



U.S. Department of Defense

A Roadmap for Cultivating and Managing Skilled Language, Regional Expertise, and Culture Talent

PHASE I



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MEMORANDUM FOR SENIOR PENTAGON LEADERSHIP
COMMANDERS OF THE COMBATANT COMMANDS
DEFENSE AGENCY AND DOD FIELD ACTIVITY DIRECTORS

SUBJECT: Managing Foreign Language Talent for Strategic Competition

The Department's ability to implement the National Defense Strategy (NDS) and compete against our adversaries rests on eliminating any current gaps in critical language skills. To do this, we must address the persistent challenges in developing, utilizing, and retaining sufficient language talent at the right level and expertise across the Total Force.

Language, Regional Expertise, and Culture (LREC) skills improve the effectiveness of the Total Force by providing direct and often immediate insight into adversary capability, intention, and activity. Recent history — from Afghanistan to Ukraine — provides concrete and powerful lessons on the significant operational importance of LREC capabilities. Furthermore, LREC skills enhance the Department's ability to build and foster effective alliances and partnerships and enable us to answer the NDS's call to leverage these relationships to prevail in conflict and preserve peace through strength.

If the DoD is to remain ahead of today's increasingly complex security environment, we must address the LREC challenges eroding our ability to collect and process intelligence and operate at speed once conflict ensues by improving our management of LREC skills. DoD needs a holistic and aggressive approach for LREC talent management to meet strategic challenges across the full spectrum of operations — particularly in Cyber, Signals Intelligence, Human Intelligence, Security Cooperation, Defense Attaché System, Open Source, and Irregular Warfare.

This Roadmap highlights actions we must take to improve the management of LREC talent, focusing on Cryptologic Language Analysts and transforming the approach to building and managing our LREC workforce. I am directing the Workforce Management Group (WMG) to oversee implementation of this Roadmap and any future implementation actions addressing other specialties requiring LREC capabilities. I also direct the WMG to provide me with regular updates on progress to include reducing barriers to retention and transition to the Reserve Component, and costs associated with the Roadmap's implementation. Advancing these actions is a vital step forward to ensuring the Department has a LREC workforce ready to meet mission needs of today and the challenges of tomorrow.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kathleen Holtz", is positioned at the bottom center of the page.



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INTRODUCTION

As stated in the 2022 National Defense Strategy (NDS), great power competitors aggressively employ various means to challenge the United States and the international order, threatening the security, peace, and stability of this great nation and its alliances. The DoD's ability to implement the NDS and win against near-peer competitors requires closing Language, Regional Expertise and Culture (LREC) skill gaps by building and maintaining the requisite talent.

LREC skills are an essential component in building trust and developing relationships with the militaries and defense counterparts of our foreign allies and partners. Moreover, they also provide the means to comprehend, firsthand, adversary capabilities and intentions and identify critical threat indications for the President, National Security Council, and military commanders around the world. For these reasons, these skills are critical to the Department's ability to understand and deter threats, particularly from China and Russia. However, DoD's ability to perform its missions as outlined in the NDS is severely impaired by continuing shortfalls in the number of Service members and civilians with critical foreign language proficiency skills. Despite numerous and diverse documented language requirements to support various operations worldwide, the Department continues to have persistent challenges recruiting, developing, utilizing, and maintaining sufficient foreign language talent, in terms of proficiency levels and availability.

Addressing these challenges requires a holistic approach to developing language talent across the career continuum, including recruitment, utilization, and retention. To drive change, Joint Service providers must recognize the issues, adopt the approach in this Roadmap, and make significant modifications to talent management practices and personnel policies. Furthermore, superior performance by language professionals and effective integration of Human Language Technology (HLT) tools are essential factors in facilitating the analysis of volumes of foreign language material. This in turn provides timely, actionable intelligence so leaders can make informed decisions such as, whether to capture or destroy targets, deploy troops, advance negotiations, or consider economic intentions. Neglecting the acquisition and development of foreign language capacity gravely degrades our insight into the capabilities and intentions of our key adversaries and our ability to foster relationships with our allies and partners.

The Department requires a long-term, focused approach to build the capacity and capability of its mission-critical partnerships. By executing the tasks laid out in this Roadmap, the Department will generate increased LREC capacity for its high priority missions.

BACKGROUND

The lack of adequate talent management practices prevents the Department from developing and retaining sufficient numbers of fully qualified language professionals required to support the numerous DoD language missions. Furthermore, exponential growth in the variety, volume, and velocity of foreign language material collection exacerbates this problem. This has significantly degraded the DoD's ability to respond to and remain ahead of today's volatile and increasingly complex national security environment, and to conduct the intelligence, security cooperation,

irregular warfare, and cyber operations necessary to protect the nation from adversarial malicious intentions.

Shortfalls in LREC skills and capabilities have plagued the Department for decades. First time language learners, under typical working conditions, may take up to eight years to achieve the language proficiencies needed to translate, interpret, and assess complex foreign language information at a master level. Initial enlistment contracts average five to six years of service, meaning most military language professionals achieve only apprentice level qualifications in their primary language during the first – and perhaps only – enlistment. Most elect to leave the Service after their initial obligation; those who do reenlist often end up in assignments that do not use their language skills. Simply put, Service personnel models create a perpetual revolving door that prevents the development and retention of technical expertise.

Today's language professionals must possess high levels of language proficiency, which in many cases include technical and domain-specific lexicons, as well as in-depth target knowledge and tradecraft skills. Military language professionals include Cryptologic Language Analysts (CLA), Foreign Area Officers (FAO) and Human Intelligence (HUMINT) collectors. This document represents phase one of a multi-phase process to cultivate and manage skilled LREC talent. Phase one focuses specifically on CLA workforce talent management. Phase two will address FAO talent management and the need for a centralized DoD HLT strategy. Phase three will address HUMINT collector talent management. Phase four will address Special Operations Forces.

To address historic, ongoing issues affecting the Defense LREC Program, DoD manpower and personnel systems, and the training pipeline must be reimaged and reconfigured to focus on standards associated with foreign language requirements, leverage critical capabilities, optimize talent management, and improve retention. Leaders must recognize the importance of foreign language skills as a core mission for safeguarding our national security and take the necessary steps to implement comprehensive talent management processes to preserve and develop the foreign language talent pool. Senior leadership within both the Intelligence Community and the DoD must commit to dedicating the resources necessary to develop highly skilled language professionals, rewarding the contributions of the foreign language workforce, and investing in and integrating HLT. The Department can improve foreign language capabilities, guided by the goals and actions in this Roadmap.

OVERARCHING GOALS

The Department must develop a plan that assesses the effectiveness of the talent management initiatives contained in this Roadmap, establishes the appropriate point at which the new Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center (DLIFLC) basic course graduation standard should go into effect, and addresses the impact of the new graduation standard on language professionals in the field who graduated under the old standard. The Services must have a detailed plan in place to transition language professionals from the current standards to the new standards outlined in this Roadmap.

The DoD must:

- **Build a CLA workforce with requisite skills and expertise to meet Service and National Security Agency/Central Security Service (NSA/CSS) requirements**
- **Implement effective talent management practices to foster development throughout the CLA career lifecycle**
- **Reshape the training pipeline to meet the demand**
- **Incentivize development of Journeyman and Master level expertise**

ASSUMPTIONS

- LREC skills will remain in demand as foundational underpinnings to the Department's capability for strengthening and building partnerships across the globe.
- There is a recognized and urgent need for language professionals to spend more time in their careers performing language-related mission tasks with advanced levels of proficiency, mission depth, and tradecraft skills.
- Demand will increase for personnel possessing technical skills and experience coupled with LREC capabilities to perform operational and strategic tasks for mission success.

STRATEGIC OUTCOME

The Department improves the management of foreign language talent to meet DoD and Intelligence Community language requirements through: (1) changes in DoD language training requirements necessary to increase production of higher proficiencies, and (2) establishment of talent management processes to improve assignment, skills utilization, and retention.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES AND REQUIRED ACTIONS

1. Build a CLA Workforce with Requisite Skills and Expertise to Meet Service and NSA/CSS Requirements

Current Situation: Today's CLA workforce is comprised primarily of apprentice-level operators, most of whom do not meet the Interagency Language Roundtable (ILR) skill level 3 requirement for listening and reading (L3/R3) codified in DoD Instructions (DoDI) 5160.70, "Management of the Defense Language, Regional Expertise, and Culture Program" and DoDI 3300.07, "Defense Intelligence Foreign Language and Regional and Culture Capabilities". The

DoD simply does not recruit, train, utilize, or retain enough fully qualified CLAs, greatly impeding the ability to meet Service and NSA/CSS mission requirements.

Desired Outcomes: The Secretaries of the Military Departments and NSA/CSS conduct a comprehensive manpower mission review; determine appropriate military/civilian employee/contractor workforce mix; document CLA requirements accurately and consistently in respective manpower and personnel systems; and adopt force structure models to develop and utilize greater knowledge, skills, and abilities.

Required Actions:

1.A. Conduct a holistic manpower review to develop a common picture of requirements for CLAs and develop a projection of future CLA requirements. The Secretaries of the Military Departments and NSA/CSS must undertake a comprehensive review of P2 and P3 cryptologic language missions to include, but not limited to, a determination of whether the mission:

- must be performed by military personnel.
- requires Apprentice, Journeyman, or Master level expertise.

The Secretaries of the Military Departments and NSA/CSS must develop a process to ensure CLA requirements are aligned and accurately reflected in their respective manpower and personnel systems.

The Department must establish policy to ensure manpower mission reviews are conducted periodically to align with changes in the NDS.

OPR: Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness (OUSD (P&R)) in coordination with the Secretaries of the Military Departments and NSA/CSS

FOC: September 2024

1.B. Develop and field a centralized DoD LREC database. The DoD must develop a centralized database to track LREC capabilities and readiness and to respond to leadership information needs in a timely manner. Understanding the state of LREC readiness within the Department is a key step toward building sufficient capacity and forecasting future requirements.

OPR: OUSD (P&R), in coordination with the Secretaries of the Military Departments, NSA/CSS, and the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI)

FOC: September 2025

1.C. Establish an appropriate CLA civilian, military (Active and Reserve Component), and contractor workforce mix. NSA/CSS, in coordination with the Secretaries of the Military Departments and OUSD (P&R), must determine whether the mission is best satisfied by a civilian employee, Service member, or contractor; this determination must consider the need to preserve continuity and mission expertise.

OPR: NSA/CSS, in coordination with the Secretaries of the Military Departments, OUSD (P&R), Joint Staff, and the Combatant Commands (CCMD)

FOC: September 2025

1.D. Adopt force structure models that facilitate the development of Journeyman and Master level expertise.

OPR: Secretaries of the Military Departments in coordination with OUSD (P&R)

FOC: September 2025

1.E. Establish procedures to ensure that CLAs spend more time on task performing cryptologic language work throughout their careers.

OPR: Secretaries of the Military Departments and NSA/CSS, in coordination with OUSD (P&R), Joint Staff, and the CCMDs

FOC: September 2025

2. Implement Effective Talent Management Practices to Foster Development Throughout the CLA Career Lifecycle

Current Situation: DoD is unable to satisfy NSA/CSS requirements for initial entry military CLAs at the ILR skill level 2+ in listening and reading (L2+/R2+) or higher. Current policies and procedures impede the Services' ability to consider language proficiency during the assignment and distribution process. Despite the time and resources invested in this skilled workforce, first term CLA reenlistment rates are lower than desired for sustainment.

Desired Outcomes: DoD implements holistic talent management initiatives improving recruiting, training (acquisition, sustainment, and enhancement language training, as well as tradecraft skills development), language skill utilization, and retention.

Required Actions:

2.A. Prioritize assignment of CLAs with ILR L2+/R2+ and above proficiency into billets coded for ILR L2+/R2+ and higher proficiency to the greatest extent possible.

Services must adjust distribution processes to assign CLAs with ILR L2+/R2+ and above proficiency to billets requiring Journeyman and Master-level expertise.

OPR: Secretaries of the Military Departments, in coordination with NSA/CSS

FOC: September 2025

2.B. Establish CLA Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities (KSAs) at the Apprentice, Journeyman, and Master levels.

2.B.1. NSA/CSS and Services must develop DoD-common KSAs, tiered by Apprentice,

Journeyman and Master levels.

OPR: NSA/CSS and Secretaries of the Military Departments

FOC: March 2023

2.B.2. OUSD (P&R) will issue policy establishing KSAs.

OPR: OUSD (P&R)

FOC: September 2023

2.C. Implement talent management initiatives to improve acquisition, development, and retention throughout the CLA career lifecycle.

2.C.1. DoD must implement a policy adopting the Defense Language Aptitude Battery (DLAB) or a DoD-approved assessment tool (e.g., the Armed Forces Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB) or the Armed Forces Qualification Test based on math and verbal elements of the ASVAB) as an official entry criterion for the DLIFLC basic course.

OPR: OUSD (P&R), in coordination with the Secretaries of the Military Departments

FOC: September 2023

2.C.2. NSA/CSS must establish procedures to ensure CLAs assigned to P3 billets perform language work to the greatest extent possible.

OPR: NSA/CSS, in coordination with the Secretaries of the Military Departments

FOC: September 2023

2.C.3. Secretaries of the Military Departments must establish procedures to ensure CLAs in P2 billets perform language work to the greatest extent possible.

OPR: Secretaries of the Military Departments, in coordination with the CCMDs

FOC: September 2023

2.C.4. DoD must identify new pathways that promote development and retention of Journeyman and Master level expertise.

OPR: OUSD (P&R)

FOC: September 2023

2.C.5. Services must conduct a review of existing assignment programs that allow Service members to remain in the same location / job over multiple tours to assess their applicability as a potential model for CLA talent management.

OPR: Secretaries of the Military Departments, in coordination with OUSD (P&R)

FOC: September 2025

2.C.6. NSA/CSS must conduct a review of mission locations to determine the viability of shifting mission to locations that enhance mission resiliency, situate mission closer to untapped sources of language talent, improve national/tactical integration, and enhance mission and career continuity for Service members.

OPR: NSA/CSS, in coordination with the Secretaries of the Military Departments
FOC: September 2025

2.C.7. Secretaries of the Military Departments must maximize the use of talent management marketplace systems and/or offer choice of assignment to the greatest extent possible to boost retention of CLAs.

OPR: Secretaries of the Military Departments
FOC: January 2024

2.C.8. DoD must expand intermediate and advanced language training to develop CLA Journeyman and Master level expertise.

2.C.8.a. Secretaries of the Military Departments must mandate intermediate and advanced language training as part of the CLA career path.

OPR: Secretaries of the Military Departments
FOC: September 2023

2.C.8.b. Secretaries of the Military Departments in coordination with NSA/CSS and DLIFLC must identify the requirements associated with mandating intermediate and advanced language training.

OPR: Secretaries of the Military Departments in coordination with NSA/CSS and DLIFLC
FOC: December 2023

2.C.8.c. Secretaries of the Military Departments and NSA/CSS must provide funding for intermediate and advanced language training.

OPR: Secretaries of the Military Departments and NSA/CSS
FOC: October 2025

2.C.9. DoD must identify solutions associated with granting of security clearances to personnel possessing critical language skills with native/heritage backgrounds.

OPR: Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Intelligence and Security (OUSD(I&S)), in coordination with the Defense Counterintelligence and Security Agency (DCSA) and ODNI.
FOC: September 2025

2.C.10. NSA/CSS must revise its security practices to enable expedited access (12 months or less) to NSA facilities / systems for CLAs with native/heritage backgrounds and/or extensive foreign travel who currently possess a TS/SCI security clearance (granted with an FNA waiver) and a favorable CI Polygraph.

OPR: OUSD(I&S), in coordination with NSA/SCC and DCSA.
FOC: September 2025

2.D. Provide resources and tools to language unit commanders and command language program managers (CLPM), enabling language professionals to achieve L3/R3 proficiency through effective management of training and professional development.

OPR: OUSD (P&R) in coordination with the Secretaries of the Military Departments, and NSA/CSS
FOC: October 2023

2.E. Train, utilize, and professionally develop CLPMs.

OPR: Secretaries of the Military Departments in coordination with OUSD (P&R) and NSA/CSS
FOC: September 2023

3. Reshape Training Pipeline to Meet the Demand

Current Situation: The current DLIFLC graduation standard of ILR skill level L2/R2/S1+ does not adequately prepare CLAs to meet national mission language proficiency requirements. A further assessment of tactical mission requirements is needed. Significant changes must be made to both acquisition language training and continuing education to meet the growing number and increasing complexity of requirements leveraged against the CLA community and to increase production of basic course graduates with at least L2+/R2+ proficiency.

Desired Outcomes: DoD conducts a holistic assessment of the entire foreign language training pipeline (i.e., acquisition and continuing education) to ensure that policy is put in place and resources are allocated to close the gap between foreign language capabilities and requirements across the DoD.

Required Actions:

3.A. Implement the recommendations in the DLIFLC Academic Peer Review Report.

OPR: OUSD (P&R) and Secretary of the Army (U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC))
FOC: ongoing

3.B. Build and maintain strategic partnerships between DLIFLC and institutions of higher learning via the DoD Language Training Center Program.

OPR: OUSD (P&R) and Secretary of the Army (TRADOC)

FOC: September 2023

3.C. Expand and resource DLIFLC Language Training Detachment facilities at regional sites to meet all Service (Active and Reserve Component) requirements for intermediate and advanced language training.

OPR: OUSD (I&S) and NSA/CSS in coordination with the Secretary of the Army

FOC: October 2025

4. Incentivize development of Journeyman and Master level expertise

Current Situation: Critical skill bonus programs do not consistently produce desired retention rates or adequately motivate Service members to achieve professional level language proficiency.

Desired Outcomes: Service critical skill bonus programs incentivize the acquisition of professional level language proficiency and increase CLA retention.

Required Actions:

4.A. Explore options to incentivize acquisition of professional level language proficiency and increase CLA retention.

OPR: OUSD (P&R) / ODASD(MPP)

FOC: September 2024

4.B. Explore the feasibility, advisability and impacts related to the implementation of a one-time bonus for language professionals who reach L3/R3 proficiency.

OPR: OUSD (P&R) in coordination with the Secretaries of the Military Departments

FOC: September 2025

