Language, Culture, and Army Culture: Failing Transformation

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Editor’s Note: COL Outzen puts forth a compelling plea for the Army to pay more attention to promoting language proficiency. The other services are similarly lacking in these fields. Although individual program managers are creating some bright spots, the truth is that poor personnel management and the burden of one-size-fits-all training preclude many servicemembers from attaining true professionalism in their fields.

Introduction

A decade of Counterinsurgency (COIN) and Counter-Terrorism (CT) operations have highlighted our military’s shortcomings in employing and understanding foreign languages, the people who speak them, and various types of knowledge derived from language communities. The Department of Defense had identified this critical capability gap by 2004, and by 2005 had directed the Services to treat language capabilities as a core warfighting skill akin to marksmanship[1]. This implied significant organizational and cultural change within the Army and sister Services, which have traditionally viewed foreign language skill as a niche meriting limited and episodic attention. Six years have elapsed, though, and the Services have failed to produce doctrine, organizations, or practices that can be considered transformative. Instead, they have applied band-aid approaches by contracting out language and related capabilities, while not reforming the way the fielded forces train for or employ language and related skills in any significant way[2]. Given emphatic calls from senior leaders such as the Secretary of Defense, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and Chief of Staff of the Army, it is hard to understand why the Army has made such little progress[3].

That we have not successfully transformed is beyond dispute among those paying attention since the Defense Language Transformation Roadmap was published[4]. With massive cuts to the DoD budget looming, though, simply recognizing failure is insufficient; the Army and DoD must develop coherent and effective responses sooner rather than later[5]. The response must both be effective and survive budget austerity, which rules out much of the Army’s current approach[6]. This essay offers a series of observations about why and how we have failed to transform language and related capabilities, and presents several recommendations for successfully moving ahead. The observations focus on the U.S. Army’s efforts, since the Army has the preponderance of resources and responsibilities for DoD language and culture operations, but are broadly applicable for the other Services as well.

Recommendations for new approaches follow the observations below, but this essay is more cautionary than prescriptive. We have underperformed at great cost for a decade, and can afford neither the same
expense nor the same results in the coming decade. Critical for COIN and CT, language requirements carry equal importance for engagement and security cooperation missions, and the need for effective conventional operations in coalition; the need will only increase.[7]. Especially after reductions in force structure that appear certain over the next decade, the Army’s efforts worldwide will frequently depend on an “economy of force” presence overseas, fewer in number but with substantially greater linguistic capability and local influence. The inability to master local languages and intellectual environments greatly increased the difficulty of military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, but remedies of a sort were available by committing more troops, more time, and more money. We have none of those luxuries in the decade of resource scarcity ahead; such inability may foreclose strategic options altogether. The Army and DoD need radical change to produce better language capability; this paper may serve as a departure point for discussions of remedy.

Observations

The Army never mastered languages and population-knowledge in Iraq or Afghanistan, and never made broad organizational or doctrinal changes to develop long-term capability in those areas.

Militaries have failed throughout history to keep up with demands of the contemporary battlefield, but seldom have they continued to fail after a decade of proof that commanders, soldiers, and civilians alike were suffering directly from that failure to transform. This transcends simple institutional inertia with marginal effects; our language incapacity has handicapped our operations and doubled our work in cities and villages from Baghdad to Kabul for a decade. The Army still suffers acute shortage of speakers of critical languages across the Combatant Commands and theaters. Commanders still struggle to find soldiers with effective language skills and regional/cultural expertise, and must match them to appropriate jobs in combat theaters on an ad hoc basis. The Army still lacks a method of developing and deploying teams with focused linguistic-cultural skills, and cannot systematically produce the quality of population-centric knowledge COIN requires. While our cadets and language professionals have access to better training and better incentive pay, we have not significantly broadened or deepened the pool of foreign-language capable soldiers, and still rely overwhelmingly on contract linguists and contract “cultural expertise.” Command language programs in garrison and in deployed theaters are not contributing much in terms of availability and efficiency or skills sustainment[8]. Arguably the Army is losing more language capability than it is producing every month, as soldiers exit service or experience skill decay through non-use. Unless we become a forward-deployed Army that once again has generations to grow such skills through contact with local populations, as in Korea and Germany during the Cold War, these problems appear to be the new normal: we will pay lip service to the importance of foreign language capabilities on the battlefield, nibble at the problem around the edges, and enter future conflicts unable to comprehend the populations we encounter. Then we will spend massive amounts of money for short windows of partial capability. The cost for such incapacity has and will continue to be severe – lost tactical opportunities, garbled intelligence, frustrated negotiations, and damaged partnerships. This is not an argument for keeping large-scale inventory in specific languages - Iraqi Arabic and Pashtu for instance – but for broadening baseline capabilities and surge capacity by training a force with more language capability across the board.

We have relied excessively on contractors for language and related expertise in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Private firms offering language interpretation and related services provided partial relief in a resource-rich environment, but are not sustainable and provide no long-term capability. Contract-dependence may have been a logical response in late 2003 and a short time thereafter, when the Department and the Army realized that the plan for short, high-tech war with minimal follow-on tasks was a mixture of poor planning and fantasy[9]. Contractors could have been an appropriate interim measure, bridging the gap
between initial shortfall and the arrival of a surge of purpose-trained teams of uniformed personnel. Instead, the Army and Combatant Commands developed a near-total and open-ended dependence on contract linguists, which brought both enormous expense and severe operational limitations\[10\]. The limitations of contractor language support were well illustrated by British filmmaker John McHugh’s short film *Lost in Translation – Afghanistan*, released in June 2008; the episode is anecdotal, but has played out so frequently for U.S. forces over the past decade that any veteran of field deployments in Iraq or Afghanistan will see bitterly familiar footage\[11\]. Interpreters not trained in the right dialect or not functional under combat conditions are a familiar story to many veterans of our current conflicts. Even when the interpreters are competent, relating to local populations primarily through interpreters dooms U.S. forces to levels of personal and cultural distance that pose serious obstacles to long-term cooperation and understanding. When the contracts are up, these linguists depart, leaving no residue of capability or training base for future surges.

*We lack language “evangelists.”*

Perhaps the most troubling aspect of U.S. Army response to operational language requirements is that our institutional culture has not changed in a significant or comprehensive way. Many commanders seem to expect someone else to fix the problem, either contractors or some “surge” capacity that unfortunately doesn’t really exist. Most commanders have just learned to operate without effective language and culture tools. Changing the expectations and priorities of commanders is a form of cultural change; cultural change requires evangelists; the simple fact is that the Army lacks such evangelists for foreign language capability. Even in operational fields where language is already considered a core competency, such as Special Forces and Foreign Area Officers (FAOs), only a minority have current qualification\[12\]. The language labs at many bases – including those hosting elite, frequently-deployed units – suffer chronic underuse. Major headquarters frequently fail to afford their personnel language sustainment time, and sometimes lack facilities for such training\[13\]. The Army’s approach to language maintenance is very narrowly focused on units with language-required Military Occupational Specialties, which normally means intelligence units with soldiers in the Military Occupational Specialties 35P or 35M. A Command Language Program (CLP) is only directed for units with such personnel, and funding from The Army Language Program (TALP) is restricted to them as well. Command Language Programs could be a vehicle to broaden the pool of linguists and diffuse language skills throughout the broader force, but instead are used to reinforce the stove-piping of language into the intelligence world\[14\]. Even many FAOs seem uncertain as to whether language capability is critical or just an enabling skill for other things, such as policy analysis or security assistance\[15\]. The hard truth is that foreign language capability cannot simply be purchased, outsourced, or obtained through monetary incentive alone; it requires behavioral and institutional change, and constant affirmation that it is a core organizational function. In addition to evangelists, institutional change requires command buy-in. Commanders must see deployable language capabilities less as a critical type of support, and more as a critical war-fighting capability\[16\]. Unfortunately, very few Army leaders are working for this deep and thorough sort of change.

*Service language strategies – including the Army Culture and Foreign Language Strategy (ACFLS) – fall far short of the DLTR’s call for “transformation.”*

The Services produced implementing strategies for the 2005 DLTR only after a delay of three to four years; one suspects that they were trying to figure out how to say “we can’t afford to transform.” The General Accounting Office pointed out that the DLTR would only become a strategic plan once the Services fleshed out the implementing details, but the Services’ slow and tepid response to most of the DLTR’s guidance was remarkable\[17\]. Some of the DLTR’s fundamental goals – better inventory of language skills, effective Service management of linguist populations, improved support to the warfighter,
broader and greater emphasis on language skills across DoD – seem not have been fully acknowledged by the Services, let alone fulfilled. The ACFLS, for instance, in a sharp departure from the spirit of the DLTR, essentially excuses units and headquarters from any role in training sustainment for languages; the responsibility lies with the training base and the individual. This is something like training soldiers to shoot in basic training, then never again, or administering the APFT every six months without affording soldiers training time for physical fitness.

Rejection of a unit responsibility for language sustainment means skills mastered in entry-level training or pre-deployment will degrade and perish quickly[18]. Perishable knowledge is a critical problem; once cadets are commissioned or language professionals are assigned other primary duties without explicit allowance for sustainment, slow but steady loss of capability inevitably ensues. The only way we can be certain that we are improving the numbers and capabilities of our linguist populations is through sustainment training; otherwise language skill decay and linguist exit from service will assure downward pressure on overall capability. To be clear, the increase in language training requirements and opportunities at officer commissioning sources, including both the U.S. Military Academy (USMA) and the Reserve Officers Training Corps (ROTC), has been a positive step[19]. Even this is a fragile and dependent measure, though: DoD funded the expansion at USMA as a supplemental project, for example, rather than a core funded part of the curriculum, and the future of those funds is subject to excision[20].

We Lack Clear Terminology for “Language-derived Population Knowledge”

Another shortcoming of the ACFLS is its invention of a categorical separation of “language” from “culture,” coupled with assertion of primacy for the latter (“big C little l”)[21]. Little wonder that in a DoD Language Summit held six years after the publication of the DLTR, DoD language management authorities were still calling on the Services to recognize language as a core capabilities – the Services appear to have deferred reform because they don’t see language as a core function, just a tool to get at “culture”[22].

The ACFLS’ blurred categories of “culture” and “language” merit further discussion. Asserting that “culture” is a realm of knowledge or expertise separable from language, and that we might attain knowledge of the former without the latter, is an unsupported (likely unsupportable) proposition. The two are of course intimately related, and can only be effectively learned together. Attempts to separate the two produce an overly academic, highly generalized type of knowledge that may have sufficed for studying the Japanese in World War II, but cannot equip us for the intimate and complex interactions that modern COIN and urban operations entail. This approach has largely been discredited in the broader field of anthropology[23]. Furthermore, placing primacy on the ill-defined and synthetic category of “culture” over language is mystifying. The term “culture” in a military operational context is poorly defined, and blurs distinctions between manners, belief structures, art, religion, and traditions -- knowledge subsets that can in fact only be accurately understood by speaking to the people bearing those ideas in a language they understand. Spoken language so thoroughly permeates how and what people think that it is folly to learn subsets of those “thoughts” without knowing the language; languages are more systems of thinking than they are mere systems of communication. Someone who speaks “language x” with a population of native speakers will absorb in short order familiarity with their customs, beliefs, behaviors, and so forth, but someone who has studied various aspects of “culture” without knowing the target language has error and separation built into their knowledge from the start. If the Army had to choose one priority between language per se or the products of language it arbitrarily calls “culture,” it chose wrongly[24]. In reality, the choice poses a false dilemma[25].

The word “culture” does not suffice to describe the breadth of knowledge about human societies in operational areas that must be mastered, but other terms currently used are little better. GAO reports, for
instance, alternate between “regional expertise” and “area expertise”, ignoring the critical point that this is knowledge about humans, their behaviors and connections, more than the regions or areas in which they live. The U.S. Army’s University of Foreign Military and Cultural Studies, on the other hand, uses “culture” as a less encompassing term - as only one of thirteen variables in the operational environment, separate from things like religion and demographic sociology. The variation in terminology and analytic scope points out the need for a unifying concept for knowledge about populations that is derived from their thoughts and behaviors; knowledge that is therefore language-dependent and language-derived, but separate from the study of the language itself.

The Army delivers language-enabled operators to long standing institutional customers such as embassies and intelligence centers, but hasn’t figured out how to put them in the hands of Combatant Commanders and deployed forces.

Part of this is a demand signal and inventory problem, part is conceptual, and part is a deployment platform problem. Those commands who have long required language capability, such as the Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) and the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), have established pipelines, procedures, requirements, funding, and field organizations for language-capable personnel. Officers and enlisted going to DSCA or DIA assignments across the globe frequently have access to quality language training prior to deployment, and some sustainment training at station. Neither Army nor Joint doctrine yet provides for an analogous capability in operational forces, despite clear evidence that the current, population-centric operating environment demands such a capability. DoD and the Army lack doctrinal and organizational approaches for placing language and population experts at the disposal of field commanders. My experience advising and liaising in Iraq, Afghanistan, and at strategic headquarters included at least a half-dozen instances of senior commanders expressing great surprise when they met a fully-language qualified officer or NCO serving at the right time and place; it clearly is not the norm.

Models for deployable language and culture teams exist but have been ad hoc rather than doctrinal solutions. These include DIA’s Defense Liaison Team Iraq (DLT-I) from 2004-2005, the current Afghanistan-Pakistan Hands (APH) program, and Special Operations Command’s Culture Support Teams (CSTs) for female engagement in Afghanistan. These were and are evolving responses to specific needs, but each shows that the Services and Commands can produce effective organizations and doctrines for language and population-centric knowledge when conditions require. Rather than evolving such platforms in tortuous fashion in the field, the Services should anticipate recurring requirements in these areas and find/resource doctrinal solutions, while educating commanders about how to request and use them.

The Army has not adopted and spread innovative approaches from the field.

Some commanders have taken the initiative to commit unit time, money, and personnel to specific target languages in preparation for specific deployments. Certain battalions in the 10th Mountain Division have sent a few soldiers per company for training over several months prior to deployment; at the larger end of the spectrum we find the Joint Staff’s Afghanistan-Pakistan Hands (APH) program, which provides hundreds of service members foundational language skills an iterative deployment pattern. Another example is the practice in 5th Special Forces Group of holding back one member of each ODA during deployment rotations for full-time language immersion in preparation for the subsequent rotation. This is a radical commitment (one twelfth of available personnel) reflect a serious commitment to effective language capability.

Two organizations focused on improving content and delivery of language-focused training and operational support also merit mention: the Defense Language Institute (DLI) and the Marine Corps Center for Advanced Operational and Cultural Learning (CAOCL). DLI has both updated its curricula
and proved agile enough to support emerging initiatives such as APH, while CAOCL has done well in integrating language and culture concepts and products for USMC deployed forces[31].

The primary Achilles Heel of the larger-scale approaches is funding, especially given what is widely expected to be a decade of severe budget austerity and steep reduction in force structure. APH, for example, was conceived and implemented as a sort of Manhattan Project for language and culture, with a degree of personal commitment and drive from multiple four-star officers that was unprecedented in the history of DoD’s language efforts[32]. The combination of senior leader turnover, budget austerity, and troop reductions in theater will likely mean the massive reduction, or perhaps elimination, of that program in the next several years. Like contract solutions, resource-heavy special-purpose organizations may not be a feasible approach in the coming decade[33]. The examples from 10th Mountain and 5th SFG, however, provide an interesting model for how we might integrate language capability across a broader spectrum of the operational force in future.

Recommendations

These seven observations paint a pretty bleak picture: top-level recognition of a serious capability gap; institutional and organizational rigidity that prevents fundamental change; conceptual confusion in identifying solutions; expensive short-term remedies that leave us right where we started; and likely the most severe wave of budget and force cuts in sixty years approaching. Have we foreclosed the possibility that our next generation of soldiers might enter their operational areas less handicapped by deficient language skills and population knowledge? The answer does not depend on a rear-guard action for expensive programs, but a focused effort to clarify operational need, and ideas for building the capability into our force. Here are some reform ideas that might serve as a starting point for that discussion.

Unify the Concept

We should recognize language and culture as aspects of a single category of military information that commanders require, rather than two, or five, or ten disparate types of information. I would nominate “language-enabled population knowledge” (LPK) as a unifying concept for information about target populations, the regions they influence, their views and values, and other information of relevance to military operations. Gross data about economy, political structure, military forces and objective measures may be accessible to analysts without language skills, but these “world view” types of knowledge unique to LPK should be recognized as a separate and necessary domain with an assigned type of operation and operator assigned to it. Language is the critical skill, LPK is the critical product to provide to commanders, and both general-purpose and task-specific operators must be developed to provide it. The LPK concept can focus collectors, analysts, operators, and commanders on the connected nature of the various facets of population knowledge and their inseparable link with spoken language. This would also correct the imprecision of referring to “culture” when what we mean is a broad but finite body of knowledge of relevance to the military planner.

Assign Lead Responsibility for the Language-Culture Mission

The U.S. Army’s best hope for progress on language and culture solutions is the FAO. This is not to say that FAOs are merely linguists; language and LPK are critical to FAOs, but so too are political-military knowledge and operational currency. If FAOs cannot integrate and lead in this critical domain of military knowledge, however, no one can or will. The doctrinal, organizational, operational, and budgetary aspects of the “language and culture” problem are thorny and weighty enough to warrant a coherent and integrated solution – with a formally tasked FAO Corps in the lead. The FAO population should be organized into a Corps, with a Commanding General, doctrinal responsibility, and standards common across COCOMs and agencies. They should be given the enduring mission of evangelizing language transformation and
integration as a key warfighting function across the Army enterprise.

A FAO Corps can become the Army’s builder and integrator for deployable organizations and effective doctrine for providing LPK. We have fielded a wide variety of LPK collectors and advisors in the past decade, but never developed a mechanism to integrate and focus their efforts[34]. Instead of providing Commanders integrated teams, doctrine, and expectations, we have relied on pick-up teams. The result has been very partial coverage of a vast spectrum of information and knowledge requirements. Our ability to describe requirements, fashion solutions, surge capabilities, and institutionalize skills will all benefit from having a Corps with language and LPK as a primary mission.

The idea that FAOs and the functions they perform are necessary at the strategic but not the operational or tactical landscape has become less and less credible over the past decade. Senior commanders in Iraq and Afghanistan have called urgently for more FAOs and FAO-like capabilities, and have strongly endorsed the efforts of the FAOs they were able to deploy[35]. Despite the failure of one early attempt to meet that need in Iraq, by 2010 commanders in both Iraq and Afghanistan were clamoring for more FAOs and were integrating them into forward units extensively[36]. The breadth and immediacy of battlefield need renders language and culture operators more like communications or logistics operators, and less like more technical functional specialists (Operational Research Systems Analysis – ORSA – for instance); expansion of Functional Area 48 into an organized Corps would address this immediacy.

The Army must do a better job of inventorying language skills across all commands, and develop the ability in times of crisis to surge those linguists to deploying commands and areas, even if parent units or agencies are not deploying as a whole[37]. Establishing a FAO Corps would provide a framework to organize surge capacity into coherent teams; this might require only a small number of core personnel at Army Service Component Command or Combatant Command level[38]. These “on call teams” might be gathered periodically for orientation and refresher training, and once called can provide immediately responsive linguist support, plus a management core for follow-on reserve or contract language and LPK operators. The FAO Corps can be established with relatively little additional cost or footprint, an important factor in the looming budgetary environment. The smaller FAO programs in the other services can then develop relationships with the FAO Corps for habitual training, doctrinal and professional development – as they currently do for a number of other combat support specialties.

**Build the Bench**

A formalized FAO Corps should be expanded through inclusion of Warrant and Non-Commissioned FAOs. These would fill not only existing support positions at attaché and security assistance offices, but might also form the basis for deployable FAO teams that could be made available to tactical commanders and Joint Task Forces to provide early-in language and LPK support[39]. By excluding warrant and Non-commissioned officers from the specialized training and long-term development in such roles, we are missing the full potential to the expand capability base.

The Army should also broaden the pool of linguists by implementing some level of foreign language proficiency bonus for soldiers scoring between 1/1 and 2/2 on the Defense Language Proficiency Test. Other services have done this for APH; anecdotal evidence shows that linguists qualifying at 1/1 with a short period of initial training may be can achieve broader competency through self study or subsequent instruction[40]. More positions should be coded for linguist-qualified soldiers (perhaps at the lower 1/1 level), especially in combat units and critical headquarters.

There is a more novel approach we might try, one that has been contemplated by Congress but not enacted. I call this the “Ivy-Army Partnership.” A combined effort between certain top-level universities (not restricted to the Ivy League of course) would establish centers for focused study of language and LPK
both for students and for language-qualified military personnel. Training might be provided on a periodic, in person basis, on a distance-learning, continuous basis, or some combination. Such centers would work both on the Services’ needs for higher-level language and LPK capacity, and on the troubling civic aspect of isolation between the military and the academy. The program could be linked with other agency initiatives, especially the State Department’s Foreign Service Institute language training, to gain other efficiencies and leverage low-density capabilities. In the ideal scenario, program graduates and even instructors would provide value as mobilized reservists to help support and guide language and population-focused operations in times of crisis or war. A version of this proposal was included by the House of Representatives in the 2010 National Defense Authorization Act, which directed DoD to partner with institutions of higher learning to establish training centers for “strategic language and regional area expertise.” Unfortunately, the final NDAA (Public Law 111-84) significantly watered down this language and merely “allowed” such a project[41]. It has not been pursued, but there is reason to think the Ivies and other elite universities would respond positively.

Change Army Culture

The most effective change that we might pursue to realize a transformation in Army and DoD language capabilities has no specific price tag attached to it: a change in Army culture itself. As long as the Army’s decision-makers politely nod but implicitly reject broad institutional adoption of language capability as a core war-fighting function, we will not make a dent in operationally-ready language and LPK in the force. Until we make the language lab on Army installations a place of equal vitality and command focus to the gym, we will fail to meet a mission identified as critical by the Department. We must make greater efforts to identify, track, employ, and reward linguists at tactical and institutional levels. We should formalize an integrated and tasked mission set to ensure progress. But most of all, we need to create a sense of zeal and mission. Like all cultural changes in the Army, this can only be achieved through leadership intervention. There are a few flag officers in the Army and the other Services who are pressing hard for language and LPK skills enhancement; anyone who spoke with Generals McChrystal or Flynn about language skills and their operational impact has seen what language evangelism looks and sounds like. The open question is whether the current and rising generation of senior leaders feels the same way, and can press reform to the level required for a decade of anemic budgeting.


3. See Secretary Gates’ remarks at West Point on February 25, 2011, General Martin Dempsey’s remarks
to the Senate Armed Services Committee on March 2, 2011, and Admiral Mullen’s comments at the Defense Language Institute, August 2009.


6. Two innovative approaches to bringing language expertise into deployed forces, the 09L (heritage speaker) linguist program, and the Af-Pak Hands (APH, discussed in detail below), are resource-intensive and likely candidates for the chopping block under the coming budget austerity. As the military forces shrink in size, time as well as money will militate against sustained investment in language capabilities. LTC Abbas Dahouk, personal communication with author, June 8 2011.


8. During eighteen months in Iraq and Afghanistan, I searched in vain for evidence of effective language sustainment or management programs for deployed forces. Command language programs may exist on paper, but they are not enhancing sustainment or availability of language skills and experts. Missed opportunities abound; one example is the failure to harness underused linguists at main bases to assist familiarization or refresher training for deployed linguists.


12. One staff officer familiar with the training and assignment process for officers estimated that less than 40% of FAOs have a current qualification in their assigned foreign language (personal communication). Anecdotal information indicates that the percentage is no better in the Special Operations Forces community.

13. The Pentagon, for instance, has a magnificent fitness center but no language laboratory, and most staff
officers are not afforded time for language study during the work day.


15. A revealing exchange in this regard occurred in successive issues of *Military Review* in 2004-2005. Michael Vane and Daniel Fagundes argued that FAOs would be better off less tied to specific regions and languages, without explaining how the Army would then maintain such expertise or how FAOs would then differ from or competent 59Z or other field grade staff officers. Friedenberg rebutted appropriately, emphasizing the key role of language in developing regional expertise.

16. GAO 09-176R and 10-879T.


18. Author knows several trained linguists who reached 3/3 DLPT level in Category IV (most difficult) languages, then degraded within a year to less than 1/1 due to work schedules which precluded sustainment study. This is both an operational and a resourcing shame.

19. Foreign language requirement for West Point cadets was raised to four semesters, for instance, according to USMA Arabic professor LTC Abbas Dahouk, personal communication, 8 Mar 11. Additionally, the US Army Cadet Command has developed a Cultural Understanding and Language Proficiency (CULP) program which aims to send ROTC cadets into immersion environments, though this initiative seems to suffer from the same conceptual culture-language problems discussed below under the Army Culture and Foreign Language Strategy.

20. Personal communication from LTC Abbas Dahouk, 1 Mar 2011.


22. Defense Language Office, *Language and Culture: Changing Perspective*, Washington, D.C. February 2011. The Language Summit appears to have presented solid thinking on challenges and proposed solutions, but the problem remains implementation by Services and Commands. See also the critique of conceptual inconsistency between DoD and Service strategies in GAO 09-176R.


25. Watson, Jeff “Language and Culture Training: Separate Paths?” *Military Review*, 1 Mar 2010. Dr. Watson argues against separating out “culture” from language or trying to train as separate tasks, based on extensive experience in training both types of tasks.


27. This includes leaders such as BG H.R. McMasters in Iraq (2005) after working with a talented Middle East FAO, and Generals David Petraeus and Stanley McChrystal in Kabul in 2010 when working with Af-Pak Hands personnel. Personal communication with author (November 2008, November 2009, and July 2010, respectively).


29. Drazen, Yochi “Afghan War Units Begin Two New Efforts,” *Wall Street Journal*, 6 October 2009. The Af-Pak Hands program (APH) was stood up by the Joint Staff’s Pak-Af Coordination Cell (PACC) in mid-2009, and involves several hundred officers spread between assignments in Afghanistan, Pakistan, bases in the U.S., and language training assignments.


31. DLI’s new series of proficiency tests, coupled with refocus on critical languages and enhanced flexibility in delivery modes and locations, has improved options for commanders (personal experience). CAOCL’s development of language and culture visual aids for warfighters, as well as conceptual integration of language and culture to USMC doctrine, should be considered a model.

32. Then-LTG McChrystal and Admiral Mullen both adopted APH as personal priorities in early 2009, and announced their support during a series of small group discussions and public statements in May and June 2009.

33. Serious discussion is apparently ongoing for up to 30-40% budget cuts for DLI, for instance.

34. Atmospherics Teams, Bilingual Bicultural Advisors, and Human Terrain Teams are examples, in addition to contract linguists and a sprinkling of special advisors (often FAOs).

35. Personal communication with author from General Stanley McChrystal, General David Petraeus, and Brigadier General H.R. McMaster. These and other leaders have same praised specific FAOs and the same time they mentioned the paucity of FAOs available on a consistent and timely basis in operational theaters. As an illustrative example of a “good year,” in 2009 83 FAOs were deployed to Afghanistan, Iraq, and other operational deployments, compared to 248 in training and 741 assigned worldwide to more traditional FAO assignments. See DoD’s 2009 Annual Foreign Area Officer Report, page 31.

36. The abortive attempt was DIA’s Defense Liaison Team – Iraq (DLT-I), fielded as a proto-Defense Attaché Office and sent packing by General Casey in 2005. Examples of improving integration of FAO’s include the Regional Support Teams of ISAF’s Combined Security Transition Command – Afghanistan,
and the APH program, which includes many FAOs and was essentially designed to develop “FAO-like” personnel in a region which had too few FAOs.

37. This would require accurate inventories as a starting point – this is a failing mentioned in repeated GAO reports, including GAO Report 10-715T.

38. According to DoD’s 2010 Annual Foreign Area Officer Report, the Defense Security and Cooperation Agency (DSCA) is working on plans for deployable/surge teams for contingency security assistance. This would be positive in so far as it goes – but would need to be integrated under COCOM or JTF command, and tied to other linguistic-cultural operations, or would remain a niche enhancement.

39. USMC is developing plans to train Non-Commissioned Officers as FAOs and RAOs, which would be a secondary specialty. Marine Corps Times, 6/13/11, p.18.

40. For COIN applications, an 11B qualified at 1/1 is to be preferred in most cases over a contract linguist at 3/3. Author is aware of multiple cases of soldiers turning a short initial period of instruction and limited proficiency into full proficiency through self-study and experience.


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Links: