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JSOU Report 11-6 Cultural and Linguistic Skills Acquisition for Special Forces Howard

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Cultural and Linguistic Skills Acquisition for Special Forces:

Necessity, Acceleration, and Potential Alternatives

Russell D. Howard
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On the cover: U.S. soldiers meet with local villagers 30 June 2011 in Al Wahida, Iraq. Soldiers of 97th Civil Affairs Battalion, 95th Civil Affairs Brigade and Charlie Company, 1st Battalion, 15th Infantry Regiment, 3rd Brigade, 3rd Infantry Division, along with Iraqi national police met with local villagers to address and assess concerns they might have about security, education, electricity, water and health. Photo courtesy USSOCOM Public Affairs.

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Contents

Foreword ix

About the Author xi

Preface xiii

Introduction 1

1. How Important Are Culture and Language? 3

2. The Relationship between Culture and Language 5

3. Accelerating Cultural Knowledge and Competency 15

4. Foreign Languages 19

5. Conclusion 35

Endnotes 41

Foreword

A variety of factors have driven an increased interest in the language capabilities and cultural knowledge of members of the U.S. military in general, as well as U.S. Special Operations Forces (SOF). The employment of counterinsurgency operations in Iraq and Afghanistan and the growing emphasis on population-centric approaches highlight the need for an in-depth understanding of people and communities. Post Iraq and Afghanistan operational environments will emphasize the underlying conditions and issues that create instability in areas of key strategic interest to the U.S. This will require SOF to have language and cultural skills capabilities that reflect the wider range of locales and ethnic groups with which SOF engage while carrying out a diverse mission—a mission that ranges from building partner capacity in counterterrorism operations to providing support in humanitarian crises. The 2010 realignment of most Special Forces, under a United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) directive, has already altered the regional focus of many Special Forces groups, creating an immediate need to learn new languages and new cultures.

In this monograph, *Cultural and Linguistic Skills Acquisition for Special Forces: Necessity, Acceleration and Potential Alternatives*, Brigadier General Russ Howard articulates the need for both cultural and linguistic skills, while distinguishing between the two. Although the concept of 'culture' remains largely ill-formed in U.S. military doctrine, Howard explores various definitions of culture and highlights the relationship between cultural understanding and the ability to predict behavior on the ground, an invaluable asset for the SOF operator.

There is no consensus regarding how much language and cultural expertise is needed by SOF, or members of the U.S. military in general. This issue, currently under consideration by Department of Defense senior leadership, is recognized as a vital capability for enhancing U.S. national security and defense. Howard discusses the role of cultural knowledge at the tactical, operational, and strategic levels, delineating between cultural awareness, cultural literacy, and cultural competency, with each level denoting a more fully developed capability.

Drawing on his experience leading the Special Forces Language School, Howard explores the relationship between learning a language and culture,

and the implications for SOF. The AfPak Hands program, based on cultural and linguistic immersion, provides one possible learning approach, though it may be difficult to replicate outside the Afghanistan theater.

Throughout the monograph Howard raises the many ongoing challenges to providing language and cultural training to SOF. Which languages should be the focus of training efforts? Will the languages in demand today be the same ones needed in the future? Should emphasis be on the most widely spoken languages or low density languages spoken only by specific ethnic groups? The SOF deployment cycle and career track are further hindrances to persistent language and culture training.

As USSOCOM and Special Operations Forces rebalance the force for a posture of persistent presence in complex operating environments, the need for language and cultural awareness training is likely to increase. General Howard's monograph is an important contribution to the discussion of just how this capability should be defined, prioritized, and developed.

Kenneth H. Poole, Ed.D.
Director, JSOU Strategic Studies Department

About the Author

Brigadier General (Ret.) Howard is an Adjunct Professor of Terrorism Studies at the Monterey Institute of International Studies. He is also a Senior Fellow at Joint Special Operations University and a Senior Adviser to Singapore's Home Team Academy. Previously, General Howard was the founding Director of The Jebsen Center for Counter-Terrorism Studies at The Fletcher School, Tufts University, the Head of the Department of Social Sciences and the founding director of the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point.

His previous Army positions include chief of staff fellow at the Center for International Affairs, Harvard University, and commander of the 1st Special Forces Group (Airborne), Fort Lewis, Washington. Other recent assignments include assistant to the Special Representative to the Secretary General during United Nations Operations in Somalia (UNOSOM) II, deputy chief of staff for I Corps, and chief of staff and deputy commander for the Combined Joint Task Force, Haiti/Haitian Advisory Group. Previously, he was commander of 3rd Battalion, 1st Special Warfare Training Group (Airborne) at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. He also served as the administrative assistant to Admiral Stansfield Turner and as a special assistant to the commander of SOUTHCOM.

As a newly commissioned officer, he served as an "A" team commander in the 7th Special Forces Group from 1970 to 1972. He left the active component and then served in the U.S. Army Reserve from 1972 to 1980. During this period he served as an overseas manager, American International Underwriters, Melbourne, Australia, and China tour manager for Canadian Pacific Airlines. He was recalled to active duty in 1980 and served initially in Korea as an infantry company commander. Subsequent assignments included classified project officer, U.S. Army 1st Special Operations Command, Fort Bragg, and operations officer and company commander, 1st Battalion, 1st Special Forces Group in Okinawa, Japan.

General Howard has a B.S. in Industrial Management from San Jose State University and a B.A. in Asian Studies from the University of Maryland. He also has an M.A. in International Management from the Monterey Institute of International Studies and an MPA from Harvard University. He was an assistant professor of Social Sciences at the U.S. Military Academy and a senior service college fellow at The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Tufts University.

His previous JSOU publications are *Intelligence in Denied Spaces: New Concepts for a Changing Security Environment* (December 2007) and *Educating Special Forces Junior Leaders for a Complex Security Environment* (July 2009).

Preface

Imagine yourself as a Special Forces group commander, and your group's regional alignment has just been changed. While not entirely useless, the cultural knowledge and foreign language acumen your personnel have acquired and retained have now become much less relevant. The invaluable personal bonds and friendships made during multiple deployments to familiar areas of operation are gone with a stroke of a pen. If the change in alignment were to be gradual, with a little time to learn new languages and cultures, you might be able to plan a phased training and education program, but this is not the case; the change is effective almost immediately. If the change had occurred during peacetime and your main concerns were conducting exercises, joint combined exchange training (JCETs), or military training team (MTT) events, you could probably find enough people qualified in the linguistic and cultural basics to get by. However, this change occurs in the midst of two conflicts, and your group will be engaging in combat.

So, what do you do now, Colonel?

Perhaps the scenario is a little dramatic, but the question—what do you do now?—is nonetheless relevant as Special Forces group commanders from the 3rd, 5th, 7th, and 10th Special Forces groups have undergone fairly rapid regional realignments and had to deal with similarly difficult questions.

Driving these changes was a 2009 United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) directive "realigning the traditional regional orientation of most Special Forces groups."[1] Most affected were the 3rd Group, which changed its regional focus from Africa to the eastern and northern parts of the Central Command region (including Afghanistan, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan), and the 10th Group, which assumed responsibility for Africa from the 3rd Group, while retaining responsibility for Europe.[2] The 5th Group's focus is on the western and southern Central Command region, including Iran, Lebanon, and the Arabic speaking countries in the Middle East. The 7th Group retains all of Central and South America, while picking up Mexico and the Northern Command area of responsibility. Only the 1st Group is unaffected by the directive, keeping its Asia and Pacific orientation intact.

The realignments, which were effective 1 February 2010, present many challenges for the Special Forces groups—particularly the 3rd and 10th— as

their personnel learn new languages and new cultures, and establish rapport with new indigenous colleagues.[3]

The realignments also present challenges for the various Special Operations and Special Forces commands and the U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School (SWCS) as they consider several possible personnel training and education requirements to overcome language and cultural competency shortfalls. So, what to do? Other than complicated personnel shifts between and among groups, are there ways to speed up the absorption of new languages and cultures? Aside from Special Forces soldiers in existing groups having to learn new foreign languages and/or cultures, are there ways to achieve communication relevance in the operational area? Is there a technological "silver bullet" that will enable Special Forces soldiers to communicate with allies and adversaries without learning other languages? Are there methods to rapidly assimilate foreign culture expertise without long and tedious study? Are some individuals more adept at learning culture and/or languages than others? These and other related questions are addressed in the following pages.

Introduction

This study, *Cultural and Linguistic Skills Acquisition for Special Forces: Necessity, Acceleration and Potential Alternatives*, was initiated before the directive mentioned in the Preface. However, the directive is well-timed in that it makes the findings and recommendations from this monograph—and its post-publication debate—more timely and relevant.

This study focuses mostly on the "accelerating" question and alternative solutions to culture and language competency requirements. While revisiting the past and restating the present successes and failures of language and culture programs might provide a useful review, the exploration of future programs, alternative concepts, or new ways of using proven methods is the added value of this work.

Organized in five sections, *Cultural and Linguistic Skills Acquisition for Special Forces: Necessity, Acceleration and Potential Alternatives*, will begin by discussing the requirements for culture and language competencies in Section 1. Section 2 develops the relationship between culture and language from a military training and education perspective. Section 3 addresses culture education and training, while Section 4 does the same for language education and training. Where possible, Sections 3 and 4 discuss desired capabilities for both culture and language and alternative or accelerated means of achieving those capabilities. Finally, Section 5 will conclude and provide some suggestions on the "way ahead."

1. How Important Are Culture and Language?

The unsurprising conclusion of nearly every study, panel, lessons-learned report, after-action review, and a host of other assessments is that culture and language are very important knowledge sets for military personnel. For example, the Army Research Institute's recent "Cultural Understanding and Language Proficiency" analysis proclaims that "lessons from recent and current operations reflect consensus" that culture and foreign language competencies for many military personnel are more than important—they are necessary for mission accomplishment.[4] However, given career and training time constraints, the challenge is to determine how much, at what level, and what mix of culture and language training and education "can best equip leaders and soldiers with the necessary knowledge and skills" to accomplish future missions.[5] Competencies in both culture and language, while largely viewed as requirements for general purpose forces, are particularly important for Special Forces soldiers. However, the Special Operations community features differing opinions about required competency levels for Special Forces, particularly given training time constraints and wartime deployment cycles.

Culture, Language and the Post-Iraq & Afghanistan Operational Environment

At the time of publication, 85 percent of all Special Forces soldiers were deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan, and this percentage may not change much in the near future even as conventional forces draw down in Iraq.[6] Other areas of the world also requiring Special Forces expertise include the tumultuous Korean Peninsula, illicit drug-infested South America, and other areas in the Middle East and Africa where al-Qaeda proxies and surrogates have expanded their operations. Even after Iraq and Afghanistan are able to shoulder their own security responsibilities, the requirements for Special Forces expertise and capabilities are unlikely to decrease. And, while no one can accurately predict exactly where Special Forces will operate post- Iraq and Afghanistan, a good bet would be along the *arc of instability*, a swath of territory from the Caribbean to the Indonesian Archipelago[7] and home to an unfathomable number of languages and cultures.

Most future threat assessments concur that the area along the arc will be contentious for a number of reasons. For example, a shortage of

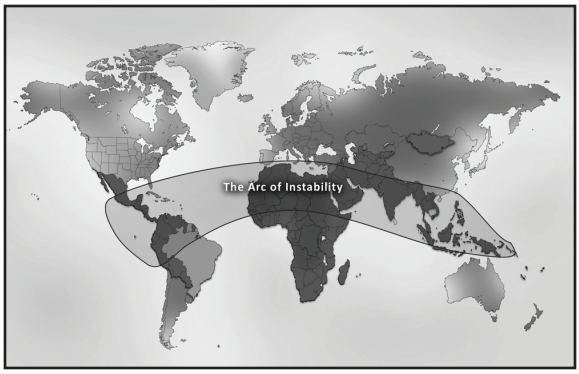

Figure 1. Arc of Instability (Created by USSOCOM Graphics)

resources—including water, food and energy—is becoming a serious problem in much of the world, but particularly along the arc. Demographic factors such as long-term fertility trends, urbanization, migration and changes in the ethnic composition and age profile of populations will influence the likelihood and nature of conflict among and within nations, particularly along the arc.[8] Irregular warfare in the guises of terrorism, insurgency, criminal activity (such as human, weapons, and drug trafficking), ethnic conflict, and civil wars will prevail along the arc.[9]

In truth, the arc of instability as depicted in the above graphic might be too shallow. Many believe that the arc should also encompass a deeper swath of western, central and eastern Africa. There are many reasons for identifying a larger area of instability, but increased al-Qaeda activity conducted by surrogates such as al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb and Boko Haram, a sometime al-Qaeda "wannabe" in Nigeria, top the list. Also in Nigeria, the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta, a nasty commercial terrorist group, is also continuing its activities despite offers of amnesty by the Nigerian government.[10] Hezbollah is firmly entrenched in the West African states of Senegal, Ivory Coast and Sierra Leone, where large Lebanese Shi'a populations control much of the illicit commercial market.[11]

No matter how the arc is defined, its territory clearly includes a multitude of security interests and threats too numerous to mention here. In turn, this requires Special Forces capabilities in the role of both "commando"—which "places a premium on speed, surprise, stealth and precision in the use of force"—and "warrior-diplomat"—which "privileges the use of cross-cultural engagement skills for influencing, training and conducting operations with indigenous populations and foreign forces."[12] And, while those conducting commando-type missions might not require culture and language competency for mission success, those in warrior-diplomat roles will.

2. The Relationship between Culture and Language

Most concur that there is an important link between cultural education and language competency. However, the extent of the linkage and importance of each is the subject of debate. Which is more important to the Special Forces soldier: language or culture? Should culture be a component of language training, or should language be a component of culture training?

Academics tend to agree that foreign language and cultural education are complementary; an appreciation of culture facilitates foreign language competency, and speaking a foreign language facilitates the in-depth understanding of culture.[13] However, there is some debate as to whether each of the two competencies is "essential" for learning the other.[14] According to Patrick R. Moran, author of *Teaching Culture: Perspectives in Practice*, it is not necessary to master a language in order to build cultural competency; however, learning a language can serve as a "critical step" in understanding culture:

> Making the effort to understand another language, listening, negotiating meanings, all these facets of communication through language demonstrate respect, which allows the learner to engage in an authentic inquiry into a culture. As the process builds, relationships emerge. And relationships become the foundation for meaningful cross-cultural engagements.[15]

Some believe that the teaching of culture should be an integral part of foreign language instruction.[16] For example, in an article titled "The Importance of Teaching Culture in the Foreign Language Classroom," Dimitrios Thanasoulas argues that cultural awareness must be viewed as "something more than merely a compartmentalized subject within the foreign language curriculum." Instead, says Thanasoulas, culture must "inhabit" the classroom and "undergird every language activity."[17]

U.S. allies in the United Kingdom have a different view. According to UK Joint Doctrine Note 1/9, culture does facilitate the use of language, and "linguistic skills facilitate the gaining and exploitation of cultural knowledge."[18] However, while linguistic ability does not guarantee knowledge

of culture, "all personnel can benefit from enhanced cultural capability."[19] According to this perspective, "It is possible for a relatively high level of cultural capability to be achieved with limited language ability. However, to be an effective linguist, a reasonable level of cultural capability is required in order to maximize the opportunities presented through direct engagement."[20] Colonel Brett Lewis, author of "Developing Soldier Competency," agrees, but for more practical reasons. He argues that foreign language proficiency is not an essential component of cultural competency because "not all soldiers have the aptitude to learn another language," too much time is required to develop and maintain proficiency, and secondary options, including translators or technology in the form of "near-universal language translations" on hand-held devices or laptops, are usually available.[21] With regards to Special Forces soldiers, Colonel Lewis' observations are only partially correct; by definition, Special Forces soldiers *do* have the competency to learn another language, or they would not have been selected to be in Special Forces. However, his other observations, particularly on the evolution and availability of technology, are very relevant and will be addressed later in this paper.

Culture: We Need Some of That![22]

Particularly because of lessons learned in Afghanistan and Iraq, the requirement for cultural knowledge for military operations has been actively promoted by defense policymakers and military leaders.[23] While some may view the culture requirement as new, in actuality cultural knowledge and warfare are "inextricably bound" and have been for centuries—at the very least, since "Herodotus studied his opponents' conduct during the Persian Wars (490-479 BC)."[24] More recent and better known are the exploits of Lieutenant Colonel T.E. Lawrence (Lawrence of Arabia), who, after the 1916 Arab rebellion against the Ottoman Empire, immersed himself in local cultures, often at extreme personal risk, and is known to have remarked, "Geography, tribal structure, religion, social customs, language, appetites, standards were at my finger-ends. The enemy I knew almost like my own side."[25]

The post-Cold War emphasis on coalition and counterinsurgency operations has increased the importance of culture for military operations. By definition, successful coalition operations require militaries from different cultures to work together successfully. Also by definition, the focal point of

counterinsurgency operations is the "hearts and minds" of those from different cultures who are at risk. In both instances, ignoring the significance of culture creates barriers to interaction and increases the risk of mission failure.[26] Cultural knowledge—even at basic levels—reduces these risks and enhances the opportunities to work with allies, defeat adversaries, and operate successfully in not just counterinsurgency operations, but other forms of irregular warfare (IW) as well.[27]

Defining Culture—A Difficult Task

A standard definition of "culture" is difficult to pin down; a recent book on the subject presents more than 300 definitions of culture.[28] Some definitions are brief and simple: "Culture is the learned and shared behavior of a community of interacting human beings."[29] Some, such as the following, are long and detailed:

> Most social scientists today view culture as consisting primarily of the symbolic, ideational, and intangible aspects of human societies. The essence of a culture is not its artifacts, tools, or other tangible cultural elements but how the members of the group interpret, use, and perceive them. It is the values, symbols, interpretations, and perspectives that distinguish one people from another in modernized societies; it is not material objects and other tangible aspects of human societies. People within a culture usually interpret the meaning of symbols, artifacts, and behaviors in the same or in similar ways.[30]

And some, such as the definition used by the U.S. Department of Defense and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), make little sense: "Culture is a feature of the terrain that has been constructed by man. Included are such items as roads, buildings, and canals; boundary lines; and, in a broad sense, all names and legends on a map."[31]

Army Colonel Timothy R. Williams' definition is the one used for the purposes of this paper. In his 2006 essay, "Culture—We Need Some of That! Cultural Knowledge and Army Officer Professional Development," Colonel Williams deftly ties the importance of culture to the accomplishment of military objectives in the emerging international security environment.[32] He defines culture as "learned ideals, beliefs, values and assumptions

characteristic of an identifiable community or population which cumulatively result in socially transmitted behavior patterns."[33] Williams notes that there are two aspects to his definition: "an invisible dimension (ideals, beliefs, values and assumptions) and a visible dimension (behavior)."[34] Without an understanding of the invisible dimension, it is very difficult to "understand, predict or change behavior"—three vitally important competencies required of today's Special Forces soldiers.

Our Enemies Understand the Importance of Culture—We Should, Too!

Al-Qaeda, America's principal adversary, certainly understands the importance of culture, and has actually chided the United States for lacking cultural awareness.[35] More important, al-Qaeda leaders understand—and are trying to change—the cultural awareness limitations of their own foot soldiers. In terms Western analysts certainly understand, Abu Bakr Naji warned al-Qaeda extremists not to project their own motivations on the enemy.[36] Critical of mirror imaging, Naji explained that, unlike al-Qaeda members, who are motivated by an ostensibly religious cause, the "motive of religion among many of the factions of the enemy [the West] is secondary"[37] However, these explanations have not been fully internalized by the al-Qaeda rank and file:

> Despite Naji's warnings, ideological and cultural misperceptions occur at every level within the movement. A telling example is the conclusion drawn in one al Qaida affiliated Web site's chat room that a flyer promoting a ROTC blood drive on a U.S. university campus proved the huge undisclosed losses inflicted on the U.S. Army and hence an urgent need for blood.[38]

Abdul Salam Zaeef, former Guantanamo prisoner and current Taliban ambassador to Pakistan, contemptuously notes America's "myopic understanding of Afghanistan."[39] He recently commented, "How long has America been in Afghanistan? …And, how much do Americans know about its people? Do they understand its culture, its tribes, and its population? I am afraid they know very little."[40]

Culture: The Strategic Corporal and the Foreign-Policy-Implementing Captain

Because of the speed and availability of information with today's technology, one soldier's "cultural misstep can quickly turn … into a situation with strategic implications."[41] While the expectation is that "strategic corporals" must possess "technical mastery in the skill of arms," they must also be aware that their "judgment, decision-making and action can all have strategic and political consequences that can affect the outcome of a given mission" and their national reputations.[42] One picture of a soldier defacing the Koran[43] can have the same impact as a Florida minister threatening to burn a truckload of Korans.[44]

While there are few, if any, corporals in Special Forces, the Department of the Army Pamphlet 600-3 elevates the "strategic corporal" concept by pointing out that Special Forces operations "focus on the operational and strategic levels" and that their "continuous forward presence of Special Forces can assist in creating the conditions necessary for stable development."[45] Therefore, the Special Forces captain who will be leading a detachment well forward in potentially failed and failing states and denied areas is more than a "strategic corporal"—he is the implementer and executor of American foreign policy, and each action he and his detachment make has strategic implications.[46] As a result, all members of the detachment—officers and noncommissioned officers (NCOs) alike—must understand more than basic culture "dos and don'ts" that can be found in a tour book. They must be able to make quick decisions that not only account for their own cultural proclivities, but also anticipate the reactions of those from other cultures whom they are trying to influence.

It seems logical, then, that developing a higher level of cultural competency in Special Forces soldiers is important at least to a level that will "improve communications and reduce misunderstandings in cross-culture interactions" with both allies and adversaries.[47] Ideally, the ultimate goal would be for culturally competent Special Forces soldiers—particularly leaders—to be adept at understanding the strategic culture of America's adversaries as an analytical tool for the present operations and a possible predictive tool for the future. But with so many diverse cultures and the enormous amount of study required to become an expert on any given one,

how can the field be narrowed to determine which "Lawrences" are needed now and in the future, and how should they be educated and trained?[48]

How Much Culture is Enough?

Unfortunately, there is no standard terminology or categorization system for various levels of cultural knowledge or capability, nor is there agreement on how much cultural capability is enough for different operational levels. Some experts, such as Maxie McFarland, a retired Army colonel, author of "Military Cultural Education," and strong advocate of enhanced culture training for the military—describe two cultural knowledge levels: cultural literacy and cultural competency. Sheila Miyoshi Jager, author of *On the Uses of Cultural Knowledge*, distinguishes between levels of cultural knowledge and utility in tactical, operational and strategic terms. While dissimilar in some ways and complementary in others, their analysis is instructive.

According to McFarland's approach, cultural literacy is the understanding of one's own beliefs, behaviors, values, and norms—and also the awareness of how perspectives might affect other cultures' views.[49] Taking a cue from Sun Tzu's oft-quoted axiom, "If you know your enemy and know yourself, your victory will not stand in doubt,"[50] McFarland notes that culturally literate soldiers should strive for "self-awareness" of their own "cultural assumptions" in order to understand how their perspectives could affect other cultures' views.[51] Therefore, before venturing into the cultural unknown, one must first become conversant with what it means to be part of his or her own culture—which, in turn, allows for reflection upon new cultures "with a higher degree of intellectual objectivity."[52]

As important and elemental as McFarland's observations are, cultural identification can be difficult for Americans for several reasons. First, a person may be largely unaware of his or her own cultural orientation—particularly aspects that undergird fundamental belief systems and values—and thus, the exercise of self-awareness is often incomplete. Second, our own insufficiently-understood cultural orientation is often projected onto others; without understanding why or how, our cultural background shapes our "attitudes, emotions, beliefs and values," and we then project this native frame of reference on the cultures we are attempting to work with (or against), with dangerous results. And third, those in the military who have lived on several different Army posts around the nation should easily understand recent research showing that cultural identification is

subjective, varying from region to region, state to state, and individual to individual.[53]

If cultural literacy is understanding one's own culture and how it might affect another, then cultural competency, says McFarland, is "a more in-depth and application-oriented understanding of culture:"[54]

> Competency is demonstrated through organizational leadership capable of crossing cultural divides within organizations and establishing cooperative frameworks between communities and groups from different cultures. Competency is about building successful teams with a common vision, effective communications, and acceptable processes that benefit from cultural [knowledge and] diversity.[55]

McFarland notes that cultural competency's utility is in "managing group, organizational, or community, cross or mixed cultural activities."[56]

In contrast to McFarland's emphasis on deeper cultural self-awareness and its impact on the interpretation of new cultures, Jager asserts that there is a place for simpler cultural knowledge at the tactical and operational levels, while agreeing that strategic-level knowledge requirements are more complex and nuanced. According to Jager, the kinds of cultural knowledge required at the tactical and operational levels are "how-to" and practical in nature—for example, awareness of specific customs (such as "do not spit in public," or "take off your shoes before entering a house") is tactically relevant.[57] In Jager's view, the practical cultural knowledge required at the operational level is anthropological and should include the "intricacies" of distinct belief systems, customs, values, symbols, and traditions that can be usefully applied to enhance the cultural awareness of American forces in foreign countries.[58]

At the strategic level, Jager believes cultural knowledge might include how other regions, nations, and societies view themselves and others and what effect this awareness has on policy and strategy formulations and outcomes. As Jager explains, "Cultural knowledge as applied to the level of strategy assumes that cultures are *dynamic* entities, not static categories."[59] Therefore, in formulating an overarching strategic framework for post-9/11 military operations, it is important to grasp not merely the cultural logic of an enemy's identity, but how the enemy has "invoked these traditional

values, historical experiences, and belief-systems in the contemporary context to justify" their hostile actions.[60] For example, al-Qaeda has "appropriated and reinterpreted Islamic texts, belief-systems, and traditions to justify their own radical ideology"—an "instrumental" use of culture that must be understood properly in order to defeat al-Qaeda.[61]

As illustrated previously, Jager notes that the types of cultural knowledge required at the tactical and operational levels—the "how-to," practical applications—are quite separate from the more abstract notions required to formulate strategy and policy, though many tend to erroneously conflate the two.[62] However, although quite distinct, the uses of culture as they apply to tactical, operational, and strategic levels are interrelated and complementary. A "sound strategic framework based on a deep cultural and historical understanding of an adversary culture will necessarily give rise to sound operations and tactics necessary for waging successful counterinsurgency" and addressing other irregular warfare threats.[63]

Clearly, both Jager and McFarland's explanations have merit. Jager's tactical, operational and strategic framework is easy for a Special Forces soldier to comprehend, even if her explanations are a bit theoretical. McFarland's approach does not highlight the tactical, but does—at least in the abstract—address the operational and strategic levels. McFarland also makes the very important point that awareness of one's own culture is an important prerequisite to understanding another culture. At the risk of being overly simplistic (and very unscientific), this paper suggests a composite of Jager's and McFarland's models as a more Special Forces user-friendly answer to how much cultural knowledge is required at various levels of decision making and planning.

This conception of the Jager-McFarland composite uses the term *cultural capability* as the baseline for all levels of understanding culture. The composite uses Jager's categories—tactical, operational, and strategic—as the levels of cultural capability while concurring with McFarland (and Sun Tzu) that, before an attempt to comprehend another culture, one should first understand the basics of his or her own culture.

So, how much cultural capability is required at each level?

At the tactical level, cultural awareness is required. A culturally aware person understands that there are differences—particularly in attitudes and values—between him or herself and people from other countries or other backgrounds. Cultural awareness is what Special Forces soldiers need to

avoid simple, though sometimes deadly, cultural misunderstandings. Cultural awareness is more than an understanding of simple dos and don'ts; it is a basic recognition of the existence of different cultural backgrounds, values, and perspectives that must be considered before conducting operations. Cultural awareness allows one to avoid faux pas or cross-cultural miscues that can result in negative consequences due to a failure to understand simple cultural nuances.[64] At minimum, culturally aware soldiers understand that there are differences in cultures, and that cultural norms must be understood at the tactical level in order to avoid situations that could negatively affect operations and mission accomplishment.

At the operational level, cultural literacy is required. In addition to being culturally aware, culturally literate soldiers understand individual cultural patterns and know their own cultural norms in relation to other cultures. According to McFarland, "understanding the way your culture affects someone else's culture can profoundly affect … chances for success."[65] An additional challenge for military leaders, says McFarland, is that they "must understand and appreciate their own military culture, their nation's culture, and the operational area's culture."[66]

At the strategic level, cultural competency is required. Cultural competence is a "set of congruent behaviors, attitudes, and policies that come together in a system, agency, or among professionals that enables effective work in cross-cultural situations."[67] Further, competence "implies having the capacity to function effectively" in an integrated fashion within the context of the cultural beliefs, behaviors, and needs of both allies and adversaries.[68] A culturally competent person is both culturally aware and culturally literate, but also has an in-depth understanding of local religions and basic belief systems, sources of pride and of shame, and most important, what aspects of the culture must be influenced in order to initiate change.[69]

Finally, if one agrees with the premise that Special Forces soldiers will be increasingly deployed along the arc of instability, undertaking coalition and multinational cooperative military efforts to address a menu of asymmetrical, demographic, and resource-related threats, then cultural competence will be a critical leadership requirement for such missions. Additionally, operations along the arc of instability will often be in failing or failed states and in denied areas where logistics support is sparse or nonexistent. The local markets will of necessity be a source of logistical support—so too will private and international non-governmental organizations. Therefore,

leaders with the cultural competency to work within the local community and with international and private organizations whose members come from widely divergent cultural backgrounds, will have a greater chance of success than those who do not. This will be not only true for Special Forces, but for conventional forces who may very well find themselves in the same operational area and logistics conundrum.[70]

3. Accelerating Cultural Knowledge and Competency

Selecting the Right Students

Unlike the case of foreign languages, where evidence exists that some have better aptitude for learning another language than others, there is no such reliable evidence regarding the learning of culture. Recent studies attempting to measure a person's cultural intelligence (CQ) are interesting and informative, but inconclusive.[71] Some tests indicate that people with certain CQ personality traits have better aptitude for learning intercultural skills, and other studies indicate that those with certain CQ cognitive skills have better intercultural acumen. However, neither of these reports, nor several others too numerous to mention here, agree.[72] In many analysts' opinion, CQ is a new construct and is worthy of further research. In fact, some are marketing CQ as a viable testing process.[73] Others are a bit more skeptical, arguing that CQ may have the potential to improve understanding of acculturation and adaptation, including the prediction of psychological wellbeing and the acquisition of culturally appropriate skills.[74] At the present time, however, realization of CQ's potential is limited by its academic measurement, which is inconclusive at best.[75]

Most anthropologists believe that the best and quickest way to learn about other cultures is to immerse oneself in the culture: move there, live there, learn the language(s), and experience daily life over an extended period of time. Since culture primarily relates to the way societies interact with each other, anthropologists believe the "best way to really get to know another society and its culture is to live in it as an active participant."[76] Through this form of "participant observation," whereby one "physically and emotionally participate[s] in the social interaction of the host society, it is possible to become accepted as a member of the society."[77] While JCETs, MTTs and Joint Exercises conducted by the five regionally aligned Special Forces Groups ensure that members of the various groups have intermittent opportunities to be "participant observers," most Special Forces soldiers do not have adequate time to fully immerse themselves in a culture for any extended period.

The conventional Army's Afghanistan and Pakistan Hands (AfPak Hands) program understands the importance of cultural and linguistic

immersion. Developed in 2009 and with its first training in May 2010, AfPak Hands is a new initiative conceived and developed by Navy Admiral Mike Mullen, then Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. AfPak members complete an intensive 17-week Defense Language Institute (DLI) course in Dari or Pashto and attend service-specific pre-deployment training before departing for Afghanistan, where they complete a week-long counterinsurgency course and four weeks of immersion training with Afghan government and security forces counterparts.[78]

In addition to culture, language, and counterinsurgency training, each AfPak Hand has "expertise in governance, engineering, intelligence, finance, and force protection."[79] Initially, AfPak service personnel are assigned to a variety of one-year assignments in Afghanistan or Pakistan, where they assist and mentor indigenous forces and ministries. They then rotate to the United States, where they "stay involved in AfPak issues at one of four major hub locations and further develop their language and culture skills with DLI instructors" before redeploying, "ideally to the same area and position in Afghanistan or Pakistan."[80] This is a long-term commitment; service members assigned to the program commit to serving three to five years with two to three one-year tours of duty in Afghanistan or Pakistan.[81] The program's goal:

> …is not to reinvent the wheel each time a new service member replaces someone returning from a deployment, but to have a cadre of military and civilian experts that will rotate into key staff and leadership positions that are in-theater and the continental United States to provide continued expertise in support of U.S. objectives in the region.[82]

AfPak Hands is a multi-service program and includes Special Operations Forces, but according to Lieutenant Colonel Chris Watrud, DLI chief of staff, Special Forces individuals are not designated as official "Hands," though they may

Figure 2. AfPak Course Graduate Converses with Afghan Soldier [83]

volunteer for the training through the Pakistan-Afghanistan Control Cell. Watrud said Special Operations Forces officers and NCOs go thru AfPak Hands language training at all three designated hubs (Washington, D.C.; Tampa, Florida; and Norfolk, Virginia), as well as at the SWCS language program at Fort Bragg, which is offering the same 16-week program as an "unofficial hub."[84] However, the long-term nature of AfPak assignments most likely would prevent Special Forces soldiers from fully participating in the program; likewise, Special Forces Command is not likely to replicate the AfPak program. Given all that Special Forces officers and NCOs have to do to remain competitive for rank and command assignments, it would be nearly impossible for an officer and extremely difficult for an NCO to participate in a three-to-five-year "advisory" program offering marginal advancement opportunities.

Anthropology as a "Quick Start" to Understanding Various and Different Cultures

Perhaps a way to compensate for the lack of immersed "participant observer" time would be to have a basic understanding of cultural anthropology. Anthropology is "the study of people and their cultures," and the aim of anthropological studies is to "develop cultural patterns and find the inherent reasons for their practices and traditions."[85] Unlike many other social science disciplines, which focus on understanding relationships between states (such as international relations) or American societal relationships (such as sociology), anthropology focuses on understanding how foreign societies work in microcosm.

More specifically, cultural anthropology is "the study of human society and culture [which] describes, analyzes, interprets, and explains social and cultural similarities and differences."[86] A course in cultural anthropology would be a good baseline for Special Forces soldiers (particularly officers) in anticipation of a career in which they will have to become familiar with—perhaps expert in—several different and disparate cultures over an extended career.

Cultural anthropology provides a foundation in the understanding of cultural patterns—a template of sorts that enables a person to assess any culture quickly based on a set of rules or patterns affecting all cultures. A good comprehension of cultural anthropology would enable Special Forces soldiers to understand basic social structures (such as tribes, networks, and

identity groups), be sensitive to local customs and patterns of communication, be reflexive about their own biases and mental models, and, perhaps most important, help them ask the right questions about what they need to know.[87] An understanding of cultural anthropology would enable them to "fast forward" their ability to understand a new culture and, in the early stages of operations in areas of new or unknown cultures, avoid the previously mentioned "cross-cultural miscues" that might jeopardize an entire operation.

Despite all of the positives of cultural anthropology, it will be a challenge to sift through and integrate the many available approaches in order to tailor the right course for Special Forces soldiers. Any such course would require materials that are not only relevant, but presented in such a way that they could be quickly comprehended and used.

4. Foreign Languages

From 1990 to 1992, this author was in charge of the Special Forces Language School and oversaw the transition of the Special Forces Language Immersion Course (SFLIC), which taught military-specific language, to the Basic Army Language Training Course, which taught a more traditional, functional skill-building approach[88] based on an upgraded Defense Language Institute model. SFLIC was not a traditional immersion course; instead, immersion meant learning mostly "Army speak," which would enable the user to teach indigenous soldiers how to move, shoot and communicate using specific military vocabulary. SFLIC was problematic for two reasons. First, it did not work very well; most soldiers could not learn how to use "soldier-specific" vocabulary without a more comprehensive understanding of the language. And second, even those few who did well at SFLIC did not have the language skills to get from the airport to the training site to put it to use.

The Basic Army Language Training Course was an improvement over SFLIC in that the standard six-month course had a high success rate at getting Special Forces soldiers to a higher reading and listening comprehension level, even in "category four" (the most difficult classification level in the U.S. government system) languages such as Arabic. In the past two decades, several improvements have been made to the language program. Presently, language training in some form is taught throughout the entire six-month Special Forces Qualification Course (Q Course) cycle, not just in a separate "language course" taught after Q Course completion. Teaching language throughout the course adds realism and reinforces the notion that language training and learning is a continuous process—not a one-time event.

The Age-Old Question: Which Foreign Languages Should Special Forces Soldiers Learn?

When this author was in charge of the Special Forces foreign language training, Major General David Baratto, SWCS commander in the early 1990s, asked with some frequency, "Are we teaching the right languages, teaching too many languages, and what other languages should we teach?" Answers to his questions always varied and, other than adding Chinese, there was no consensus on which additional languages should be taught—or dropped, for

that matter. Certainly, Dari and Pashto—so important today—were not on any wish list then. However, the same discussion—which languages should be taught today and in the future?—is still a core topic of discussion.[89]

Two decades ago, nine foreign languages were taught at SWCS: French, Russian, Spanish, German, Arabic (Egyptian and Modern Standard), Korean, Tagalog, Thai, and Vietnamese.[90] Today, SWCS teaches 17 primary languages, including: Polish, Tagalog, Bahasa (Indonesia), French, Spanish, Urdu, Czech, Hungarian, Arabic, Chinese (Mandarin), Korean, Russian, Persian (Farsi), Turkish, Thai, Dari, and Pashto. Additionally, and depending on today's requirements, several "surge" languages, such as Dari, Pashto, Laotian, Turkish, Serbian, Arabic (Iraq), Bengali, Vietnamese, German, Punjabi, and Portuguese (Brazil), may also be offered.[91] Yet, even with this wider menu of language options, the decades-old questions remain: Are these the right languages to teach? Should some be dropped and others added?

The answers depend on different points of view. Some would contend that most of the world's population speaks one of ten or so languages either as a native speaker or second language speaker—so stick with those. Others might argue that English is increasingly becoming the international language—so if a person speaks English, there is little incentive to learn a foreign language. Still others believe that, within the decade, technology will be such that a person speaking any language will be able to, with the help of a laptop and special software, speak with another person using any other language—so, new technology will override the need to learn new languages. Finally, there are those who contend that the ability to speak low-density languages, particularly along the arc of instability, will continue to be an important "force multiplier"—so, continuing to identify those who can learn foreign languages easily and those who have already demonstrated foreign language acumen is important because new, uncommon languages requiring quick study and learning will continuously be a factor in the present and future security environments. To some degree, all of these opinions have merit; each will be discussed in the following pages.

Learn the traditional and most commonly spoken languages

In 2010, as part of the research for this paper, this author interviewed a professional interpreter and long-time colleague. His name is Martin Kwame Matrevi, and his native language is Ewe, but his two specialty languages are

French and English. Martin does simultaneous translation from English to French and French to English and is quite good at his trade. When asked about the importance of Special Forces soldiers learning African languages, his response was somewhat surprising. In his words, "If you can speak French, English and/or Arabic, you pretty much have Africa covered."[92] He went on to explain that if you know a dozen or so of the most common languages, you can effectively communicate with most of the world.

Interestingly, studies conducted by George Weber from 1993 through 1999 support Martin's opinion and also reinforce SWCS's decisions on which languages to teach over the past two decades. The multi-year Weber Study, though a bit dated, contains findings that are still relevant. Weber's goal was to determine which were the world's most influential languages by examining several "language importance" categories, including the numbers of primary speakers, secondary speakers, countries where used and populations of those countries, and major fields using the language internationally. Additionally, it examined the economic power of countries using the languages and their socio-literary prestige.[93] For the purpose of this paper, the numbers of primary and secondary speakers of each language are most important. According to Weber's studies, the rank order of languages by number of primary (native) speakers is:

1. Mandarin Chinese (1.1 billion)
2. English (330 million)
3. Spanish (300 million)
4. Hindi/Urdu (250 million)
5. Arabic (200 million)
6. Bengali (185 million)
7. Portuguese (160 million)
8. Russian (160 million)
9. Japanese (125 million)
10. German (100 million)
11. Punjabi (90 million)
12. Javanese (80 million)
13. French (75 million)[94]

And, the rank order of those languages spoken as second languages was:

1. French (190 million)
2. English (150 million)
3. Russian (125 million)
4. Portuguese (28 million)
5. Arabic (21 million)
6. Spanish (20 million)
7. Chinese (20 million)
8. German (9 million)
9. Japanese (8 million)[95]

Thus, if one combines the native speaker populations to the secondary speaker populations, approximately 60 percent of the world's population speaks one of the following languages as either a first or second language:[96]

1. Mandarin Chinese (1.12 billion)
2. English (480 million)
3. Spanish (320 million)
4. Russian (285 million)
5. French (265 million)
6. Hindi/Urdu (250 million)
7. Arabic (221 million)
8. Portuguese (188 million)
9. Bengali (185 million)
10. Japanese (133 million)
11. German (109 million)[97]

The 60 percent figure is calculated using the global population figures from 1995, when this study was first completed (5.7 billion). Today's population is a bit more than 6.7 billion,[98] but according to an update by George Weber in 2008, "the number of speakers of *all* the top ten languages have gone up in the last quarter century but relative to each other, the situation among the top ten remains unchanged."[99]

While Weber's findings emphasize the importance of several core languages and seem to support both the decisions of the SWCS and the opinion

of the Ghanaian translator, there are some flaws in this approach. What about the 40 percent of the world's population that does not speak one of the major languages? Also, while the data above can provide a good argument for learning the world's major languages, they are a poor argument for not learning others. For example, a village elder in Peshawar is unlikely to know any of the major languages listed, but Pashto-speaking skills can be vital for a unit operating there. The premise also assumes away the need for any cultural awareness if English is the global lingua franca.[100]

The Importance of English

Several years ago, at a multinational Cobra Gold Exercise, a Thai senior colonel expressed that he appreciated Special Forces soldiers' attempts to learn and speak Thai, but that it would really be more efficient if Thai soldiers learned how to speak English. His rationale was that Thai soldiers would be more motivated to learn English than Americans would be to learn Thai because of English's preeminence in a globalized world. If his soldiers learned English, the Thai colonel reasoned, two-way communication between our soldiers would be much easier, and thus operations would be more effective. His suggestion, given somewhat in jest, was to put an American English instructor in every Thai Special Forces training installation.

The Thai colonel had a point; English is an important language. According to the CIA World Fact Book, less than 5 percent of the world's total population speaks English as a primary language.[101] However, that number doubles when people who speak English as a second or third language are counted. According to recent British Council statistics, English is spoken as a native language by approximately 375 million and as a second language by another 375 million speakers in the world, and speakers of English as a second language will soon outnumber those who are primary speakers.[102] Clearly, two different data sets confirm the fact that, depending on how you count, one out of four or five of the world's population speaks English at some level of competence. Adding emphasis to the importance of English, the Council notes that English has official or special status in at least 75 countries with a total population of over two billion.[103]

The English language is widely recognized as the most dominant language of international business. Other languages are indisputably growing in influence—most notably, Chinese, Spanish, and Arabic—but English's predominance is reflected in and solidified by its emphasis within

international business schools.[104] English is the official language for the airline industry, and now all commercial pilots and air traffic controllers must speak English.[105] English is also a key language for legal systems around the world—so much that in one part of Germany, commercial law cases can be conducted in English.[106] In South Asia, English is the prevalent language in higher education, science, and inter-state communication, and is an official co-language in India (alongside Hindi).[107] And the list goes on.

While the data above encourage wider English-speaking capabilities around the world, teaching English as a foreign language has a reverse culture benefit. Much of this paper has argued for more culture training from a "know yourself, know your ally, and know your enemy" point of view. However, just as al-Qaeda believes it is important for its operators to understand American culture, it can be argued that U.S. allies should also understand American culture.

There are several excellent university-level programs offering bachelor's and master's degrees programs in Teaching English as a Second Language (TESOL, which is also called English as a Second Language, or ESL, and Teaching English as a Foreign Language, or TEFL). However, one does not have to have a degree to be a qualified TESOL instructor. The only requirement is a certificate that can be obtained from a recognized training institution for a few hundred dollars. Earning a certificate is fairly straightforward. Usually, TESOL certificate courses taught in the United States are intensive, full-time courses that run four to six weeks and focus on practical training and different language methodologies. Most reputable courses include more than 100 contact hours in the classroom, and better courses also include a student teaching component.[108] Some programs offer a distance learning option, with credits completed online and at a student's individual pace.[109]

So how might the ability to teach English as a second language fit into Special Forces operational planning and professional development? Recall the Thai colonel's comment that it would be a good idea to have an English instructor at every Thai Special Forces base. Interestingly, maintaining an English instructor at allied Special Forces installations would have several benefits. First, the instructor would have status and the gratitude of the host nation, so that the instruction presented would have lasting value. Second, more friends and allies speaking English would enhance global communications. Third, the TESOL instructor's foreign language and culture capability would also be enhanced because he or she would be "immersed" in a foreign

language and culture. And finally, the instructor could learn valuable "capability and intentions" information by observing activities at a foreign base. Other than personnel availability issues, there probably is no good reason for there not to be a TESOL "skill identifier" for at least one member on every Special Forces team. While current requirements probably prevent Special Forces personnel from being TESOL instructors, there would be nothing preventing Department of Army government civilian employees or contractors from serving as TESOL instructors. Also, in "SOF for Life" terms, being a TESOL instructor for allied Special Forces organizations could be an ideal retirement career.

However, according to the Chief of Staff at the Defense Language Institute, while teaching English to allies is not a bad idea per se, reliance only on English would leave Americans at a severe disadvantage for everything from dealing with friendly forces in a meaningful way to understanding when things go wrong. Developing a relationship with an ally is one thing, says Watrud, but becoming completely dependent on them is another. There may be an ulterior motive, as it leaves the "host" forces holding all the cards when it comes to information.[110] Explains Watrud:

> While it always helps to work with allies to speak English well, improving our forces' ability to speak their language has a multiplied effect: in addition to allowing us to work with the members of their military that we normally encounter (often a small subset of their leaders or key individuals), training our forces to speak a target language lets us interact with their entire population—and that can extend far beyond the military to anyone else we might need to deal with. Furthermore, the contribution to mutual respect, acceptance, and a positive working relationship brought by just making the effort to learn their language can prove extremely beneficial.[111]

Speech-to-Speech Technology—Wave of the Future?

In Douglas Adams's humorous sci-fi novel series, The *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, a special kind of fish—the Babel Fish—has amazing translation capabilities. When inserted into a human's ear, the Babel Fish translates any spoken language into whichever language the listener understands. It is a very nifty device that many companies are trying to replicate, including Yahoo!, which has adopted the Babel Fish name for its online text translation

product, and Google, whose evolving phone software for instantaneous translation owes a debt to Adams's Babel Fish concept.[112]

In 2007, a venture capital firm asked this author to test some text-to-text language translation software developed by an Australian who was a principal in a Malaysian firm based in Kuala Lumpur. In the testing of a Chinese–to-English and English-to-Chinese text-to-text translation product he was developing, the system worked fairly well—better than the systems available at the time on Google and Yahoo!. The developer said he believed speech-to-speech capability might be viable; within 10 years, technology will enable two people with a single laptop, two earphone portals, and two microphones to converse in any language with 90 percent accuracy.

Globalization, induced increased commerce, and travel have created an ever-increasing demand for a Babel Fish-type device that can deliver instant speech-to-speech translation between different languages. Potential military applications for such a device are clearly evident, as U.S. military personnel struggle to communicate with allies and adversaries in Iraq and Afghanistan. More important, particularly for Special Forces, the requirement for real-time, speech-to-speech capabilities will only continue to increase in the post-Iraq and post-Afghanistan security environment, as most future threat scenarios predict that Special Forces will be very busy in areas where English is not a first or second language. Thus, the military will benefit from the ultimate goal of speech-to-speech translation (sometimes referred to as S2S) to "enable real-time, interpersonal communication via natural spoken language for people who do not share a common language."[113]

Recent progress in the field of computer-assisted speech and language processing has advanced the creation of automated speech-to-speech systems. However, none of the systems are quite up to Adams' fictitious Babel Fish capabilities:

> Creating speech-to-speech translation systems for cross-lingual oral communication has been the dream of speech and natural language researchers for decades. It is technically extremely difficult because of the need to integrate a set of complex technologies – Automatic Speech Recognition (ASR), Natural Language Understanding (NLU), Machine Translation (MT), Natural Language Generation (NLG), and Text-to-Speech Synthesis (TTS) – that are far from mature on an individual basis, much less when cascaded together.[114]

In addition to Google's emerging phone-based software, there are several "aspiring" products on the market, including some being tested by Department of Defense agencies. Two of those are the Multilingual Automatic Speech-to-Speech Translator (MASTOR) system being developed by IBM for Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency, and the Jibbigo system, which has an iPhone, iPod, and/or iPad application now being tested at DLI.

Conceptually, the MASTOR system has advantages over commercially available translation systems, which "can only work with pre-programmed fixed phrases" that would be impossible to configure for military use, particularly in combat.[115] According to IBM, MASTOR "offers users the ability to have a free-form conversation without having to memorize any pre-determined phrases."[116]

Recently, this author had an opportunity to test the Jibbigo speech translator system used at DLI. Supposedly a person using the system can speak a sentence aloud into an iPhone, iPod or iPad in one language, and the sentence is broadcast aloud in another selected language, "much like a personal human interpreter would."[117] Jibbigo also shows the text translation on the instrument, so the translation's accuracy can be verified if the users can read the language. Results with the Jibbigo system have been mixed. In one test, this author participated in the English-to-Chinese translation was nearly perfect, but the spoken Chinese was translated at a correctness rate of approximately 60 percent, which could have been due to poor pronunciation or background noise in the conference room. However, the vocabulary was quite simple, the translation time was prohibitively slow, and the controlled environment certainly did not replicate what could be encountered in the field, particularly in a combat setting. This seems to be the case with all of the speech-to-speech technology available to the military and civilian markets; generally, they are not robust enough to meet the scale, breadth, and tempo required for the mission areas/needs of deployed forces. The threshold for effective use of speech-to-speech translation in the business world is lower than in the military, where there is "a need for 'street' level communication that accounts for unstructured/colloquial speech, varied sub-dialects, noisy environments, the need for hands-free communication, and the need for increased accuracy in real-time, tactical translation," which is just not yet available.[118]

Low-Density Languages—Africa Case Study

Those who favor learning the world's major languages or believe universal English or technology will negate the need to learn foreign languages, might reconsider if they took a close look at areas of low-density languages where colonial languages like English or French are only spoken by the elite, and technology will be a long time coming. For example, in Africa, where al-Qaeda and like-minded groups are expanding operations at a rapid rate and Special Forces will most likely be engaged in future decades, low-density languages predominate. Of the 7,000 languages spoken throughout the world,[119] more than 2,000 are spoken in Africa.[120] Which of these should be learned in order to help friends and allies address future threats?

Certainly, Arabic needs to be included because it is the official language of several North African states. However, other African languages, such as Berber, Igbo, Swahili, Hausa, Amharic and Yoruba, which are spoken by tens of millions of Africans, might also merit consideration. Additionally, another hundred or so African languages are used by millions for inter-ethnic communication. If multi-tribal interoperability is a goal, should a capability in those languages also be important? And what of Nigeria, which has one of the greatest concentrations of language diversity in the world? More than 500 languages are spoken in Nigeria,[121] many of them used within the Niger Delta, where the U.S. has major oil interests, and Special Forces could conceivably be called upon to assist Nigerian forces for countering economic terrorism. So which languages should be learned, and by whom?

Some, such as the translator in Ghana, would argue that French, English, and Arabic should suffice. However, according to retired Colonel David McCracken, former 3rd Special Forces Group commander and knowledgeable of language requirements in Africa, this is not the case.[122] Based on his numerous deployments across the African continent, McCracken believes that "legacy languages, such as French, Portuguese and Arabic (with wide utility), as well as Spanish, German and Italian (of lesser value) are important languages to know when operating in Africa."[123] However, says McCracken, throughout that entire continent, those languages are spoken by the educated class and elites, not the local populations that Special Forces soldiers work with most extensively and will most likely continue to be working with in the future. Despite some analysts' assertions to the contrary, it remains

extremely important to learn local languages and dialects in order to work effectively in Africa. Many cultures in Africa place significant value in personal relationships, and those are best developed when applying the local language or dialect. As McCracken asserts, "The traditional colonial languages may work in the capitals and major cities, but in rural and denied areas where we most often work, they are of limited use." The Special Forces soldier must therefore be able to speak grammatically-correct English to our leaders at the embassy level, communicate in viable legacy linguistics with partner nations' leaders, and also adequately dialogue with his local-level counterparts who actually know the operationally valuable information he needs to succeed.[124]

Clearly, teaching all African languages within Special Forces is impossible; in fact, teaching even the "most relevant" is also impossible, because there are still too many dialects to systematize, and the notion of relevance changes according to ethnic politics, regional activity, and priority relationships. Even narrowing the focus to the languages spoken in a troubled African region, such as the Niger Delta, is not realistic, as in that particular area approximately 25 languages and 153 dialects are spoken.[125] Perhaps the answer is not which low-density languages to learn in Africa and other areas of operation, but who should be selected to learn them.

Selecting the Right Candidate for Foreign Language Instruction

As noted previously in this paper, the ability to identify those with "special culture learning acumen" is questionable and a matter of debate. This is not the case with foreign language-learning capabilities, as there are tried and tested ways to identify those with the capacity to learn foreign languages, as well as some new "brain training" testing that indicates that this capacity can be stimulated and improved. Also, there are some hypothetical parallels between the suggestion that studying anthropology might establish a baseline for accelerated culture learning and the notion that learning foreign languages becomes easier the more languages you learn. Finally, in recognition of those who suffered SFLIC in the Special Forces Language School in the 1980s, the premise might have some merit; there actually is some evidence that vocabularies common to a profession, be they military, religious, business, scientific, or some other, make learning a foreign language easier for those in a given profession.

Identifying Foreign Language Aptitude

Unlike the open question of cultural aptitude, there is ample evidence that foreign language aptitude is testable. An important question for this study, then, is whether foreign language aptitude is different from general aptitude or intelligence. The answer, based on a number of studies and applications, is "yes." A number of foreign language aptitude tests, including the Defense Language Aptitude Battery (DLAB)—well known to the Special Forces community—have demonstrated the ability to exceed a "general intelligence test in the prediction of success in learning a foreign language."[126] J. B. Carroll, one of the most noted and prolific authors on the subject of foreign language aptitude, has suggested that "foreign language aptitude comprises four cognitive abilities,"[127] each of which are reflected, to one extent or another, in DLAB and other foreign language aptitude tests that have been developed subsequent to Carroll's original research in the early 1960s:

> The first of these abilities is phonetic coding, which is the ability to segment and identify distinct sounds, to form associations between those sounds and symbols representing them, and to retain these associations. This is a rather unique auditory component of foreign language aptitude. It is especially important in classes that emphasize spoken language.
>
> The second component is grammatical sensitivity, the ability to recognize the grammatical function of words or other linguistic structures in sentences. This component may be especially important in classes that emphasize an analytical approach to learning a foreign language.
>
> The third component is rote learning ability as it applies to foreign language learning situations. Rote learning ability is a kind of general memory, but individuals seem to differ in their ability to apply their memory to the foreign language situation.
>
> The fourth component is inductive language learning ability. This is the ability to infer the rules that govern the use of language. Again, this component is probably like general inductive learning ability,

but individuals may vary in their ability to apply it to the foreign language learning situation.[128]

There are two language aptitude tests widely used by the federal government to select potential students: the DLAB, used by the Department of Defense and the FBI, and the Modern Language Aptitude Test (MLAT), used by most other federal offices and intelligence agencies. The DLAB is a bit different from the MLAT in that it is used not only as a selection mechanism, but also for placement; a "certain minimum DLAB score is associated with qualification for studying the languages" in each of four categories of difficulty as classified by the U.S. government.[129]

Tests such as the DLAB are important because they remove students who will have difficulty learning a foreign language and thus save money and instructor and student time. It makes no academic or professional sense to set a student up to fail, and the DLAB does much to eliminate that possibility. As this paper goes to press, DLAB 2 is on the drawing board. Now under development at the University of Maryland's Center for Advanced Study of Language (CASL), DLAB 2 "will develop a new version of the DLAB that is based on advances in cognitive science, personality and trait psychology, and foreign language education. The new test will improve prediction of foreign language learning potential and prediction of the likelihood of attrition" —and thus hopefully save even more time and money.

Accelerating Foreign Language Competency

CASL is also involved in research that will potentially accelerate a person's ability to advance and retain foreign language competencies. Advertised as "brain training," the objective of the program is to "enhance foreign language professionals' working memory capacity via a time-intensive and mentally stimulating training regimen" that improves foreign language text processing and comprehension. The concept involves strengthening a person's "working memory" (WM), which is "the small amount of memory that stores and manipulates information for ongoing use" and "supports problem solving and intelligent behavior; action planning; and language abilities such as reading, spoken language comprehension, and drawing inferences."[132] By strengthening WM, researchers at CASL believe that a stronger working memory will lead to quicker and more accurate translation

and interpretation, even in the face of "complex, ambiguous, or incomplete text."[133]

Learning one foreign language makes it easier to learn the next, and the next…

Approximately 20 years ago, this author recalls general consensus at the Special Forces Language School was that there was a point of diminishing returns with regard to the number of foreign languages one could learn. Learning a third language was easier if you could successfully learn a second language—that was understood. However, the thinking at the time was that there were limits to the efficiencies of learning more languages; that there was a "saturation point," if you will.

This turns out not to be the case. The educated and proven thinking now is that learning foreign languages gets easier the more languages you learn. By learning different languages, a person becomes "accustomed to different ways of putting sentences together, different ways of marking the relationships between words, different sounds and intonation patterns, and different ways of thinking," all of which "help when learning new languages."[134] Those who learn multiple languages also "develop strategies for learning vocabulary and grammar, and for paraphrasing and generally communicating with whatever words [they] can remember."[135] Furthermore, multiple experts agree that not only does learning a third or fourth language become easier once a second language is mastered, but that language learning has the overall benefit of keeping the "brain actively engaged."[136] In fact, the skills developed through language learning have even been found to delay the onset of Alzheimer's disease, illustrating the unique functions exercised by language study.[137]

Professional vocabulary is an important independent variable in accelerating the learning of one or more languages. It helps to have vocabulary common to a profession that is familiar in several different languages, says professional translator Martin Kwame Matrevi. In his case, the common vocabulary was found in the Bible, which he knew in English and, according to him, made it accessible to learn in French. Having common reference vocabulary across languages made conversation easier because he at least knew some of the words and was not embarrassed to try to speak.[138] Similarly, many professions, such as engineering, science, mineral exploration, and of course, the military have standard terms that are relatable across

languages or, in some cases, nearly universal. Therefore, in these professions and others, having a familiar base vocabulary to work with makes learning the rest easier.

Asking which language to learn is the wrong question—it is better to ask who can best learn any language

"Which languages should we be learning?"—the question General Baratto asked decades ago, and many within the defense community still ask—is probably the wrong question. In truth, any language is learnable given available time and effort. The real question is, "Who can learn a language quickly and to a high level of proficiency, no matter what the language is?" This question is manageable for the reasons articulated in the past few pages. First, tests such as the DLAB provide clarity on who can learn foreign languages and who cannot. Second, new and continuing research provides insights on manipulating and strengthening portions of the brain responsible for cognitive and language aptitude—much like the all-pro linebacker in the off-season weight room, those with a facility with foreign languages will be able to "exercise" parts of the brain to make them even better. Third, those successful at learning one or more foreign languages will be able to continue learning other foreign languages at a quicker rate. Therefore, the key to taking on new and particularly low-density languages has more to do with selecting the right personnel to learn the language than the language itself. In Special Forces, the right candidates are available. They have been tested and speak—or have the acumen to speak—several different languages and most likely can have their abilities strengthened. However, knowing who these language superstars are and managing them effectively is the challenge.

Some final thoughts: not either/or, but both?

This piece has not provided a comprehensive, comparative study regarding the relative merits of studying either foreign languages or cultures. Yet two earlier conclusions of the study were that foreign language competency is more difficult to achieve than cultural competency, and that cultural competency may have greater short-term benefit than foreign language competency. More than a year has passed since the author has reached that initial conclusion, and the truth is that both culture and foreign language

are learned better if learned simultaneously. The answer is not "either/or," but "both"—if time is available.

This has also been the conclusion of the foreign missionary community. Other than the Special Forces, foreign missionary work is one of the best examples of a profession that requires foreign language and culture competency. Indeed, the Army's premier language unit is the 1,600-member 300th Military Intelligence Brigade, a popular and much sought-after reserve Army unit in Utah. The 300th and its two battalions were initially staffed primarily with Mormons who learned their foreign language and culture skills while on two-year missions overseas.[139] Mormon missionaries are immersed in both the language and culture of the country where they are "on mission." Most Mormon missionaries who learn a second language intuitively "understand that it is necessary for them to learn the vocabulary and grammar of the new language." They also learn to understand that "cultural literacy, or knowledge of the culture, will also significantly improve their ability to speak and understand the language."[140] Not surprisingly, the Institute for Cross-Cultural Training at Wheaton College's Billy Graham Center, which offers preparatory materials for cross-cultural ministry work, also advocates a combination of language and culture learning for its missionaries. According to the Institute, "good" language learners tightly integrate cultural knowledge into their study of language, developing a high proficiency in each.[141] Furthermore, "good" language learners are highly motivated individuals who have positive attitudes toward their new language and culture; they realize the importance of becoming accepted members of their new societies in order to become effective communicators.[142]

5. Conclusion

Given the operational tempo and the places where Special Forces will serve in the next several decades, the requirements for foreign language and culture competencies are sure to increase. While there is some debate over which is more important—language or culture—most agree that learning about culture is easier than learning a foreign language, and more useful to the soldier in the short-term. However, there is a growing body of evidence indicating a certain symbiotic effect when learning language and culture together, which in turn yields more long-term benefits.

In an ideal world, language and culture students would not be detached learners that form a distant and static view of a culture. Instead, they would be active participants in culture and language learning that is designed to be more dynamic and directly engaged. Ideally, immersion learning is the best way to achieve direct engagement, but absent the time, funding and, in some cases, access (training in Waziristan, for example, is not an immediate possibility), there are some alternatives worth considering.[143]

Student selection is important. There is no sense selecting a student who is going to have difficulty mastering the topic, be it culture or language. Unfortunately, there is not yet a mechanism that can test a person's ability to learn culture; however, there are several ongoing but inconclusive studies that attempt to measure a person's CQ, which would be an indicator of cultural learning aptitude. Some studies suggest that people with certain CQ personality traits have better aptitude for learning intercultural skills, and other studies indicate that those with certain CQ cognitive skills have better intercultural acumen.[144] The fact that the results are inconclusive does not limit the value of the studies, and the studies should continue, perhaps with the help of the Special Forces community as researchers and/or subjects of the research.

Selecting students who have a proclivity for learning foreign languages is relatively straightforward, as foreign language aptitude is and has been a successfully-implemented standard. As mentioned in previous sections of this piece, the DLAB has been used by all Department of Defense language training institutions for decades. Passing the DLAB is a prerequisite for entrance into language training programs, and the score attained on the battery is used for placement; the higher a prospective student's score,

the more difficult a language he or she is encouraged to study. Now in the testing phase, DLAB 2 will improve the assessment and placement process by adding personal history (place of origin, family background, cultural heritage, other foreign language competencies, and so forth), cognitive and psychological elements to the test.[145] According to Colonel Dino Pick, Commandant of the Defense Language Institute, "Early testing of DLAB 2 is encouraging and, once implemented, will save time and money by better selecting candidates who can more easily learn foreign languages."[146]

The prospect of accelerating the ability of a person to learn culture is limited, but for language there are some new possibilities. With regard to culture, and based on research for this paper, two findings are of interest. First, many professionals in the field suggest that a foundation in anthropology, and particularly cultural anthropology, for all Special Forces soldiers would "jump start" their ability to learn the fundamentals of nearly any culture more quickly and easily; cultural anthropology provides the "template" from which any culture can be addressed. Second, this paper also posits that different levels of culture learning and application are important. Obviously, the optimum level of cultural understanding would be native, but this is an unrealistic expectation of most Special Forces soldiers other than those who are immigrants or strongly-oriented second generation soldiers. Therefore, the level of cultural understanding required might coincide with the type of mission set: tactical, operational, or strategic. In conventional terms, this is relatively easy to apply to unit size and mission. A generalization (especially given the present threat environment) would be: platoon = tactical = cultural awareness; company = operational = cultural literacy; and battalion-brigade and higher levels = strategic = strategic competency.

Source: Margaret Nencheck (used with permission)

BASELINE	Level	Description	Case Studies		
			Somalia	Iraq	Afghanistan
CULTURAL CAPABILITY	Tactical Awareness	Understanding that there are differences between cultures; the dos and don'ts.	Showing the bottom of one's feet is offensive to Somalis.	Iraqi men often hold hands in public as a sign of affection or brotherhood.	Use your right hand to pass things or eat; using the left hand is a sign of shame.
	Operational Literacy	Understanding individual cultural patterns and knowing your own cultural norms.	Clan strife was predicated on nomad vs. agriculturalists conflicts over available pasture.	Contemporary Kurdish TV still references the gassing of Halabja in 1988.	Although hundreds of tribes in Afghanistan share the same religious background, they are very different.
The baseline for understanding all levels of culture; grounded in the understanding of one's own culture.	Strategic Competency	Congruent behaviors, attitudes, and policies that enable work in cross-cultural settings.	TV images of Somali mobs from the 1990s fuel anti-Somali sentiments toward immigrants in U.S. communities today.	Corruption in business and government is pervasive, as Iraqis place more value on honor than transparency.	The drawing of the "Durand Line" between Pakistan and Afghanistan in 1893 put tribes and families on opposite borders.

Table 1. Taxonomy

However, in Special Forces terms, this logic does not easily apply, because the smallest unit—the Special Forces team—by definition operates across the tactical, operational and strategic levels. To address this complexity, one suggestion is that each team trains some members at each of the levels: awareness (at a minimum), literacy, and competency. One might assume that more senior members of the team would attain a literacy or competency level, but that would not have to be the case, particularly given the increased emphasis on recruiting immigrants and second-generation citizens into the force.

The notion that language education can be accelerated has basis in fact. Those who have learned a foreign language can then learn another foreign language, and another, and another at quicker rates. The special skills required for foreign language aptitude take time to acquire. However, once the skills are learned, they can be applied to the next language, and the next.

Therefore, if a new mission requires learning a new, low-density language, then the talent pool to draw on are those who have already learned—with some competency—one or more foreign languages.

New research also indicates that a person may be able to accelerate language learning and enhance retention by exercising portions of the brain. While still in the testing phase, the research conducted by the University of Maryland's Center for Advanced Study of Language suggests that the working memory portion of the brain, which stores memory important for language learning and retention, can be strengthened through a series of intense mental exercises. Advocates of "brain training," as it is known at the Defense Language Institute, believe that by strengthening working memory linguists can overcome many traditional obstacles to translation and interpretation.[147]

While there is some evidence that foreign language learning and competence can be accelerated and some sense that a foundation in cultural anthropology will accelerate one's ability to learn different cultures, suggestions that there are alternatives to learning mission-required languages and cultures are less convincing. The notion that learning one or more of the ten most used languages in the world can get you by in 60 percent of the world is interesting—but what about the other 40 percent, particularly when the 40 percent are located in areas where Special Forces are most likely to be operating in the next decades? This is not to say that learning "legacy languages" is not important; knowing a legacy language might get a person by with the educated and elites, even in denied areas. More important, learning any language, including a legacy language, is the premier indicator that a person can learn more languages easier and faster.

Those who advocate technological applications to replace the need for foreign linguists have a while to wait. Field systems still being tested remain less than 90 percent accurate, difficult to manipulate, and do not account for idiom, jargon and dialect. Watrud sums up the problem with technology best. Despite advances in technology, says Watrud (and according to regular reviews of current offerings), nothing yet comes close to skilled human translators. Issues with vocabulary, ability to operate in a "less than pristine" environment, handling background noise, and understanding slang or sarcasm are just some of the shortcomings of pre-programmed technology. Even at a generous 90 percent accuracy rating, if the 10 percent

a machine gets wrong consists of critical operational information, the other 90 percent alone might be useless.[148]

Additionally, those who are enthusiastic about the English-only option should reconsider. True, English has become a global lingua franca over the past several decades, but this should have little bearing on a decision to learn a foreign language—especially considering that nearly 80 percent of the world's population does not know English.[149] Remaining monolingual restricts educational development and communication abilities, as well as the opportunity to fully understand another culture, given the symbiotic relationship between language and culture learning this study has explored. Still, the Thai senior colonel's suggestion that Special Forces English instructors should be made available to teach English at allied Special Forces installations is solid; the benefit of doing so would likely have benefits lasting for generations to come.

Finally, there is no "silver bullet" to attaining levels of foreign language capability and cultural knowledge, awareness, literacy, and competency. Innate talent helps, particularly with learning foreign languages. However, hard work is the key to success in both endeavors, particularly if both language and culture are learned simultaneously. In the end, good language and culture learners assume responsibility for their own learning. They make use of a wide range of available resources, including school-based language and culture instruction with independent learning opportunities, including lifetime learning through native culture interaction.[150] Self-direction is key; rather than innate ability, personality, or resource availability, the most important factor in successful language and culture learning is the motivation of the individual learner.[151]

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