



Volunteers from Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center, Naval Post Graduate School, and Middlebury Institute, along with cultural performers from all over California, celebrated Monterey's 3rd Annual Language Capital of the World Festival on Sunday, May 7, 2017 (U.S. Army/Amber K. Whittington)

Why Not a Joint Security Force Assistance Command?

By John Francis Jakubowski

The *David L. Boren National Security Education Act of 1991* provides that the future national security and economic well-being of the United States will depend substantially on the ability of its citizens to communicate and compete by knowing the languages and cultures of other countries.¹ Consistent with the law,

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implementation guidance over the years has been clear, and increasingly more urgent. Consider the following statements.

President Barack Obama laid out a vision of a nimble, well-armed, and multilingual fighting force of the future—but not the one that was built to fight land battles against the Soviets in Europe. President Obama stated, “In the 21st century, military strength will be measured not only by the weapons our troops carry, but by the languages they speak and the cultures they understand.”²

Then–Central Intelligence Agency Director Leon Panetta stated, “Language skills are the keys to accessing foreign societies, understanding their governments and decoding their secrets.”³ Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Mike Mullen stated, “No training is more crucial to the U.S. military than education in critical foreign languages and cultures . . . the flexibility of language training in the military underscores the state of global flux.”⁴ And finally then–General Stanley McChrystal stated, “Language training is as important as marksmanship, medical,

unit drills, physical fitness, and other key training that you will conduct prior to deploying to Afghanistan.”⁵

There is no question that the ability of Servicemembers to communicate and connect on some level with multinational partners, security forces of other nations, and indigenous populations can be a key element of combat mission success.⁶ But expectations regarding the definition of the word *success* for future military operations represent a challenge that the Department of Defense (DOD) should embrace and shape. So far, the right attention has not been paid to the strategic usefulness of foreign language training, civil-military operations, and the need to develop regional cultural experts.

The Government Accountability Office (GAO) has repeatedly recommended that DOD adjust and improve the visibility and sustainment of language and culture training. In response, the Services have seemingly retreated to their respective and frequently duplicitous stovepipe processes to assess their Service-specific strategic language needs and training focus areas. Generally, each Service funnels language training requirements through various Service- and DOD-level training and personnel systems. Eventually, the Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center (DLIFLC) receives an annual student input. Pursuant to special statutory authority, DLIFLC hires language faculty, many of whom are noncitizen natives from particular countries of interest. The process is complicated and time-consuming, as shifting and competing policies and priorities clash with recruitment and faculty employment efforts.

DLIFLC trains approximately 3,500 Servicemembers annually to an established standard of proficiency in listening, reading, and speaking modalities.⁷ The level of skill or proficiency in these areas is measured on a scale of 0, which equates to “no proficiency,” to 5, which would suggest “native country proficiency.”⁸ There are students in eight different undergraduate education schools that teach up to 40 different languages.

The graduation standard at DLIFLC is set at level “2+/2+ /2.” This means

that a student must achieve a 2+ in language, a 2+ in reading, and a 2 in speaking on the Defense Language Proficiency Test. Students who meet this standard on the aptitude tests are the cream of the crop. These students typically are slated for tours of duty in an intelligence capacity. Those who do not meet the standard find their way back to their respective Services for use in whatever capacity the military deems appropriate.

The cost to operate the DLIFLC’s language and training mission is about \$300 million annually.⁹ This figure does not include what the Army spends to maintain the Presidio of Monterey, California, which is in one of the highest cost-of-living areas in the country. Maintenance of the installation includes expenses to keep operational barracks, administrative buildings, grounds, dining facilities, health and dental clinics, and recreation facilities. In addition, investment spending to build new barracks and dorms, dining facilities, and other things is another substantial cost.

The primary beneficiary of DLIFLC efforts are intelligence activities and agencies, not the regional combatant commanders. The needs of combatant commanders are separately managed by the Army as DOD’s executive agent, a role the Army assumed in 2005. The Army spent about \$5.2 billion from 2008 through 2012 to acquire translation and interpretation services for various contingency operations.¹⁰ In addition, the GAO has noted that language and culture training to support the needs of contingency operations, predeployment training, and day-to-day military activities are also separately handled by 159 contracting organizations in 10 different DOD components.¹¹ These activities obligated approximately \$1.2 billion on contracts for foreign language support during the same time period.¹²

Think Jointly

The process of enrolling and training students at DLIFLC, coupled with the complications associated with managing multiple foreign language training interests and needs across the military

Services, suggest a renovation and strategic relook is necessary, particularly when installation operation and maintenance expenses and investment spending are added to the calculus. But instead of strategically assessing future language and culture training needs to meet probable missions, the Army is moving forward with more of the same: contracting for language training and translation services on an ad hoc basis.

As an example, the Defense Language Interpretation Translation Enterprise (DLITE) program is an Army acquisition effort awarding multiple contractors nearly \$10 billion through 2027 to provide interpreting, translating, and transcription services for missions across the globe.¹³ DLITE provides contractual coverage for the support of forces engaged in humanitarian, peacekeeping, contingency, and combat operations. It also provides contractual coverage for exercises and cultural familiarity and awareness missions in performance of day-to-day operations. The contract was awarded by the Army Intelligence and Security Command in March 2017 and, apparently, will be the go-to vehicle for foreign language support services and capabilities needed to meet new, ongoing, and changing mission requirements.¹⁴

The award of the DLITE contract resulted in a great deal of fanfare. According to press releases, the acquisition team worked through countless long hours to develop, solicit, review, and select the best contract for the Army. The team’s efforts amounted to 2.5 years of accumulative man-hours, reviewing over 8,700 pages of procurement sensitive information.¹⁵ The expense of putting together such a procurement must have been enormous, but in the end, there is nothing particularly innovative about procuring interpretation and translation services. The reality is that the contract is a temporary solution rather than a focused reassessment of the strategic value of language and culture training. New mission imperatives, highlighted by the establishment of the Army Security Force Assistance Brigades (SFABs), demonstrate the need for a strategic relook of

security force assistance missions and how language and culture training fit.

It is interesting that efforts to elevate and focus on language and culture training as a strategic imperative is not isolated to DOD. The GAO has issued several reports highlighting the Department of State's persistent foreign language shortfalls.¹⁶ The ongoing difficulties at State along with those at DOD identified by the GAO in the management of language and culture training processes, and meeting language service needs around the world, would seem to warrant an exploration of new strategic approaches. Yet it does not appear that much is being done to partner across the military Services, much less across the Federal Government.

Partnering is a focus du jour in the Army and across the military Services. Partnering initiatives with private entities, communities, and local and state governments are frequently, and often mistakenly, touted as win-win solutions to perceived difficulties associated with some contracting processes. These days if you are partnering with an entity—whether public or private—to meet a requirement or mission need, it is viewed as progress, even though the overwhelming evidence indicates that best values are achieved when the private sector or state and local governments have to compete to deliver a product or service. Creativity and a “sharp pencil” (that is, finding a way to lower the price) forced by competition typically result in better quality and reasonable prices.

DOD does not seem to apply the same vigor to collaborations and partnering across the Services or with other Federal agencies. There is, however, a shared mutuality of interest regarding security assistance missions and language and culture training among the Services and across the Federal Government. This is not always true of the partnering initiatives and agreements with state and local governments and private entities often pushed by the Services.

Part of the problem with the lack of partnering, as it pertains to security force assistance challenges and future language and culture training, is that the Services

have not been forced to think jointly. The Army, by and large, owns the security force assistance mission. And as the DOD executive agent of language and culture training programs, it is saddled with an impossible task of coordinating Service-unique interests and needs. The Army has all of the responsibility but no means to effectively manage and control the other Services' language and culture training approaches. Each Service develops its own language training doctrine and educational needs, resulting in duplicity, competing efforts, and overlap.

As a rule of law advisor in Afghanistan, my observation of the Army's approach to communicating, understanding, and “decoding” Afghan society may be best described as a plug-and-play process that often did not foster relationships or communication. Instead, combat units attempted to adapt by assuming roles for which they were not trained adequately. My mission brought me in regular contact with State Department officials who were engaged in activities that were ultimately directed toward the same objective (that is, to develop judicial capacity and trust in the military and government). Our mission activities, specifically communicating and connecting with Afghans at various levels and capacities within the government and the Afghan National Army, overlapped and at times conflicted in execution, resulting in frequent confusion and mixed messages.

The creation of SFABs and the DLITE contract may serve the Army well. A broader focus, though, is necessary. Army Chief of Staff General Mark Milley is right on target with the creation of SFABs as a strategic requirement that will shape the success of future contingency operations.¹⁷ Now, the rest of DOD needs to follow his lead.

The Security Force Assistance Command

A joint, functional Security Force Assistance Command (SFAC) should manage security force assistance needs of the combatant commanders and have management oversight of language and cultural training requirements

across DOD. SFAC should mirror to a significant degree the State Department's Foreign Service Institute, be jointly resourced, and be structured and staffed to ensure flexible and responsive support to combatant commanders, while at the same time meeting the more enduring, long-term needs of the Intelligence Community. Initial approaches to standing up the SFAC might proceed as follows.

First, we should recognize that our performance of security and assistance missions of the recent past—specifically in Iraq and Afghanistan—indicate inadequate language and culture training of Soldiers and other Servicemembers. We can do better.

Second, there is clear recognition, certainly within the Army, of the challenges associated with security force assistance mission requirements. SFABs are a step in the right direction. Six SFABs are planned, along with a Military Advisor Training Academy at Fort Benning, Georgia. The academy will train Soldiers to handle many postconflict security assistance and civil-military cooperation requirements. Language and culture will be a significant piece of the training. In adapting to better meet the security force assistance missions, the Army and DOD should consider exploring synergies and collaboration across the Services, intelligence agencies, and State Department.

One possibility might involve a review of the training mission at the U.S. Naval Postgraduate School's (NPS) Center for Civil-Military Relations. The center's core competencies do not include a language component, yet DLIFLC is located a few blocks away. Collaboration between the Army and Navy for language training at NPS is nominal if it exists at all. Furthermore, it seems that mutual interest—and a partnering opportunity—exist between the Military Advisor Training Academy and the training on civil-military relations at NPS. Some consideration toward consolidating and centralizing existing efforts of the Army and Navy, and an exploration of collaboration opportunities, is unreasonable. The entities could be carved out and/

or combined together and with DLIFLC to serve as the initial foundation of the SFAC. There ought to be a more focused unity of effort.

Third, consideration of a DLIFLC transformation is appropriate. For far too long, many have viewed DLIFLC as not being equivalent in stature to other Title 10 schools, a remarkable oversight given the rather clear direction noted by the former President and others. Part of the lack of focus on DLIFLC's critical contributions in foreign language and culture training has to do with the "junior college" stigma that exists. The fact that, by and large, the student body comprises mainly enlisted Servicemembers as compared to the graduate-level officer training at other DOD schools seems, to some, to be relevant measure of the complexity of training (or lack thereof). It needs to change.

Language requirements should not be trusted primarily to contractors. DLIFLC is perfectly situated to assume a more direct role in providing responsive language training at levels appropriate to meet the needs of the Intelligence Community as well as at other levels and at standards that are responsive to broader mission needs. Critical to any DLIFLC transformation would be to ensure that research and development funds to advance cutting-edge translation programs and improve devices for language interpretation are delivered at point of need.

Finally, legal authority exists right now to assist DOD in expanding and transforming language, culture, and civil-military relations training. The *David L. Boren National Security Education Act* provides enormous opportunities for DOD to expand, grow, and reassess how to best meet the security force assistance challenges identified by the Army Chief of Staff. The statute authorizes the award of scholarships and grants to DLIFLC students and permits attendance by civilian students at DLIFLC. Opportunities also exist for DLIFLC to assume a more expansive and active role in the National Flagship Language Initiative.¹⁸ The statute could serve as an initial starting point for a reassessment of how DOD will best

meet security force assistance challenges going forward.

It is abundantly clear that the definition of success in fighting and winning the Nation's wars will almost certainly include a security force assistance component. Communication and collaboration skills will be of paramount importance. As such, DOD needs a front-burner strategy regarding the security force assistance requirements of the future, consistent with General Milley's vision for the Army. It is time to work toward resourcing and staffing a new unified joint Security Force Assistance Command. JFQ

Notes

¹ "The future national security and economic well-being of the United States will depend substantially on the ability of its citizens to communicate and compete by knowing the languages and cultures of other countries." See *U.S. Code*, Title 50, Chapter 37, § 1901, (b) (4).

² "Obama's Address to Veterans," *New York Times*, August 17, 2009, available at <www.nytimes.com/2009/08/18/us/politics/18obama.text.html>.

³ "CIA Values Language Capabilities Among Employees," *CIA.gov*, March 18, 2010, available at <www.cia.gov/news-information/featured-story-archive/2010-featured-story-archive/cia-values-language-capabilities.html>.

⁴ John J. Kruzal, "Mullen: U.S. Military Benefits from Language Training," *DOD News*, August 11, 2009, available at <<http://archive.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=55448>>.

⁵ Joseph Morgan, "DLIFLC's Afghan Language Portal Opens," *Army.mil*, February 25, 2010, available at <www.army.mil/article/35000/dliflc_afghan_languages_portal_opens>.

⁶ *Language and Culture Training: Opportunities Exist to Improve Visibility and Sustainment of Knowledge and Skills in Army and Marine Corps General Purpose Forces*, GAO-12-50 (Washington, DC: Government Accountability Office [GAO], October 2011), available at <www.gao.gov/assets/590/585990.pdf>; *Defense Contracting: Actions Needed to Explore Additional Opportunities to Gain Efficiencies in Acquiring Foreign Language Support*, GAO-13-251R (Washington, DC: GAO, February 25, 2013), available at <www.gao.gov/assets/660/652298.pdf>.

⁷ Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center (DLIFLC), "Welcome," available

at <www.dliflc.edu/home/about/>.

⁸ DLIFLC, "DLPT Guides and Information," available at <www.dliflc.edu/resources/dlpt-guides/>.

⁹ DLIFLC Resource Management Office Web site, available at <www.monterey.army.mil/RMO/resource_mgmt.html>.

¹⁰ *Defense Contracting*, 3.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ "Contracts," Release No. CR-041-17, *Defense.gov*, March 3, 2017, available at <www.defense.gov/News/Contracts/Contract-View/Article/1102176/>.

¹⁴ Jocelyn M. Broussard, "INSCOM Recognizes 39 Employees for Supporting \$9.86 Billion DLITE II Contract," *Army.mil*, April 27, 2017, available at <www.army.mil/article/186803/inscom_recognizes_39_employees_for_supporting_986_billion_dlite_ii_contract>.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Department of State: Foreign Language Proficiency Has Improved, but Efforts to Reduce Gaps Need Evaluation*, GAO-17-318 (Washington, DC: GAO, March 2017), available at <www.gao.gov/assets/690/683533.pdf>; *Department of State: Staffing and Foreign Language Shortfalls Persist Despite Initiatives to Address Gaps*, GAO-06-894 (Washington, DC: GAO, August 2006), available at <www.gao.gov/new.items/d06894.pdf>.

¹⁷ Meghann Myers, "Army Chief Dispels Rumors, Misconceptions about SFAB Berets, Tabs," *ArmyTimes.com*, October 30, 2017, available at <www.armytimes.com/news/your-army/2017/10/30/army-chief-dispels-rumors-misconceptions-about-sfab-berets-tabs/>.

¹⁸ See *U.S. Code*, Title 50, Chapter 37, § 1902, (j).