

**Prepared Statement
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Before the

**Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management, Federal
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United States Senate**

**“Closing the Language Gap: Improving the Federal Government’s
Foreign Language Capabilities”**

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INTRODUCTION

Chairman Akaka, and members of this distinguished subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today on this very important topic which is a priority for the Department of Defense.

The Department is moving forward to build and maintain a Total Force with skills in foreign languages of strategic importance for the 21st Century. These capabilities are needed to ensure our personnel have the skills they need for success in today's missions and to support national initiatives.

The military operations in which our forces are engaged require that they understand the languages and cultures of the regional population. How the indigenous population perceives our presence and our work will influence our success. Being able to communicate with them in their language is a strategic and tactical enabling factor. However, acquiring the necessary language and cultural skills is a time intensive process. Once gained, these skills tend to deteriorate rapidly if not used frequently. Just as importantly, these skills do not translate easily from region to region. We have made great progress in providing basic language and cultural training to our deploying personnel, but still are working to build a better foundational capability that provides more individuals with true expertise, professional-level language skills, and advanced levels of regional expertise.

LANGUAGE CAPABILITY SHORTFALLS

The Department recognized the gap in foreign language skills during operations immediately after the terrorist attacks on the United States in 2001. The Total Force did not have the personnel with foreign language skills needed for Operations IRAQI FREEDOM and

ENDURING FREEDOM in Iraq and Afghanistan. Based on studies, which validated these shortfalls, the Defense Language Transformation Roadmap (DLTR) was published in early 2005 to transform how the Department valued language skill, regional expertise, and cultural capabilities. This document marked the Department's first steps to comprehensively build and manage key enabling capabilities and it laid the foundation for our efforts. Its four goals and 43 tasks addressed (1) the need for a foundational language and regional area expertise, including our ability to identify requirements and assets on hand; (2) the capacity to surge our capabilities to meet operational needs, (3) the formation of a cadre of language professionals who possess language proficiency in reading, listening and speaking at the professional level, and (4) a process to track the accession, separation, and promotion rates of military personnel with language skills.

The DLTR marked the Department's first step to take specific action to transform the force to meet the challenges of the future. For the past five years, the Department has been aggressively executing the roadmap to build and improve our language capabilities to support our vast global missions. We are implementing initiatives and programs to deliver the necessary language and cultural training to our Forces whenever and wherever needed. Our efforts are not just limited to training, but also include recruiting initiatives and special incentive pay.

ADDRESSING THE SHORTFALLS

The Department recognizes that execution of the President's strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan is its highest priority. Successful counterinsurgency operations are required for immediate and long-term success in the Afghanistan and Pakistan region. Language skill, regional expertise, and cultural capability are vital enablers for the conduct of these operations

and are considered by our senior commanders in the region to be as important as other basic combat skills. We have moved aggressively and with much success to build these capabilities. Our initiatives include recruiting programs that focus on accessing heritage language personnel or personnel with advanced language skills, pre-accession foreign language training, standardized pre-deployment training, foreign language proficiency bonuses and pay, foreign language study at the Academies, incentives for ROTC students to study foreign languages, expanding the role of civilians through the civilian expeditionary workforce, and creation of the Afghanistan-Pakistan Hands Program, which will generate a cadre of experts specially trained and equipped to repeatedly deploy to that region.

Afghanistan Pakistan Hands Program

The Afghanistan Pakistan Hands (APH) program was launched in August 2009 to create greater continuity, focus, and persistent engagement in Afghanistan and Pakistan by developing a cadre of experts who speak the local language, are culturally capable, and focused on regional issues for an extended period of time. These experts enhance the region's engagement and communications, which are essential for strategic success. APH personnel rotate between positions in-theater and out-of-theater that directly influence the U.S. strategy in the region. As of May 2010, 86 APH have deployed and 103 are in training. The most recent graduating class demonstrated outstanding results. More than 78 percent of graduates achieved the elementary level proficiency of 1/1 (out of a 4/4 scale) or higher on the Interagency Language Roundtable scale of the Defense Language Proficiency Test. The Commander International Security Assistance Force US Forces – Afghanistan identified level 1/1 as the goal for this training. The Department's use of Language Training Detachments, which are our onsite foreign language training schools, are a factor in achieving these results.

Language Training Detachments

Demand for language training to meet warfighter requirements, for the general purpose forces (GPF) and language professionals, has grown beyond what can be provided through the traditional brick-and-mortar, language institute methods. To meet the need, the Department has committed to an innovative, locally-provided, life-long learning approach, through the use of Multi-purpose Language Training Detachments, and dedicated highly specialized Language Training Detachments for the recurring special needs of the Afghanistan Pakistan Hands program. The Department is investing \$33 million to fund ten language training detachments to improve the language and cultural capabilities of the general purpose forces which will minimize travel costs, and reduces the member's (or employee's) time away from family and the unit. The Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center currently operates 23 Language Training Detachments (LTD) in 21 different locations. Three APH general purpose forces LTDs have been activated at Forts Campbell, Carson, and Drum that train service members in Afghanistan/Pakistan language and culture.

The Department needs individuals with advanced and native or near-native level language skills. Since advanced and near native level language skills traditionally take years of study, the Services have created heritage recruiting plans so they can surge their capabilities by accessing these skilled personnel when needed. Two particularly successful recruiting efforts are the Military Accessions Vital to the National Interest pilot program, and the Army's 09L Interpreter/Translator program.

Military Accessions Vital to the National Interest Pilot Program

The Army, Air Force, and Navy recruit native and heritage speakers through the Military Accessions Vital to the National Interest Pilot Program. The program was launched in February 2009 to recruit legal non-citizens with critical foreign language and culture skills as well as licensed healthcare professionals. Recruits receive expedited U.S. citizenship processing, similar to that received by other non-citizen military personnel, in return for their service. The Army, for example, has accessed 792 personnel with critical language skills and 143 healthcare professionals (most of whom also speak a critical language). Recruiting for the initial one-year pilot program ended December 31, 2009. A two-month interim extension authorized the Army 120 additional positions. Two subsequent interim extensions were approved, the last ending June 30, 2010. The Department is continuing to review, examine, and evaluate initiatives like this as creative solutions to build these new skills into the Total Force.

Army 09L Interpreter/Translator Program

The Army has recruited native speakers as interpreters into the 09L Military Occupational Specialty since 2003. To date, approximately 1,000 Soldiers have graduated from Advanced Individual Training, and all were mobilized immediately following graduation and served (or are serving) in Iraq or Afghanistan. Originally focused on Iraq, the Army expanded its program for Afghanistan. The Army is undertaking a pilot program with United States Africa Command and United States Pacific Command to generate interpreter-translators fluent in languages found in these geographic regions.

Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center

The Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center (DLIFLC) is the Department's premier language training school. Originally organized and structured to provide specialized training to a small number of intelligence professionals and Foreign Area Officers, it has transitioned from a small school with a single focus to an agile team that meets increasingly complex language instruction, distance learning, and instructional material needs around the world. From Fiscal Year (FY) 2009 to FY 2010, the Foreign Language Center taught nearly 8,500 students in nonresident language training and nearly 43,000 students in language familiarization training. Within three days of the recent earthquake in Haiti, troops involved in the humanitarian relief operations received over 20,000 Language Survival Kits. More than 65,000 Language Survival Kits were shipped in support of the relief efforts. Within just a few days, the Haitian-Creole Language Survival Kit was available for download on the DLIFLC website. These tools proved to be successful in facilitating communication between the Haitians and our Service men and women supporting operation unified response.

CHALLENGES

The Department has encountered challenges in providing the language skill, regional expertise, and cultural capabilities requested by the Combatant Commands. The current requirements system does not provide a clear demand signal for future foreign language needs so that our force providers can generate the capabilities we need. Based on several capabilities based reviews, which drive the development of the DoD Strategic Language List, we have greater clarity of our current and long-term future foreign language needs. We are building a strategic plan which will provide the steps needed to achieve and institutionalize these skills. Additionally, the Department undertook a capabilities-based assessment to determine the process

that will convert prioritized Combatant Command capability requirements into validated, prioritized, actionable demand signals apportioned among the force providers. The force providers will act on these demand signals to meet these requirements through recruiting, training, professional education, and other career development or personnel management means. Once we have clear demand signals, we can begin addressing shortfalls.

Training

As mentioned earlier, because language skills take years to acquire and are highly perishable, the Department has placed special emphasis on pre-accession training for cadets and midshipmen, especially in the Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC). In June 2009, the U.S. Army Cadet Command established a goal to increase the number of cadets completing at least two semesters of the same foreign language to at least 75 percent of graduates. We are expanding opportunities for ROTC cadets to gain exposure to critical languages and cultures. . While the Department of Defense cannot mandate that civilian universities develop programs in less commonly taught languages, it encourages them to do so with the "Project Global Officer" grant program and now offers a Language Skill Proficiency Bonus as authorized in the FY 2009 National Defense Authorization Act to encourage ROTC students to take foreign language and culture studies relevant to U.S. strategic needs. Qualified ROTC cadets and midshipmen may receive up to \$3,000 per year to undertake such studies. This program was initiated in the latter part of Fiscal Year 2009. During that first partial year of execution, 29 students were paid the Skill Proficiency Bonus in FY 2009, and an additional 237 students began receiving the bonus as first time enrollees in the program. As expected for a new program, particularly one started late in the Fiscal Year, the numbers of participants in FY 2009 are relatively modest; however, they are expected to increase in FY 2010, when students begin the new academic year.

Every future officer who enters Air Force ROTC is encouraged to gain proficiency in a foreign language and participate in a cultural immersion program or study abroad. The Foreign Language Express Scholarship is a three and a half year foreign language scholarship for study of languages the Air Force considers critical. The Air Force is expanding scholarships to cadets in Foreign Area Studies who are required to take at least 21 semester hours in a foreign language. Non-technical scholarship cadets must take a minimum of 12 semester hours of foreign language to retain their scholarship.

The Navy requires one semester of language or culture in addition to a normal course load and expects that every ROTC midshipman opting for Naval service will complete three semesters hours of world culture and regional studies.

In addition to ROTC programs, our Service Academies are providing foreign language and cultural instruction for cadets and midshipmen. Graduates leave these Academies with increased language and cultural capabilities as well as life-changing experiences that provide the necessary preparation for effective leadership in today's global environment.

The United States Military Academy (USMA) encourages cadets to participate in foreign language and culture programs. All cadets must complete a minimum of two semesters of foreign language study. Humanities and Social Science majors, which account for approximately half of the student body, are required to take four semesters of foreign language. Of the 4,439 cadets enrolled at West Point in the spring 2010 semester, 1,865 cadets took some language instruction. Of these, 877 cadets were enrolled in first-year, 5-day-a-week language classes; 417 cadets participated in either the Semester Abroad program (148) or other short-term (spring or summer) immersion experiences (269); 57 cadets took part in the Foreign Academy Exchange Program – a separate spring break immersion (7-10 days) at one of thirty foreign

military academies. These programs are providing the cadets with heightened language and culture capabilities.

The United States Naval Academy (USNA) similarly provides numerous language opportunities for its midshipmen. The Naval Academy provides Semester Study Abroad, Foreign Academy Exchange, and summer foreign language immersion opportunities. Additionally, this year the Academy added Chinese Mandarin and Arabic to their majors; minors are also provided in one of the Academy's seven languages. Every year, a significant number of USNA graduates complete a minor in a foreign language. These ensigns have significant proficiency in the language studied, and are capable of putting their language to immediate use in the fleet. In 2009, 139 graduates, including 54 Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) majors, graduated with foreign language minors. These included 15 minors in Arabic, 20 in Chinese, 12 in French, 8 in German, 19 in Japanese, 4 in Russian, and 61 in Spanish. These figures represent a dramatic increase from spring 2004, when graduates included 99 foreign language minors, with only 20 in critical languages.

The United States Air Force Academy (USAFA) has also been strengthening its language and culture programs. Beginning with the class of 2011, all cadets must study at least two semesters of a foreign language. Cadets who are pursuing non-technical degrees are required to study at least four semesters of a foreign language. The USAFA expanded its study abroad opportunities and 751 of 4,400 cadets participated in a Semester Aboard, Language and Cultural Immersion, or Foreign Academy Exchange program during the 2009-2010 academic year. Furthermore, approximately 23% of the class of 2009 (241 graduates), earned a minor in a foreign language. The Air Force Academy instills language and cultural relevance within its cadets.

Meeting Demands for Advanced Skills

The DoD Foreign Area Officer (FAO) program continues to develop and expand its population. Over 1,860 officers currently hold the FAO designation – an increase of 90 from FY 08. The Services plan to recruit and train more than 190 a year, with almost 1,150 new FAOs entering the program by 2015. Sustainment training is a key area that requires attention for our FAO population. In the 2007 DoD Annual FAO Report, dated April 2008, sustainment training was mentioned as an area that needed focused attention. It was noted that there was no joint, comprehensive sustainment training and education program available for FAOs to maintain and/or enhance their professional level language and regional expertise. Therefore, The Joint FAO Skill Sustainment Program was developed to address this gap. This three-year pilot was approved by the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness in December 2008 with a goal of finding innovative ways to provide foreign language and regional sustainment training and education for seasoned FAOs to enable them to meet growing joint mission requirements. This pilot program utilizes advanced, innovative delivery techniques such as short-term classroom training and distance learning modules delivered thru a newly developed FAOweb. FAOweb is an internet portal designed to provide distance learning and community networking to FAOs within DoD. FAOweb was officially launched in February 2010. To date, two courses have been offered – Latin America and Europe/Eurasia – with participants from the Active and Reserve Component FAOs as well as civilians doing FAO-like assignments. The next resident course is in June and will focus on Asia. The goal is to offer at least one resident seminar for a particular region per quarter. A program review will be conducted in the Spring of 2011 to decide whether the pilot results warrant transition to a permanent program.

Risk Assessment

Knowing the requirements allows the Department to assess the risk it is willing to take in regard to developing language skill, regional expertise, and cultural capabilities. The Language Readiness Index (LRI) as part of the Defense Readiness Reporting System (DRRS). The LRI is a strategic, near real-time web-based tool that compares language capability inventory against requirements for Component missions and roles to identify the gaps in the Total Force. Senior leaders can use this tool to make informed decisions, develop risk assessments, examine risk mitigation measures, and shape the future force. The LRI has achieved initial operational capability in the DRRS framework and continues to progress toward full operational capability status. The next phase of development is underway and will include additional data; awareness, familiarization, and technical training to stakeholders; an automated quarterly report for the Quarterly Balanced Scorecard; and upon approval of the Language, Regional Expertise and Associated Culture (LREC) Capabilities-Based Assessment requirements, update the LRI to accept LREC requirements. The LRI is now the tool of choice for inputting language requirements. The Combatant Commands are now uploading data for the LRI directly into DRRS using the LRI requirements input tool.

Coordinating a Stronger Future

The Department of Defense and the University of Maryland co-sponsored, in June 2004, an unprecedented *National Language Conference*, involving leaders in foreign language education across the federal government, academic and the private sectors. This conference was prompted by the greater need for U.S. citizens with foreign language competence to help respond to

requirements of the 21st century and national security interests, the increasing globalization of industry, and the need to provide government services to a diverse and multi-lingual population in the United States. As a result of this conference, a White Paper, *Call to Action*, was published in August 2004 articulating a vision for the United States as a “stronger global leader through proficiency in foreign languages and understanding of the cultures of the world.”

The Department of Defense efforts to support this vision was through two programs – the Language Flagship and the National Language Service Corps (NLSC). Flagships focus on building higher education models that graduate students at professional levels of proficiency in critical languages. The goal of the Flagship effort was to enroll 2,000 students by the end of 2010. The Language Flagship currently offers programs in Arabic, Chinese, Korean, Hindi-Urdu, Persian, Russian, Swahili, and Yoruba. Based on projections, we expect to reach our target in the 2010-11 academic year. . The Flagship also supports K-12 Flagship Programs at public schools in Ohio, Oregon, and Michigan. These pilot programs are intended to serve as a national model for articulated K-12 language instruction in the U.S.

The NLSC represents a pilot effort to establish an entirely new organization built on the extraordinary language capabilities of the American population. The NLSC is designed to provide surge language capacity to the federal government during times of emergency and national need. The NLSC is a pool of individuals who possess skills essential to the capacity of the federal sector to respond to national and international needs, particularly those that arise during national and international threats, emergencies, and disasters. The NLSC has successfully completed activation exercises with the Centers for Disease Control, U.S. Pacific Command and the Defense Intelligence Agency, and has successfully deployed members overseas.

Coordination across Government agencies is vital in order for the United States to build and sustain the foreign language skills and understanding of the cultures needed to meet the challenges of a complex, dynamic changing world environment. Therefore, an inter governmental working group comprised of representatives from Secretary of State, the Departments of Defense and Education and the Office of the Director of National Intelligence meets regularly to identify opportunities to share information on new initiatives and best practices.

We have made great progress in improving our foreign language skill, regional expertise, and cultural capabilities to meet 21st Century national security challenges. Although we have achieved much success, we acknowledge that more work remains. Our vision and strategy are strong. We are seeking creative solutions and have found that our efforts have been successful. Commanders' lessons learned validate the successes gained by having a Total Force with the required language skill, regional expertise, and cultural capability, where and when needed. Thank you for your continued support of language and culture programs.