time – language training should be extensive and rigorous. The force needs high end skills that can defuse tense situations and negotiate complex agreements. For these, the solution should involve a strategy “that acknowledges language proficiency as the most important component in a language dependent MOS [military occupation specialty] – the hardest skill to acquire and the easiest to lose.”²⁹ Language may be these soldiers’ greatest contribution to operational goals and require exhaustive training time. It need not be their only contribution, however, as they can also be trained in the soldiering skills that permit them to function as an integrated member of the fighting unit.

Since “it is easier to take a linguist and train him to be a Soldier than it is to take a Soldier and train him to be a linguist,” personnel with a primary language skill should be welcomed as more than mere “linguists.”³⁰ Their combined language and soldiering skills provide critical means needed by the unit to achieve operational objectives. Units can be virtually illiterate without them.

A range of skill levels. The linguistic skill range between those barely able to say “good morning” and the master linguist is vast; skills that fall anywhere within that range can be put to use accordingly. Those on the way to becoming proficient, and those who hit a culmination point in their language study with semi-developed skills can each contribute according to skill level.³¹ The full range of skills is needed, including creative technological devices that might put basic language assets into the hands of deployed troops.³² A broad range of native-speakers also helps a commander navigate the decisive points of a human-centric theater of operations.³³ Native speakers can bring to bear complex nuances about culture (and in the Arabic context, even understand the Holy Quran at a level that helps U.S. officials engage Muslims more effectively). Such native skills create a common reference point for understanding the motivations of the other side; armies cannot expect to win hearts and minds without delving into the cognitive world which those hearts and minds inhabit.

The full spectrum of language and cultural skill levels fit into a “culture of communication” within the force. The fidelity of communications at the tactical level, across the AOR, enables troops to gain the initiative towards achieving operational objectives in diverse and evolving circumstances. The skills should be appreciated as a core competency, not a niche specialty. In an acronym-rich military community (with somewhat broad-roaming designations like a Range of Military Operations, or ROMO), one might refer to the

proper role for communication in combat as the Range of Language Effectiveness (ROLE).³⁴ Language has a role at all levels, and rather than despair at the difficulty of the task the Pentagon should embrace the opportunity to amplify information-based skills appropriate to the evolving nature of warfare. The bar should be raised wisely without overextending the force; but, it should be raised decisively to enhance both cultural understanding and language study. Just as one cannot truly grasp complex culture without some grounding in language, “it is difficult to speak a language if you do not understand the culture.”³⁵

Putting the ROLE in perspective, the United States “can’t afford to train every Soldier in the Army to be a certified linguist, but [the United States] can’t afford not to have everybody in the Army understanding cultural awareness, and maybe some rudimentary language capability.”³⁶ Leadership needs to shift the balance in favor of more, and higher quality, training. Indeed, “the right blend is defined as: some people have to be experts, and everybody has to know something.”³⁷ All require constant reinforcement in the field to polish those skills.

Too many languages to train all. The scope of this paper cannot encompass the range of priority languages in which military personnel will need to be proficient in the future, but lingering operations in Iraq and Afghanistan certainly help define current areas of focus. (One retired officer questioned the assertion that “language needs were difficult to assess” by noting that after years of OIF and OEF the military should “have a pretty good idea of what countries we’re fighting in.”³⁸) The languages of future battles are no more predictable than what precise platforms might best fight future wars, but that does not prevent research and development from moving ahead. Planners use their best judgment in assessing which languages to focus on and various initiatives to define priority languages help guide the

selection.³⁹ The military establishment should invest in information-based skills as it does in technological upgrades, even if tradeoffs are required which favor enhancing the soldier's mind rather than enhancing his equipment. What America should fear is that "Sputnik moment" in which the scramble for Russian linguists caught the nation unprepared.⁴⁰

HEADED IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION

The imperative is clear: the U.S. military must be more capable of functioning outside of the English language to achieve operational objectives. In assessing how well the U.S. military is doing, one finds a plethora of programs designed to help fill the language gap.

Good programs abound. From the resident language classes at the Defense Language Institute to pronunciation tips on an iPod, the avenues for acquiring language are manifold and diverse in their intent.⁴¹ Elaborate language learning efforts over time include the ill-fated Army Specialized Training Program (ASTP) administered through college training during 1943-44,⁴² training software from the "Rosetta Stone" language series available to soldiers over the Internet at Army Knowledge Online,⁴³ and ever-evolving attempts to provide pay incentives for language acquisition and maintenance.⁴⁴ Creative use of technologies can also lead to beneficial hand-held devices to assist in translation, and serious attempts to recruit native language skills through the MAVNI program (Military Accessions Vital to the National Interest) help round out a rather thorough range of programmatic enhancements.⁴⁵ All of these efforts have merit and all are part of the solution.

Further progress should be anticipated as some of the many recommendations in the *Defense Language Transformation Roadmap* of January 2005 and related initiatives come to fruition.⁴⁶ That study lays out a path to eventual success – if heeded by the military

leadership and resourced to the full extent. One telling recommendation in the *Roadmap* may ultimately reveal the depth of commitment to language goals: “Make foreign language ability a criterion for general officer/flag officer advancement.”⁴⁷ A robust language credential standing in the way of flag rank would certainly have an impact on the motivation of personnel at all echelons. How robust of a standard is set, how quickly it is implemented, and how strictly the new standard is adhered to remain open to debate. Including language skills on a list of promotion precepts is a start, but is insufficient to build capacity without threshold requirements as training targets and greater recognition of international communication prowess as criteria for senior leadership.⁴⁸ The proof of the Pentagon’s commitment will be in the implementation. Leadership, more than mere program development, is the current variable; the challenge is to create a command climate in which language flourishes. (The U.S. government generally shares a similar challenge, with many departments and agencies needing to heed the same call to improve language skills.⁴⁹ American society at large should ideally be part of a broader solution, but that challenge is beyond the scope of this paper. Foreign language opportunities should inspire citizens to national service.⁵⁰)

“Success” is more than a program. Leaders who demand, expect, and most of all exemplify excellence in the foreign language arena will have the most positive impact on their subordinates. Until commanders can show that they took the time to train for effectiveness in the “human space” of the battlefield, they are not in a good position to instill those skills in others. Officers who simply administer programs half heartedly delay the cultural awakening that stands between today’s military and a more operationally capable force of tomorrow.⁵¹

The key is leadership. America needs leaders with deeper communication skills near the front lines. Major General Robert Scales (retired) has testified before the U.S. Congress that “Army transformation” should not be viewed only as a technological shift, but as a fundamental cultural shift in the military mind. “Cognitive transformation” is required to dominate in “this emerging era of culture-centric warfare.”⁵² Based on “the fundamental truth that war is inherently a human rather than a technological enterprise,” Scales notes that the classic “centers of gravity” are shifting to the perceptions of people, with success in battle “defined as much in terms of capturing the human and cultural rather than the geographical high ground.”⁵³ Interpersonal skills such as cultural understanding and empathy are “already important weapons of war.”⁵⁴ Highlighting these cognitive weapons, operational leaders need their forces fully armed with the depth of human understanding that derives from language and communication expertise.

CHANGING THE CULTURE

A broad range of programs, however impressive, is not the key to success; critical are networked programs and training continuity that help speakers reach and maintain fluency over time, personnel practices that put an incentive on language learning and retention, integration of linguists into units (rather than viewing them as a “specialty” function peripheral to the main effort), and demanding that commanders consider language along with other operational functions prior to and during deployment. Awareness of the “language factor” is almost as important as the skill itself in focusing minds on operational objectives.

Programs are designed to be networked. A mindset of language learning is needed, which builds upon but does not end with the mere taking of language courses. No single

teacher or textbook – no matter how well presented – is the sole source of good language skills. The diversity of circumstances in which language is used, multiple dialects, and situational adjustments make it imperative that language learners consult a diversity of sources, confront a variety of conversational situations, and absorb culture from more than one perspective. Rather than plugging one program or another into the training regime (as if checking a box), it is critical that military leaders inject an ethic of language learning into the full training spectrum. Commanders should seek out and seize opportunities for themselves and their troops to practice/develop/maintain language skills.

Organic capabilities are preferable. Frequent references to “linguists” in doctrinal publications unfortunately infer that language is a specialty skill to be contracted out or attached to the unit as a support function.⁵⁵ That said, organic capabilities have many advantages: they build unit cohesion by integrating language into the force structure; cleared personnel ensure better operational security; they allow a unit to interpret the linguistic cues of a situation directly, not through the eyes of an outsider; they increase the unit’s awareness of the culture generally; they avoid reliance on an interpreter untested in battle; they bypass the dilemma of a translator’s sympathies getting in the way of a conversation – or a translator whose ethnic background is offensive to one’s interlocutors; and, they give authority to the voice of the speaker – who is seen as a core member and not a hired hand.

Organic skills within units may almost always need to be augmented by external capabilities contracted prior to or during operations. Specialists are important force multipliers, but are much more effectively utilized if some organic capability in the unit provides reinforcement and quality control. A leader separates himself from deeper levels of understanding by passing this role to intermediaries, and commanders “are much more

comfortable with an interpreter that is also a Soldier.”⁵⁶ U.S. interests should be entrusted to the person with the best situational awareness. If that’s the commander, all the better; if it’s not, a commander should defer to the trusted judgment of the more “culturally literate” when culture or language is the key variable. (Recognizing that trained linguists will never quite match the intuition of native speakers, the *Small Wars Manual* does caution that a balance is needed between trained Americans and native speakers – both have a place in careful operational design.⁵⁷)

Personnel practices can provide incentive. Language pay and increased promotion prospects offer incentives to invest time in language learning. Language skills pertinent to the “Long War” now being fought deserve particular incentive; competence in these tongues should be rewarded by increased promotions regardless of an officer’s core skill set.⁵⁸ The assumption that Foreign Area Officers (FAO) or “linguists” are the only ones to be rewarded for language is simply out of date. For all personnel, “until language skills are as highly valued by service promotion boards as other tactical skills, soldiers will not feel compelled to learn and maintain such abilities.”⁵⁹ Lt. Gen. David Barno (retired), with extensive experience in Afghanistan, declares that too much emphasis remains on “operational experience” when considering promotions; “promotions based on who racked up the most command time in combat may not yield the best strategic leaders of the future.”⁶⁰

Officer development programs should incorporate language training. A career-long view is required to build, refine, and maintain expertise. Personnel rotations should also take language into account as a particularly valuable skill set, not sending qualified personnel to perform less demanding tasks.⁶¹ A commander’s best assets (such as high impact, low density language skills) should be arrayed in support of his operational objectives. Language

is a scarce skill to be highlighted when available and cultivated when language-learning potential is discovered at all echelons. It should not be lost on military officers that language skills are also an asset in seeking post-retirement jobs.⁶²

Integration of linguists enhances the team effort. Linguists, whether in uniform or hired by contract, need to be made part of the team as early as possible (with appropriate security precautions based on clearance levels). A combat unit would never go into battle without weapons on the assumption that it can hire skilled riflemen after the team arrives. Unfortunately, many a combat unit has deployed without the basic skills needed to win – communication capabilities in a foreign locale. Methods need to be found to incorporate the language skill into the training regime, exercise planning, and into the ethos of the troops who will represent America to a besieged population. Gone are the days when the soldier could expect to encounter a clearly defined “enemy.” Here are the days in which a unit creates more enemies (for itself and its nation) by treading into the sacred turf of a foreign society without an integrated capacity to interface smartly with that society. Integrated communication skills add to the “antennae” through which commanders understand and adapt to conditions on the ground.

“Language awareness” is as much a skill as language itself. Although General Stanley McChrystal (Commander, U.S. Force Afghanistan/International Security Assistance Force, Afghanistan) neglected to mention language skills in his September 2009 “ISAF Commander’s Counterinsurgency Guidance,” every recommendation in that document requires communication.⁶³ He outlines a mission that will fail without deep human engagement. The key is having commanders and subordinate troops acclimated to the culture in which they must function. That is impossible without language as a lens through

which to better penetrate culture. Instilling forces with this new mindset may be a commander's primary job.

Anyone who has mastered a difficult foreign language likely recalls the transformative effect of the experience. New cultural insights open to view. A sense of cross-cultural understanding emerges, as do fresh abilities to adapt cognitively to new environments. Language learners gain a better understanding of their own society and language, achieve a more intuitive level of cultural discourse, gain a deeper appreciation for the role of language in communication, and tend to “know” what they don't know as they analyze unfamiliar surroundings. These skills are adaptable. Thus, the language learning process itself has broader benefits – regardless of how extensively one ultimately uses the target language. A person who has made the transition to think in Chinese, for example, is likely more astute in managing relations with foreigners generally. Language study, therefore, is a valuable investment in broadening an officer's ability to engage across national borders in many directions. The breaking down of stereotypes is another benefit of language learning.⁶⁴ Moving beyond pre-conceived notions and erroneous assumptions is what victory in adaptive war is all about. (Caution ought to be taken that linguists not over-identify with the population speaking the target language, but maintain American perspectives in assessing U.S. interests. An American who can step into an alternative mindset without losing his cognitive footing in American objectives is an extremely valuable asset.)

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Some may pose the counterargument that language and culture are already ingrained in the training regime to the extent feasible. Indeed, programs are many and growing, yet

they constitute mere lip service when compared to the magnitude of the human-centric operational objectives at hand. Senior-level advocacy is a key variable in elevating cognitive preparation to a threshold at which tongues, not lips, are in America's service.

The research associated with this paper found that a challenge as complex as equipping U.S. troops with sufficient language skills to meet today's political-military objectives does not hinge on programs alone, but on a military culture that recognizes the importance of communication in pursuing operational objectives. The goal is not to train all troops to be master linguists. The goal is a consistent training focus at all levels, both pre-deployment and in theater, to ensure that no one is totally illiterate on the battlefield. Communication should be a mindset, not a mere training exercise. At the higher levels, many more qualified linguists need to be given the resources to gain true fluency and populate all sectors of the force – the more integrated the better. Long-term language training should be career enhancing, not a niche requirement viewed as a distraction from the main effort. Translators also need to be hired and deployed earlier, trained to understand military tasks, and more smartly integrated into operational units.

The answer lies in recognition of the true problem – commanders should stop looking for the structured solution and create the “command climate” solution. Doctrine should be more forthright in highlighting foreign language as a basic survival skill – right along with weapons training as an obvious operational requirement. These skills stand between U.S. forces and their objectives. Promotions and pay incentives should reinforce the need for language skills – to include consideration of a rigorous language requirement for promotion to flag rank. Commanders should create (and be part of) a climate in which language is given a premium commensurate with its criticality to operational success.

NOTES

¹ Page 9 of this paper notes a number of these programs.

² Richard M. Cavagnol, "Lessons from Vietnam," *Marine Corps Gazette* 91, no. 3 (March 2007): 16.

³ John W. Davis, "Our Achilles' Heel: Language Skills," *Military Review* 86, no. 2 (March/April 2006): 110.

⁴ Kirsten A. Holmstedt, "II MEF Leathernecks Go to War Armed with Arabic," *Leatherneck* 88, no. 3 (March 2005): 36.

⁵ Walter E. Kraus, "Bridging the Linguistic Gap," *Army* 58, no. 7 (July 2008): 63.

⁶ U.S. Department of Defense, "Face of Defense: Army interpreter links cultures with language," *US Fed News Service, Including US State News*, Washington, DC, December 30, 2008, <http://www.proquest.umi.com> (accessed 15 September 2009).

⁷ Jason Jordan, "iPod Vcommunicator Helps Soldiers Communicate with Iraqis and Afghanis," *Pentagon Brief*, January 1, 2008, 8. An additional example highlights how language skills prevented further bloodshed: After a bloody engagement at Goose Greene in the Falklands, British troops learned the value of precise language skill when a Marine interpreter (a scarce resource in that battle even though the enemy all spoke Spanish) drafted a letter in Spanish suggesting that Argentine forces surrender. With the expectation that perhaps 80 might heed this call, the British were "astounded" to see "a great column of men emerging from Goose Green, marching towards them in three ranks." This language-enabled surrender netted the British 1,200 prisoners of war without further bloodshed. One can only imagine what might have ensued had a Royal Marine, Captain Rod Bell, not had the Spanish skills to match the task. From Max Hastings and Simon Jenkins, *The Battle for the Falklands* (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1983), 250-51.

⁸ U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Operational Planning, Joint Publication 5.0*, Washington, DC: 26 December 2006, II-11. See paragraph 11.e. in particular.

⁹ Cecil MacPherson, Devin Rossis, Irene Zehmisch; Notes, 8th AMTA Conference, Hawaii, 21-25 October 2008. Conference focused on "Meeting Army Foreign Language Requirements with the Aid of Machine Translation" and was held at Language Requirements Branch, U.S. Army Intelligence Center and Fort Huachuca, Fort Huachuca, Arizona.

¹⁰ Katherine McIntire Peters, "At a Loss for Words," *Government Executive* 37, no. 10 (June 15, 2005): 46.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Kevin M. Charkowske, "Practical Impacts and Effectiveness of Cultural Intelligence," *Marine Corps Gazette* 89, no. 10 (October 2005): 20.

¹³ Mike Musgrove, "Court Rejects Suit Against CACI Over Abu Ghraib Torture; Contractor Granted Wartime Immunity," *Washington Post*, September 12, 2009, A14; see also Letter to Editor, "Hold the Private Contractors in Iraq Accountable," *New York Times*, June 22, 2008, editorial page.

¹⁴ John W. Frost (Colonel, AR), “Language Training and the Activation of Combat Electronic Warfare Intelligence (CEWI) Units in the Reserve Component” (research paper, Carlisle Barracks, PA: U.S. Army War College, Military Studies Program, 24 March 1989), 27.

¹⁵ U.S. Marine Corps, *Small Wars Manual* (Reprint of 1940 Edition), Washington, DC: USMC, 1940, SWM 1-15, p. 26. (Also identified as NAVMC 2890.)

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, SWM 1-28, p. 41 and SWM 6-20, p. 12.

¹⁷ Bryan Bender, “Pentagon says it needs more foreign recruits, Will offer road to citizenship for up to 1,000,” *Boston Globe*, December 6, 2008, A2.

¹⁸ U.S. Department of the Army, *Counterinsurgency* (Washington, DC: Headquarters, Department of the Army, 15 December 2006), A-2. Also identified as FM 3-24/MCWP 3-33.5 or COIN Manual. See Appendix C for discussion of utilizing linguists.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, seven full pages constituting Appendix C address utilization of interpreters, although the COIN manual does acknowledge that “the best use of linguists may be to train Soldiers and Marines in basic language skills.”

²⁰ Paul J. Schmitt, “Effectively Using Interpreters,” *Infantry* 91, no. 1 (Spring 2002): 17.

²¹ Milan Vego, *Joint Operational Warfare: Theory and Practice* (Newport, RI: U.S. Naval War College, 20 September 2007 (reprint of 1st ed 2009).

²² *Ibid.*, III-3.

²³ *Ibid.*, III-3 and III-65.

²⁴ William M. Darley, “Clausewitz’s Theory of War and Information Operations,” *Joint Forces Quarterly*, 1st Quarter 2006, 73-79. Includes an illustrative chart on the dominance of “kinetic” versus “information” factors in deciding a series of historical engagements, with a clear trend towards information dominance over time.

²⁵ David J. Danelo, “The Linguistic Tipping Point,” *Marine Corps Gazette* 89, no. 10 (October 2005): 30. Danelo calls this delicate cost/impact balance a “tipping point” for learning languages quickly yet being able to operate effectively.

²⁶ C. Todd Lopez, “Language company first in Army,” *Army Well-Being*, October 22, 2008, <http://www.armywell-being.org> (accessed 26 September 2009).

²⁷ A secondary intent for language indoctrination (which can only be properly achieved if the language is taught and learned in the right spirit) is to deepen the soldier’s sense of the humanity of the other side, to understand the human underpinnings of their culture. Such understanding begins with the simple language of everyday life. If every soldier, no matter how junior, gave the impression to the populace that he/she had studied the culture even this little bit, the strategic communications value would be tremendous.

²⁸ John Valceanu, "DLI: Training Army Linguists," *Soldiers* 56, no. 5 (May 2001): 42-44. Source notes (p. 44) that native language instructors "totally destroyed any stereotypes I may have had about people from the Middle East." This is a common phenomenon in language learners.

²⁹ Terrance M. Ford (Lieutenant Colonel, MI), "The Adequacy of the Army's Foreign Language Program," (research paper, Carlisle Barracks, PA: U.S. Army War College, 1 February 1990), 137. (Publication provided by Defense Technical Information Center.) Source contains a good overview of language recommendations on pp. 133-37).

³⁰ C. Todd Lopez, "Language, cultural learning important to Army mission," December 17, 2008, <http://www.army.mil/-news/2008/12/17/15280-language-cultural-learning-important-to-army-mission> (accessed 26 September 2009).

³¹ Characterized according to the Interagency Language Roundtable (ILR) five-point scale which rates language capacity from zero (no skill) to five (educated native fluency) and is found at www.govtillr.org, the recommended notion is that all deployed troops, in whatever capacity, should receive a minimal level of training from which some might take interest and climb to a higher level. The standard would remain a "zero" or "zero plus" level of comprehension. Advanced linguists would seek a target of "three" or better in comprehension, speaking, and reading. Three is considered functional for professional discourse. A range of personnel at the "one" and "two" levels can also make a contribution, although professional fluency is certainly preferred and refined discourse happens at level three and above.

³² Reference McPherson (et al) at note #9; see also Bill Sweetman, "Speaking in Tongues," *Defense Technology International* 3, no. 3 (March 1, 2009): 14.

³³ Anonymous, "Army Guard Seeks Native Speakers in 20 Languages," *National Guard* 59, no. 9 (September 2005): 27; see also "The 51st TICO (Translator Interpreter Company)," <http://www.army.mil/standto/archive/2009/05/28> (accessed 26 September 2009); and John J. Kruzel, "Army to Activate First company of Native Linguists-Turned-Soldiers," *U.S. Department of Defense Information / FIND*, Lanham: Oct 15, 2008 (American Forces Press Service).

³⁴ ROMO is explained in U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Capstone Concept for Joint Operations*, Washington, DC: August 2005, p. 10.

³⁵ Janice L. Burton, "Language Transformation Plan to Build Culturally Savvy Soldiers," *Special Warfare* 18, no. 2 (September 2005): 14.

³⁶ C. Todd Lopez, "Language company first in Army," *Army Well-Being*, October 22, 2008, <http://www.armywell-being.org> (accessed 26 September 2009). Source quotes Brig. Gen. Richard C. Longo, Director of Training in the Army's Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations and Plans, G-3/5/7, who offers a positive review of Army efforts to fill the language gap.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Will Bardenwerper, "For Military, Slow Progress In Foreign Language Push," *New York Times*, September 22, 2008, A-20.

³⁹ Lists of priority languages vary. One characterization notes that "needs are constantly shifting and evolving," from an "urgent demand for Somali interpreters one year" to a "requirement for Serbo-

Croatian speakers another.” What remains clear, however, is that “the services will need large numbers of Arabic speakers...as well as people fluent in Pashto, Urdu, Dari, and other languages spoken in Afghanistan. That source goes on to list the more difficult languages as “most likely to be in high demand” in the future, to include Arabic, Korean, Chinese, and Persian Farsi. From Katherine McIntire Peters, “At a Loss for Words,” *Government Executive* 37, no. 10 (June 15, 2005): 46-51. Another notes Arabic, Hindi, Farsi, and Somali as “too important to pass up” if native-speaking recruits are willing to sign up. From Bryan Bender, “Pentagon says it needs more foreign recruits, Will offer road to citizenship for up to 1,000,” *Boston Globe*, December 6, 2008, A2. Other lists are similarly speculative, but some priorities are common: Arabic, Farsi, and the languages of Afghanistan/Pakistan. One article suggests that the range is broad: Anonymous, “Army Guard Seeks Native Speakers in 20 Languages,” *National Guard* 59, no. 9 (September 2005): 27. Another suggests that DoD is looking for “any of 35 languages, including Arabic and Yoruba.” See Alexandra Zavis and Andres Becker, “Army widens immigrant recruiting; Program aims to add much-needed language and health specialists with an expanded offer of U.S. citizenship,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 4, 2009, A4. The Defense Language Transition Roadmap suggests annual publication of a “strategic language list.” From U.S. Department of Defense, *Defense Language Transformation Roadmap* (Washington, DC: Office of??, January 2005), p. 5 (see required action 1.G.).

⁴⁰ Will Bardenwerper, “For Military, Slow Progress In Foreign Language Push,” *New York Times*, September 22, 2008, A-20; see also Katherine McIntire Peters, “At a Loss for Words,” *Government Executive* 37, no. 10 (June 15, 2005): 46-51.

⁴¹ John Valceanu, “DLI: Training Army Linguists,” *Soldiers* 56, no. 5 (May 2001): 42-45. See also DLI website at www.dliflc.edu; also Jason Jordan, “iPod Vcommunicator Helps Soldiers Communicate with Iraqis and Afghans,” *Pentagon Brief*, January 1, 2008, 8.

⁴² See Louis E. Keefer, *Scholars in Foxholes: The Story of the Army Specialized Training Program in World War II* (Jefferson, North Carolina, and London: McFarland & Company, Inc., 1988). This folksy treatise of the ASTP program as seen through the eyes of participants highlights a costly program that netted limited benefits when funding was cut. It represents an example of the resources that can be marshaled to expand language when needed but also highlights the vulnerability of such programs to political forces.

⁴³ Various sources refer to the Rosetta Stone option for language learning. One October 2008 report notes that 178,000 had signed up to use the option. From C. Todd Lopez, “Language company first in Army,” *Army Well-Being*, October 22, 2008 (accessed at <http://www.armywell-being.org> on 9/26/2009).

⁴⁴ Foreign Language Proficiency Pay is mentioned in U.S. Army News Release, “Army announces critical language incentive-pay program,” August 13, 2008. Accessed on 9/26/2009 at <http://www.army.mil/-newsreleases/2008/08/13/11649-army-announces-critical-language-incentive>. See also Military.com – benefits: Accessed on 9/26/2009 at <http://www.military.com/benefits/military-pay/special-pay/military-foreign-language-proficiency-pay>. See also Anonymous, “Army Offers Language Bonus to ROTC Cadets,” *US Fed News Service, Including US State News*, Washington, D.C.: Aug 14, 2008.

⁴⁵ Technologies are discussed in MacPherson, et al (reference note #9); see also Bill Sweetman, "Speaking in Tongues," *Defense Technology International* 3, no. 3 (March 1, 2009): 14. The MAVNI program is found in C. Todd Lopez, "Army seeks language, medical skills from non-citizens," *U.S. Department of Defense Information / FIND*, Lanham: Feb 23, 2009 (Department of Defense U.S. Army Releases); also John J. Kruzel, "Army to Activate First company of Native Linguists-Turned-Soldiers," *U.S. Department of Defense Information / FIND*, Lanham: Oct 15, 2008 (American Forces Press Service). Also referenced in Anonymous, "Army Guard Seeks Native Speakers in 20 Languages," *National Guard* 59, no. 9 (September 2005): 27.

⁴⁶ U.S. Department of Defense, *Defense Language Transformation Roadmap* (Washington, DC: DoD, January 2005). For a review of recommendations from a November 8-9, 2005 conference in Washington, DC focused on Military Language, see also Peter A. Shaver, "Language Action," *Military Intelligence Professional Bulletin* 31, no. 3 (July-September 2005): 59-61. Most of the good ideas are on the table, they just need leadership focus.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, *Defense Language Transformation Roadmap*, 8 (see required action 1.S.).

⁴⁸ As an example, the U.S. Navy's inclusion of "Language, Regional Expertise and Cultural Experience" as a competency of value to promotion boards for rear admiral (lower half) candidates in FY10 is the right idea, but needs more fidelity and priority to serve as an incentive. Secretary of the Navy, to ADM Patrick M. Walsh, USN, memorandum, December 1, 2008, p. B-5.

⁴⁹ A January 5, 2006 fact sheet from the U.S. Department of State, Office of the Spokesman, spells out goals of the "National Security Language Initiative" launched by the President to expand the language skills of American citizens generally.
<http://www.actfl.org/i4a/pages/index.cfm?pageid=4249> (accessed 26 September 2009).

⁵⁰ Some dissenting voice is heard from the education community about the U.S. military taking a central role in foreign language instruction. Some fear that American efforts to learn foreign languages will be viewed from abroad as having ulterior motives if the Pentagon is at the center of the effort, perhaps distancing local populations from American language students. Discussed in "Inside Higher Ed advertisement," January 4, 2006,
<http://www.insidehighered.com/layout/set/print/news/2006/01/04/language> (accessed 8 October 2009).

⁵¹ The need for a "cultural awakening" is discussed in William B. Brents (LTC, USA), "America's Cultural Awakening" (research paper, Carlisle Barracks, PA: U.S. Army War College, Strategy Research Project, 30 March 2007).

⁵² Robert H. Scales, Jr. (MG USA, retired), "Testimony," Senate, *Statement for the Record before the Senate Armed Services Committee*, 110th Congress, 1st sess, April 17, 2007. Paragraph on p. 4 under heading of "Cultural and cognitive dominance on the battlefield" is particularly insightful. Similar sentiments expressed in Robert Scales (USA, retired), "Testimony," House, *Army Transformation: Implications for the Future: Hearing before the House Armed Services Committee*, 108th Congress, 2nd sess, July 15, 2004.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 4 (from April 17, 2007 testimony).

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Multinational Operations, Joint Publication (JP) 3.16* (Washington, DC: CJCS): III-5, 6 (see paragraphs 4.a. and 4.c. in particular).

U.S. Department of the Army, *Counterinsurgency* (Washington, DC: Headquarters, Department of the Army, 15 December 2006), A-2. See Appendix C for discussion of utilizing linguists. Also U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Military Operations, Joint Publication 5.0* (Washington, DC: CJCS): II-11.

⁵⁶ C. Todd Lopez, "Language company first in Army," *Army Well-Being*, October 22, 2008 (accessed at www.armywell-being.org on 9/26/2009).

⁵⁷ *Small Wars Manual*, SWM 6-20, p. 12.

⁵⁸ See references to Foreign Language Proficiency Pay at note # 44.

⁵⁹ Katherine McIntire Peters, "At a Loss for Words," *Government Executive* 37, no. 10 (June 15, 2005): 46-51.

⁶⁰ Rick Maze, "Officers Need More Time In Classroom," *Navy Times*, 10 September 2009.

⁶¹ A comical example of poor utilization of language skills is found in Keefer's review of the ASTP program. One Pfc Morton Leeds, who "already had three years of both German and French, but was assigned to study Italian," ended up serving in India, where he taught himself Russian while doing duties unrelated to language (p. 205). The following quotation is tragic in its humor. "In true Army fashion, though educated as a psychologist, trained by the Army as a linguist, and incompletely trained in bomb disposal, I had been shipped overseas as an electric arc welder, a specialty in short supply. At the reassignment center north of Calcutta, I requested and was granted the privilege of hospital attendant status, and from there was shipped to the hospital. For a while I worked in the V.D. ward." From Louis E. Keefer, "Scholars in Foxholes: The Story of the Army Specialized Training Program in World War II" (Jefferson, North Carolina, and London: McFarland & Company, Inc., 1988), p 206.

⁶² Thomas Lynch and Michael O'Hanlon, "Rewards for Hiring Veterans," *Washington Times*, October 9, 2007, A15.

⁶³ International Security Assistance Force, Kabul Afghanistan, "ISAF Commander's Counterinsurgency Guidance," Headquarters, ISAF, not dated.

⁶⁴ John Valceanu, "DLI: Training Army Linguists," *Soldiers* 56, no. 5 (May 2001): 42-45. Source offers but one example of a student who claims language study with native instructors broke down his personal stereotypes. This is a common phenomenon among students of other languages and cultures as they become familiar with a reality previously unknown to them.

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