

# Foreign language, Cultural Diplomacy, and Global Security

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November 15, 2015

There can be no doubt that a nation with greater knowledge of and experience with the languages and cultures of the world would be a nation more skilled at cultural diplomacy and more able to contribute to global security. This paper will examine the nation's commitment to building foreign language skills for this purpose, beginning with a historical overview. It will review actions taken to attempt to build the nation's capability, and examine the critical and complicated issues facing federal agencies as they undertake to solve problems on their own and meet the nation's need for foreign language in pursuit of cultural diplomacy and global security.

It seems appropriate to begin with a discussion of cultural diplomacy. The Institute for Cultural Diplomacy discusses cultural diplomacy as follows:

*Cultural Diplomacy may best be described as a course of actions, which are based on and utilize the exchange of ideas, values, traditions and other aspects of culture or identity, whether to strengthen relationships, enhance socio-cultural cooperation or promote national interests; Cultural diplomacy can be practiced by either the public sector, private sector or civil society.*

*Whilst the term "cultural diplomacy" has only recently been established, evidence of its practice can be seen throughout history and has existed for centuries. Explorers, travelers, traders, teachers and artists can be all considered living examples of "informal ambassadors" or early "cultural diplomats" (for example, the establishment of regular trade routes enables a frequent exchange of information and cultural gifts between traders and government representatives).<sup>2</sup>*

In the Summer 2015 edition of *World Affairs*, Nancy McEldowney, the Director of the Foreign Service Institute within the Department of State, discusses the different world in which our diplomats operate. Entitled, "Fast Forward: U.S. Diplomacy in an Untethered World," she describes the challenges and opportunities facing today's diplomats in a complex and changing world. This world includes the power of social media, non-state players, and the lack of a traditional world structure. She describes the diplomat's need for "deeper expertise."

*One of the most crucial aspects of diplomacy is the ability to get inside other peoples' heads, to know what they think, how they think, and why they do so. Our*

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<sup>1</sup> The author is the former (retired) Deputy Under Secretary for Plans in the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, and the first Department of Defense Senior Language Authority.

<sup>2</sup> See [www.culturaldiplomacy.org](http://www.culturaldiplomacy.org)

*diplomats must be thoroughly fluent, not just in foreign languages but also in the issues that matter most to those we're dealing with. Questions of social development such as education, literacy, and poverty; environmental degradation; post-conflict stabilization; women's and minority empowerment; corruption, rule of law, and market-oriented policies that create the conditions for job creation—these are the issues driving the world, so we must be positioned to drive them. ... Put another way, our diplomats must haggle with fluency and expert knowledge in each of the boutiques of the global bazaar. This type of advanced regional, substantive, and linguistic expertise is acquired not in weeks or months, but rather over years of sustained and focused effort. It entails a significant investment of individual effort as well as government resources. But the long-term dividends—grasping underlying trends and shaping them as, and often before, they unfold—will recoup the cost many times over. (McEldowney, 2015)*

The State Department has an official arm for cultural diplomacy, the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs. The Bureau's mission is to "To increase mutual understanding between the people of the United States and the people of other countries by means of educational and cultural exchange that assist in the development of peaceful relations."<sup>3</sup>

Cultural diplomacy, however, operates beyond the mission of the State Department. And our cultural diplomats are wide spread. Workers from the U.S. Agency for International Development work to support growth in developing countries. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention operate in more than 50 countries and CDC personnel are engaged in global health issues such as the Ebola outbreak<sup>4</sup>. Navy battleships alter course to provide assistance with natural disasters such as earthquakes.<sup>5</sup> According to a Press Release issued by the Central Intelligence Agency on December 8, 2010, then CIA Director, Leon Panetta, noted the importance of these skills for the intelligence community: "Language is the window through which we come to know other peoples and cultures, ... mastery of a second language allows you to capture the nuances that are essential to true understanding...this is not about learning something that is helpful or simply nice to have. It is crucial to CIA's mission."

And one can argue that the Special Forces soldier on the ground is the first line of cultural diplomacy with the people of the country they support.

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<sup>3</sup> See [www.eca.state.gov](http://www.eca.state.gov)

<sup>4</sup> See [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)

<sup>5</sup> The Marine Corps actually dealt with the unexpected nature of deployments by requiring Marines to specialize in an area of the world – in order to maximize the chances that cultural and regional expertise would be on board when the unexpected occurred.

For example, the University of Montana operates a Defense Critical Language and Culture Program.<sup>6</sup> In this program, Special Forces soldiers have the opportunity to learn Pashto, one of the principal languages of Afghanistan. In the spring edition of the University's magazine, there is an article featuring Staff Sergeant Adam McCaw who attended that program and was deployed to a small village in Afghanistan. He was the only member of the unit who spoke the language and the article attributes the success of the unit's mission to Staff Sergeant McCaw's abilities in language and culture. The article states:

*McCaw was a better soldier than ever. And it had nothing to do with holding his ground in a firefight. He was a frontline ambassador for the US, trying to make a positive change in a country wracked with problems. For McCaw, it all started with dialogue.*

*"And it's hard to have a conversation with someone," he says, "if you don't know anything about them." (Baynham, 2015, p. 20)*

Given the reach of our government's work, and the complexities of today's world, knowing the languages of the world is more critical than ever. Truly, the Federal Government's need for foreign language and cultural expertise is broad and it is deep.

### **SEEKING A NATIONAL SOLUTION -- HISTORY**

It is worthwhile to consider how our government as a whole has responded to the need for foreign language expertise. Concern about the acquisition and use of such expertise is not new and history shows a pattern of some successes and some inactivity.

The need for collaboration across the Government was recognized as early as 1955 with the informal formation of the Interagency Language Roundtable (ILR). The ILR arose from discussions among representatives of the Foreign Service Institute, the CIA Training Division, and the Air Force Language Program. The ILR continues today. It is unfunded, has no official government sponsor (leadership rotates), and gains its authority from the consensus and collaboration of its members. The members of the ILR were responsible for creating the ILR scale for measuring language proficiency, currently widely used across Government.<sup>7</sup>

In 1958, the National Defense Education Act (NDEA) was passed in response to the Soviet Union's success with the launch of Sputnik on October 4, 1957 and a concern, therefore, that we were not keeping pace with Soviet scientists. The Act was comprehensive in addressing educational issues, but specifically, for our purposes, sought to increase the study of science, mathematics and foreign language. It also provided funding for foreign language and area

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<sup>6</sup> This is funded by the Language Training Centers Program, as authorized by Congress and administered by the National Security Education Program.

<sup>7</sup> See [www.govtilr.org](http://www.govtilr.org)

studies (Title VI) and these resources exist today at select universities with Language Resource Centers and National Resource Centers.

On April 21, 1978, President Carter published Executive Order 12054, establishing the President's Commission on Foreign Language and International Studies. The Commission issued its report in November 1979, concluding, in a well-known quote, "Americans' incompetence in foreign languages is nothing short of scandalous, and is becoming worse." The report contained recommendations for the educational system, and for business and labor. The important recommendations of this report that resonate within the theme of this paper were:<sup>8</sup>

*The U.S. Government should achieve 100% compliance in filling positions designated as requiring foreign language proficiency....*

*The President should designate a major official as the responsible officer to be the point of contact on all matters involving foreign language and international studies.*

*Establish a National Commission on Foreign Language and International Studies.<sup>9</sup>*

In 1991, the Congress passed the David L. Boren National Security Education Act. This Act provided authority to the Department of Defense for scholarships and fellowships for American students to study abroad (in return for government service). It also authorized grants for higher education. As a result of this legislation, DoD established the National Security Education Program, including The Language Flagship Program, designed to stimulate teaching and curriculum in higher education that would produce graduates of high language proficiency. The specifics of NSEP and the results of NSEP will be discussed later in this paper. In 2011, the National Security Education Program published a 20 year review of progress. Two quotes from that review pertain. First, from the Director, Dr. Michael Nugent, as he summarizes the success of the program:

*... NSEP has remained true to its legislative goals: permitting the federal government to advocate on behalf of international education; providing new approaches to the teaching and learning of languages; identifying and supporting outstanding American university students to study languages and cultures critical to U.S. national security and creating a pipeline of these students to serve in government positions relevant to national security. (National Security Education Program 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Review, 2011, p.2)*

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<sup>8</sup> The full text of this report can be found at

<http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015005504900;view=1up;seq=1>

<sup>9</sup> In 1986 the National Foreign Language Center was founded. The NFLC website credits the Carter Commission findings as impetus for its creation, which was funded by private grants. See [www.nflc.umd.edu](http://www.nflc.umd.edu)

In that same review, Senator Boren, now the President of the University of Oklahoma, wrote:

*As we anticipated 20 years ago, we need U.S. citizens who speak other languages and understand other cultures to represent our interests in an increasingly complex and global world.<sup>10</sup>*

Interest in addressing foreign language needs at the national and Congressional level continued. In June 2004, as the Department of Defense (DoD) was beginning its multi-year foreign language initiative, the Department partnered with the Center for Advanced Study of Language at the University of Maryland to convene the National Language Conference. The Conference grew from a growing realization at DoD that if foreign language was an imperative for its forces, it would help if those recruited into service had received language education. About 300 hundred people attended this conference, including representatives of most federal agencies, educators, representatives from educational associations, representatives of business, and guests from foreign lands that routinely teach their citizens more than one language. This conference resulted in a White Paper, entitled *A Call to Action for National Foreign Language Capabilities* which contained many recommendations for improving the teaching and management of foreign language expertise in the United States. The primary recommendation was for a National Foreign Language Coordination Council to be established to

*... identify crucial priorities, inform the nation's leaders of the seriousness of the foreign language gap, increase public awareness of the need for foreign language skills and career paths in business and in government, advocate maximum use of resources, coordinate cross-sector efforts, monitor the foreign language activities of all federal government departments and agencies, recommend needed national policies, and allocate designated resources to promising programs and initiatives at any level (federal, state, and local). (National Language Conference, 2005, p. 3)*

In May of 2005, Senator Daniel Akaka<sup>11</sup>, who would emerge as a continuing advocate of foreign language capability in the nation, introduced the National Foreign Language Coordination Act of 2005. This proposed legislation was built on the recommendations of the National Language Conference, and it called for the creation of a “National Language Director” and a “...National Foreign Language Coordination Council to develop and oversee the implementation of a foreign language strategy...and monitor the foreign language activities of the federal government.” He specifically noted that such a council could be responsible for “...integrating language training into career fields and increase the number of language professionals.” (Akaka, 2005,p. 2) He also noted:

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<sup>10</sup> The review is available at: <http://www.nsep.gov/docs/20%20Year%20Anniversary%20Review.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> Senator Akaka was the Chairman of the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management, the Federal Workforce, and the District of Columbia.

*America needs people who understand foreign cultures and who are fluent in locally spoken languages. The stability and economic vitality of the United States and our national security depend on American citizens who are knowledgeable about the world. We need civil servants, including law enforcement officers, teachers, area experts, diplomats, and business people with the ability to communicate at an advanced level in the languages and understand the cultures of the people with whom they interact. (emphasis added) (Akaka, 2005, p.2)*

Senator Akaka's understanding of the needs of the federal government and thus our nation was clear. This was the first of a number of legislative attempts to establish such a council. Such legislation was never enacted. Senator Akaka also conducted a number of hearings on foreign language, particularly foreign language in the federal government. (McGinn, 2014, pps.7-8)

In summary, while the Boren National Security Education Act marked a victory for legislation supporting the development of expertise in language and culture, in recent years there has not been collective interest in establishing a national agenda and corresponding oversight in this important area.

## **THE NATIONAL SECURITY LANGUAGE INITIATIVE**

Lacking a national solution to the problem of foreign language, there is one national initiative whose effects go beyond the border of individual agencies. This is an initiative to grow the nation's capability to field the necessary cultural diplomats and provide for global security.

The National Security Language Initiative was announced by President George W. Bush on January 5, 2006. The initiative was precipitated by the Secretaries of State (Condoleezza Rice and Secretary of Education (Margaret Spellings) inviting the Secretary of Defense (Donald Rumsfeld) to join in the effort (Rumsfeld, 2005). It was the product of months of high level collaboration and planning by officials from the Department of State, the Department of Defense, the Department of Education, and the Director of National Intelligence, later joined by representatives of the Department of Labor.

Each agency grappled with and identified initiatives that could contribute to the overall goal, which was "To increase dramatically the number of U.S. residents learning, speaking, and teaching critical-need foreign languages." (U.S. Department of Education, 2008, p.1) The emphasis was on those languages deemed necessary for national security and for our diplomatic relations abroad. A State Department Fact Sheet released on January 5, 2006, lays the groundwork:

*An essential component of U.S. national security in the post-9/11 world is the ability to engage foreign governments and peoples, especially in critical regions,*

*to encourage reform, promote understanding, convey respect for other cultures and provide an opportunity to learn more about our country and its citizens. To do this, we must be able to communicate in other languages, a challenge for which we are unprepared.*

The agencies participating in NSLI sought to stimulate the study of languages in critical need for national security, and to engage the nation in an endeavor to increase the number of students of these languages beginning at an early age. The breadth of NSLI was remarkable since it began with children in kindergarten and elementary school. The stated goals of NSLI were:

- Increase the number of U.S. residents studying critical-need languages and starting them off at an earlier age.
- Increase the number of advanced-level speakers of foreign languages, with an emphasis on mastery of critical-need languages.
- Increase the number of teachers of critical-need languages and providing resources for them. (U.S. Department of Education, 2008. P.1)

As noted in the State Department Fact Sheet, the Administration requested \$114M in Fiscal Year 2007 to support NSLI. Some specifics of the initiative were:

The Department of Education refocused its Foreign Language Assistance Program grants to focus on critical needs languages. These three year grants to elementary and secondary schools were for innovative and model programs in language instruction.<sup>12</sup> The Department of Education also implemented teacher training initiatives. (U.S. Department of Education, 2008, pps. 6-8)

The Department of State established intensive summer language institutes, enhanced a language component of the Fulbright scholar program, provided Gilman Scholarships for financially disadvantaged undergraduates, and established programs to bring native speaking foreign language teachers to K-12 and college settings. (U.S. Department of Education, 2008. pps. 11-13)

Of particular note is the State Department NSLI-y program. It offers scholarships for high school students and recent graduates to study abroad, either for the summer or a full academic year, in the critical languages. These languages are listed on the NSLI-y website<sup>13</sup> as Arabic, Chinese, Hindi, Korean, Persian (Tajiki), Russian, and Turkish. For the 2013-14 program 3285 applications were received for 626 positions. (Brecht, 2014, p.12)

The Director of National Intelligence initiated a STARTALK program. Administered by the National Foreign Language Center at the University of Maryland, STARTALK offers summer programs in critical-need languages across all 50 states and the District of Columbia.

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<sup>12</sup> These grants are no longer funded.

<sup>13</sup> [www.nsliforyouth.org](http://www.nsliforyouth.org)

Over 45,000 students and 10,000 teachers have participated to date, with over 70% of students stating they intend to continue studying a world language following their STARTALK participation and the vast majority of teacher trainees stating they intend to earn teacher certification and/or teach a world language in the U.S. As of 2015, STARTALK was offered in eleven languages: Arabic, Chinese, Dari, Farsi (Persian), Hindi, Korean, Portuguese, Russian, Swahili, Turkish, and Urdu.<sup>14</sup>

With the National Language Conference in 2004, DoD assumed a leadership role in the effort to improve the nation's educational policies and programs designed to grow and employ a citizenry with the ability to communicate in other languages. In engaging with the efforts of the National Security Language Initiative, DoD stepped out of its normal and expected role, and funded its portion of what was designed to be a national solution. DoD invested in improved higher level foreign language programs at the college/university level (The Language Flagship), developed a National Language Service Corps poised to support all federal agencies, and even sponsored three innovative kindergarten through high school (K-12) foreign language programs as a stop gap, to gather lessons learned, while the Department of Education sought funding to expand the number of these programs. (U.S. Department of Education, 2008, pps. 15-17)

## **FEDERAL AGENCY ISSUES AND CHALLENGES**

### **HIGHLIGHTING A CASE IN POINT – THE DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE**

*So we are not going to stop screaming that this country has to take language seriously and we have to take language seriously because it is a critical skill now to success on the battlefield.*

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This introductory quote is from a Senate Hearing in 2007, entitled “Lost in Translation: A Review of the Federal Government’s efforts to Develop a Foreign Language strategy.” The speaker was the Principal Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, Department of Defense (DoD). The hearing was one of a number called by Senator Daniel K. Akaka in an attempt to understand the Federal need for language skills and spur national action on this issue.

DoD is obviously not the only Federal agency concerned about foreign language, cultural diplomacy, and global security. But DoD arguably has more people in overseas locations than any other agency. And, clearly, DoD’s mission is squarely at the intersection of cultural diplomacy and global security. Whether engaged in military operations, assisting with earthquakes and natural disasters, or helping with a global crisis like the Ebola outbreak, an understanding of language and culture is critical. While some may argue that missions can

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<sup>14</sup> Information provided by the Executive Director, National Foreign Language Center, October 14, 2015



succeed without them, the words and interest of DoD leadership, the findings of the House Armed Service Committee, Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, and the experience of the Special Operations soldier highlighted at the beginning of this paper demonstrate the critical need for these skills. Finally, DoD makes language policy and program decisions hoping to influence the behavior of over 2 million members of the Armed Forces and civilian employees. Over the past decade DoD engaged in an extraordinary effort to cultivate, create, and sustain foreign language proficiency. There may be lessons in the DoD experience for the rest of government.

The House Armed Services Committee, Subcommittee on Oversight conducted an investigation of DoD's program and confirmed DoD's concern about the need to grow national capability. The report also underscored the DoD need:

*It is difficult to predict the exact price tag for developing needed language and cultural capabilities. However, we do know what the cost to the military and the nation is if we continue to fail to greatly enhance these skills. The risk is more conflict and prolonged conflict, and the cost is more lives needlessly lost on all sides. (U.S. House of Representatives, 2008, p. 54)*

After the attacks of September 11, 2001, DoD found itself without capability in the languages of the countries where its forces were engaged in operations. There were few, if any, speakers of the languages of Afghanistan, notably Dari and Pashtu, and similarly few Arabic speakers. This was of great concern to the Secretary of Defense who, it seemed was in constant communication about numbers of speakers, languages being taught, and plans for the future.

DoD dedicated itself to improving language capability. All components appointed a Senior Language Authority at the General/Flag Officer or Senior Executive level, and these Senior Language Authorities comprised a Defense Foreign Language Steering Committee (later and now known as the Defense Language Steering Committee). The Senior Language Authorities helped determine needs and establish policies and the Defense Language Steering Committee was the body that crafted and coordinated the Defense Language Transformation Roadmap.

The Defense Language Transformation Roadmap was published in 2005. It began with assumptions about the need for foreign language:

*Conflict against enemies speaking less-commonly-taught language and thus the need for foreign language capability will not abate. Robust foreign language and foreign area expertise are critical to sustaining coalitions, pursuing regional stability, and conducting multi-national missions especially in post-conflict and other than combat, security, humanitarian, nation-building, and stability operations.*

*Changes in the international security environment and in the nature of threats to US national security have increased the range of potential conflict zones and expanded the number of likely coalition partners with whom US forces will work.*

*Establishing a new “global footprint” for DoD, and transitioning to a more expeditionary force, will bring increased requirements for language and regional knowledge to work with new coalition partners in a wide variety of activities, often with little or no notice. This new approach to warfighting in the 21<sup>st</sup> century will require forces that have foreign language capabilities beyond those generally available in today’s force.*

*Adversaries will attempt to manipulate the media and leverage sympathetic elements of the population and “opposition” politicians to divide international coalitions. (Defense Language Transformation Roadmap, 2005, p.3)*

Over a decade later, these assumptions would undoubtedly be updated. However, points of these assumptions still resonate. The use of language and cultural expertise extend beyond the traditional military mission and the world is changing to require a rapid response in languages the Department might not have at its disposal. Even though the Roadmap is over ten years old, its framework still stands as a valid and comprehensive approach to developing language strategy.

The authors of the Roadmap considered these assumptions in designing a series of actions, at the conclusion of which, the Department would find itself with a much richer capability.

The Roadmap had four goals.

- Create foundational Language and Regional Area Expertise. It was necessary to understand, develop, and employ the organic foreign language ability of the members of the Department of Defense and integrate this into the DoD structure for perpetuity. For example, among the things the Department focused on was policy development and the establishment of a permanent Defense Language Office. All current members and new additions to the Armed Forces were surveyed for language ability. Emphasis was placed on incorporating regional content into the military education system and enhancing language training at the military academies.
- Create the capacity to surge. In recognition of the fact that the DoD mission could require deployments to unexpected locations for which the Department had not developed in house capability, there needed to be strategies to respond quickly. For example, the DoD implemented pre-deployment training for troops prior to assignment.

- Establish a cadre of language professionals possessing an Interagency Language Roundtable proficiency of 3/3/3 in reading/listening/speaking. Address language requirements (below 3/3/3 level ability). There was a growing recognition that language capability needed to be enhanced beyond the levels currently taught by the Department's school house – the Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center which was graduating students with a level 2 proficiency.
- Establish a process to track the accession, separation, and promotion rates of military personnel with language skills and Foreign Area Officers.

Some features of the Defense Language Program stand out for purposes of this paper. A Defense Congressional witness in 2010, Nancy Weaver, described two programs to recruit native level language skills. One of these programs, Military Accessions Vital to the National Interest, was a pilot to recruit non-citizens with critical foreign language and cultural skills. The recruits received “expedited U.S. citizenship processing.” The program began in February 2009 and by July 2010, the Army had recruited 792 members with critical language skills. (Weaver, 2010, p.6) The other program created a new Military Occupational Specialty 09L, which recruited native speakers as interpreters, focusing on the languages of Iraq and Afghanistan. The program started in 2003, and 1,000 individuals were recruited, trained, and sent to Iraq and Afghanistan (Weaver, 2010, p.6)

These two programs, initiated in a time of war to meet a language crisis, demonstrate the aggressive action the Department of Defense was taking to meet its immediate needs. These language skills were not available in the force or in the numbers required in the public from which DoD recruited. (McGinn, 2014, p.21)

A second and more enduring program is the Foreign Area Officer (FAO) program. Foreign Area Officers possess high levels of language capability and understanding of specific regions of the world. In 2012, the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Readiness testified before Congress and described this field as follows:

*These officers combine military skill with specific regional expertise, language competency, and political-military awareness to represent and advance U.S. interests in one of nine geographical areas: Latin America, Europe, South Asia, Eurasia, China, Middle East and North Africa, Northeast Asia, Southeast Asia and sub-Saharan Africa.*

She cites an increase in the field from 1,414 to 2,055. (Junor, 2012, p. 10) Language, cultural savvy, and regional knowledge are highly valued skills for diplomatic purposes and for advising the Component Commands of the DoD. Each FAO stands as a personal example of the intersection of foreign language, cultural diplomacy and global security.

*An additional role...The National Security Education Program*

As noted above, the search for a coordination and collaboration forum for Federal Agencies with an interest in language began as early as 1955, with the grassroots formation of the Interagency Language Roundtable. However, there continued to be no concerted leadership at the national level to advance policy, programs and resources in a Government-wide priority. History argues that this role fell to the Department of Defense. It began with the passage of the National Security Education Act (discussed earlier), progressed to the convening of the National Language Conference, and then to the initiatives of the National Security Education Program.

The National Security Education Program was established in 1991 within the Department of Defense under the David L. Boren National Security Education Act.<sup>15</sup> The legislation provided for a National Security Education Board comprised of six presidential appointees and seven representatives of the federal agencies. As with the Defense Language Steering Committee, the Board is chaired by a senior representative of the Department of Defense. In early 2012, DoD merged two offices, the Defense Language Office and the National Security Education Office into the Defense Language and National Security Education Office. The Defense Language Office had overseen the operational language requirements of the Armed Forces, and the National Security Education Office had been responsible for programs described here as a part of the National Security Education Program. Their combination created a unified structure within the DoD and it further strengthened the programs that DoD operates on behalf of all of Government supporting national security. It ensured that the two language coordinating bodies, the Defense Language Steering Committee and the National Security Education Board, were managed by the same office. We turn now to the National Security Education Program.<sup>16</sup>

In the Executive Summary of its Annual Report, DoD claims that “NSEP is one of the most significant efforts in international education since the 1958 passage of the National Defense Education Act.” The report goes on to list the purposes of NSEP:

*To provide the necessary resources, accountability, and flexibility to meet the national security education needs of the United States, especially as such needs change over time;*

*To increase the quantity, diversity, and quality of the teaching and learning of subjects in the fields of foreign languages, area studies, counterproliferation studies, and other international fields that are critical to the nation’s interest;*

*To produce an increased pool of applicants to work in the departments and agencies of the United States government with national security responsibilities;*

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<sup>15</sup> David L. Boren National Security Education Act of 1991 as amended. 50 U.S. Code § 1902

<sup>16</sup> The elements of the National Security Education Program are described in a comprehensive report issued by DoD: National Security Education Program, 2014 Annual Report. Unless otherwise noted, the information that follows was found in this report.

*To expand, in conjunction with other federal programs, the international experience, knowledge base, and perspectives on which the United States citizenry, government employees, and leaders rely; and*

*To permit the federal government to advocate on behalf of international education.*

This section concludes: “As a result, NSEP is the only federally-funded effort focused on the combined issues of language proficiency, national security, and the needs of the federal workforce.”

These words would seem to clearly place NSEP in the forefront of a comprehensive U.S. approach to supporting cultural diplomacy and global security.

There are nine specific programs within NSEP. Boren Scholarships and Fellowships support individual study abroad in return for federal service (an African language component has been added to this). The Language Flagship provides grants to universities to develop programs and graduate students at high levels of language proficiency. English for Heritage Language Speakers helps to improve English proficiency of those who speak critical languages. Project Global Officers focuses on the language and cultural education of students in the Reserve Officer Training Corps (there is also a program combining ROTC education with the Language Flagship effort). Language Training Centers at selected universities provide training for military and civilian personnel of the DoD. And, finally, the National Language Service Corps establishes an on-call language capability for emerging requirements. All of these programs deserve mention and are extensively discussed in the NSEP report. For purposes of this paper, there are three that deserve particular mention because of their potential reach across government.

#### Boren Scholarship and Fellowship Programs.

As noted above, the National Security Education Program was created as a result of the David L. Boren National Security Education Act in 1991. It has its origins in the scholarships and fellowships awarded to deserving undergraduate and graduate students to allow them to study abroad in countries of interest in supporting our national security, in return for federal service. Since these awards began in 1994, over 5,200 scholarships and fellowships have been provided to deserving students. Over 2600 of these students are employed, or have been employed in support of national security at federal agencies. These agencies spread across the Government, again demonstrating that concern about cultural diplomacy and global security does not rest exclusively with the State Department or the Department of Defense. The list of employing agencies is found at Appendix A. (National Security Education Program, 2014, p. IV and p. 85) (McGinn, 2014, p. 16)<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Dr. Nancy Ruther also referenced NSEP placements in a paper dated 2003.

Boren Scholarships and Fellowships are awarded to individual undergraduate and graduate (respectively) for study abroad in regions and with an emphasis on languages deemed critical to national security. In return for this financial and placement support, the students agree to a national service requirement – one year working in a federal agency important to national security. Under current legislation, agencies of first priority are: DoD, Homeland Security, State Department, and Intelligence components. While positions may not always be available in these agencies, students may branch out to other agencies with national security missions. Absent positions there, students may find employment in education. The leaders of these programs determine the areas and languages of the world to focus on by surveying federal agencies. The languages most often studied are Arabic, Mandarin Chinese, Korean, Portuguese, Russian, Swahili, and Turkish. However, many other nontraditional and less commonly taught languages are also studied, such as Bengali, Hindi, and Persian (NSEP report, p. 101)

### The Language Flagship

NSEP undertook a fresh and innovative look at higher education and language learning. The result of this was the establishment of The Language Flagship. This program provided grants to Institutions of Higher Education and Overseas Flagship Centers to produce students who would graduate with high levels of professional language proficiency, in majors that were not necessarily foreign language.

In a recent book describing The Language Flagship initiative, the creators of the initiative, Michael Nugent and Robert Slater describe the history and motivation for this effort. They explain:

*Flagship established for the first time a responsible and accountable partnership between the federal government and higher education with a goal to produce high-level language proficiency skills, identified as a critical shortfall by the national security community throughout the 1980s and 90s. (Nugent/Slater, p. 13.)*

The authors go on to explain that up until the establishment of the flagship program, higher education did not have an academic focus on producing the level of language proficiency needed by professionals moving into the federal government to support national security. They note a finding from the House Armed Services Committee:

*In a report published in 2008, the U.S. House of Representatives Armed Services Committee (HASC) criticized the nation's lack of language proficiency, citing the lack of an "educational infrastructure that can produce the dramatically increased numbers of highly-proficient individuals needed, not only to support national security, but also for economic competitiveness." (House Armed Services Committee, 2008, p. 55) (Nugent/Slater, p. 22)*

The Language Flagship sought to address this issue by creating a structure within universities for a special emphasis on a program that would allow students from many majors and language backgrounds to achieve professional level proficiency. Students participate in special programs and “interventions”, including extra practice and tutoring, taking content courses in the target language, and an overseas Capstone experience. The NSEP notes that over 95% of 2014 Flagship students achieved a score of 2+ or above based on an Oral Proficiency Interview. (National Security Education Program, 2015, p. 29) Similar results were demonstrated in additional assessment efforts, working with the Foreign Service Institute, in reading as well as speaking.

There are currently 27 Flagship programs at 22 universities, specializing in Arabic, Chinese, Hindi, Korean, Persian, Portuguese, Russian, Swahili, Turkish, and Urdu.

### The National Language Service Corps

The National Language Service Corps (NLSC) grew out of an earlier pilot effort by DoD to establish a Civilian Linguist Reserve Corps (part of DoD’s commitment to the National Security Language Initiative.) The purpose of the “Corps” was to recruit Americans with language skills, willing to serve “on call” (much like a military reserve) when a specific need was identified. The original concept was that all federal agencies would participate and use such a Corps. An additional possible fit with NSLI was that Boren scholars could potentially use involvement in the Corps as part of their service requirement, and that one could perhaps find language teachers among Corps members. DoD agreed to pursue such a Corps and provided funding. The goal at the time was to recruit 1000 members and focus on ten languages.<sup>18</sup>

Today, that concept has evolved into the National Language Service Corps. The National Language Service Corps today has over 5,400 members with over 318 languages and dialects. In 2014, the NLSC was activated to provide 3700 hours of service. Its work included interpretation, role playing and cultural training, on-site translation, and official correspondence. Languages activated included Mandarin Chinese, Thai, Japanese, Lithuanian, Russian, North Vietnamese, Dari, Arabic and Indonesian.

Currently the Department has its own authorities to operate the NLSC for DoD. The Department is currently establishing authorities to support the program on a national basis for all federal agencies. (National Security Education Program, 2015, p. 51)

## GENERAL FEDERAL AGENCY ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

*Our Mission: We partner to end extreme poverty and to promote resilient, democratic societies while advancing our security and prosperity.*

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<sup>18</sup> This is based upon the author’s personal knowledge.

This is the mission statement of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID)<sup>19</sup>. The Department of Defense is clearly not the only federal agency concerned about foreign language, cultural diplomacy, and global security. The Department of State, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and Intelligence organizations come to mind when contemplating this area.

However, as the number of agencies hiring Boren scholars demonstrates, these concerns are spread broadly in the federal arena. There is more evidence of federal agencies' concern for language. In accordance with the Higher Education Act, each year the Department of Education solicits from federal agencies a statement of the languages they consider important. That list may be found in its entirety at the Department of Education website.<sup>20</sup> Seventy-eight languages are included, notably for the fact that most are "Less Commonly Taught." They range from Akhan (Twi-Fante) to Zulu.<sup>21</sup> Agencies also include regions of the world in which they have an interest.

In 2007, the National Research Council of the National Academies published, International Education and Foreign Languages, Keys to Securing America's Future. This work cites reports that expressed concern about foreign language capability before the events of September 11, 2001 and thereafter (pps. 47-48) The report attempts to quantify the federal government's need for foreign language, putting that number (in 2007) at 25,000 – 34,000, with another 19,000 – 44,000 needed for "area or international studies" expertise (p. 49). These numbers appear to reflect needs in the traditional national security agencies (such as the Department of Defense, state Department, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation). This number seems low, given the fact that DoD alone has over 30,000 positions with a language requirement. (Junor, 2012, p.3) And no doubt it does not include positions that require some language, but for which language may not be coded as a formal requirement.

This paper has dealt in some detail with the Department of Defense. A review of three other federal agencies describes approaches to the management of foreign language skills.

The Department of State. In December 2014, there were 4250 Language Designated Positions, with 77% filled by language qualified personnel. Overall, the number of LDPs has increased – from December 2002 to September 2015, there has been 57.4% growth in LDPs. For languages with more than 100 LDPs in December 31, 2002, by September 30, 2015 Arabic increased by 169%, Portuguese by 114%, and Chinese-Mandarin by 100%.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, the overall percent of LDPs/overseas positions changed from 45.2% in 2002 to 53.4% in September 2015.

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<sup>19</sup> See [www.usaid.gov](http://www.usaid.gov)

<sup>20</sup> <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ope/iegps/languageneeds.html>

<sup>21</sup> Akhan is spoken in Ghana. Zulu is spoken in South Africa.

<sup>22</sup> Arabic and Mandarin Chinese, of course, are among the most difficult languages requiring longer training time.



The Department provides hiring and financial incentives in the management of language capability. Candidates with language skills in most languages are given preference points in hiring, with additional points granted to Generalist and Specialist candidates with proficiency in critically needed languages. (These languages currently include Arabic, Mandarin Chinese, Persian-Dari, Persian-Farsi, Hindi, Korean, Pashto, and Urdu.) The Department offers Language Incentive Pay and has recently updated the program and eligible languages. Input from the Department states, “The Department is fully committed to maintaining a pool of language-qualified employees in a full range of languages and believes these changes will enhance our ability to achieve this goal.” In addition to updated languages, some other provisions include providing bonuses for employees who attain required proficiency after arriving at their post, and rewarding those who attain 4/4 proficiency.

In addition, the Department requires that Foreign Service Officers demonstrate a proficiency in at least one foreign language before they are commissioned and must complete language probation requirements by the end of a five year limited appointment. Minimum required scores vary with the language. For the “easier languages” such as Spanish, French, Portuguese and Italian the minimum may be 3/3. More difficult languages such as Thai, Arabic, and Chinese may have lower minimums.<sup>23</sup>

The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). In a 2012 appearance before the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management, Federal Workforce, and the District of Columbia, the FBI witness described an organizational change to create a Language Services Section for overall management of language resources. FBI had 1400 linguists, contract (800) and FBI employees (600). This is an increase since September 11, 2001, with growth in Arabic, Urdu, and Farsi. The witness notes that FBI does operate with a “...workforce planning model with recruitment efforts targeted toward languages where there is a shortfall or anticipated need.” FBI uses their contract linguists as a hiring pool for the agency’s Language Analysts. FBI uses several strategies to overcome hiring obstacles, including proficiency pay for those with language skills in the overall workforce and working with other entities such as the National Security Education Program. For training, FBI noted that they operate their own Foreign Language Training Program and take advantage of long term training at the State Department’s Foreign Service Institute. FBI does take advantage of Human Language Technology. (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2012)

The U.S. Agency for International Development. USAID has employed the third highest number of NSEP graduates, following the Department of Defense and the Department of State. Within USAID, like the Department of State, language is mandatory for their Foreign Service Officers who, in order to tenure within 5 years, must attain a 3/3 level (reading and speaking) in a language such as French or Spanish or a level 2/2 for a more difficult language like Russian, Arabic, or Korean. Proficiency levels are determined by testing at the Foreign Service Institute

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<sup>23</sup> Information pertaining to the Department of State was provided by the Department on November 23, 2015.

(FSI). Secondly, languages are required for assignments overseas. Currently, 20% of positions are Language Designated Positions (USAID is planning to increase that number). USAID has a goal of enhancing its capability in Arabic. If potential hires claim to have language, they are given a telephonic Oral Proficiency Interview and, if results are positive, they are sent to FSI to be tested. USAID does hire individuals without language capability as technical experts and offer follow-on language training. Depending upon the job, the Mission can waive the language requirement. When there is an unmet language need on-site, Foreign Service Nationals can fill voids, or they hire local interpreters.<sup>24</sup>

Federal agencies overall share challenges and issues in building the capability they need – the right people – the right languages – and, the right proficiencies.

A starting point for consideration is a report that was issued by the Government Accountability Office (GAO) entitled: “Foreign Languages: Human Capital Approach Needed to Correct Staffing and Proficiency Shortfalls.” At that time (2002) the Office of Personnel Management and the Office of Management and Budget were interested in instilling this approach across the whole of government. The elements of the human capital approach were development of strategic plans, conducting an inventory of the workforce, ascertaining existing competencies and identifying needs, and making plans to meet those needs. (GAO, 2002, pps. 31-34) A discussion of this approach and agency progress became a theme underlying a series of Congressional hearings focused on foreign language conducted by the Subcommittee on Oversight of Management, the Federal Workforce, and the District of Columbia, Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Government Affairs. In a perfect world the GAO recommendation to apply this approach would make sense. But what were the issues affecting agencies who were trying to plan?

Filling positions with the right skills, the right language and the right proficiency is a challenge. The Department of State and USAID have Language Designated Positions (LDPs). The U.S. Department of State Foreign Affairs Manual (Volume 13)<sup>25</sup> defines the criteria for establishing LDPs: “Operational need is the determining criterion for LDPs, where language proficiency is essential, rather than merely helpful or convenient, to enhancing U.S. effectiveness abroad.” (p.1) There are a number of additional criteria listed for deciding whether a position is classified an LDP. Prior to assuming such a position, an employee must have the required language and proficiency. However, that requirement may be waived. (p.3) USAID currently has about 20% of its positions designated as LDPs, and also provides for waivers. As noted above, the Department of State currently has 4250 LDPs, with 77% filled by language qualified personnel.

Filling LDPs is a challenge because urgent requirements may arise that need immediate attention. Increasingly, these requirements arise in parts of the world where the most difficult

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<sup>24</sup> Information pertaining to USAID is based upon an interview with an official of the agency, October 8, 2015

<sup>25</sup> See <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/88545.pdf>

languages are spoken (e.g. Arabic, Chinese, Dari). These languages require intensive training, over one year in duration, to achieve the proper proficiency. Agencies need to make decisions about whether to fill a position without foreign language training, or hold it vacant until training is completed. (Thomas-Greenfield, 2012)

DoD faces a similar issue. The DoD witness at the 2012 hearing testified that in Fiscal Year 2011, over 81% (29,960) of military positions with language requirements were filled. However, only 28% were filled with those at the required proficiency level. She notes that progress was made, but adds:

*The long term solution must be a national one. In short, we recruit from a national pool of individuals who, for the most part, have little or no formal language training. We recognize that our schools cannot teach every language vital to U.S. national security, but we know that having a pool of individuals who have been exposed to a foreign language or had early language training will greatly facilitate further language acquisition. A citizen possessing any language learning skills would greatly increase the Department's ability to fill language required positions with qualified individuals. (Junor, 2012, pps. 2-3)*

In a perfect world, foreign language and regional expertise would be so widespread that agencies could easily identify such expertise and relate it to positions and vacancies with a 100% match. In the real world, this possibility doesn't exist and agencies must often concentrate on filling vacancies with needed skills and abilities, dealing with the foreign language and regional expertise concern after hiring or using interpreter/translator workarounds. (McGinn, 2014, p. 19)

Lacking a national pool of language educated citizens from which to recruit, agencies may not require language as a pre-requisite for hiring. There are various ways language might be considered in the hiring process. Sometimes there are extra points given in the hiring process, such as with the State Department. Sometimes agencies involve language considerations in the hiring process. Sometimes, as in the case of USAID, those who claim to have a language are tested. But, as stated in the case of USAID, individuals without language capability can be brought on as technical experts and receive follow-on language training. With the exception of the native speaker recruiting programs mentioned earlier, individuals are recruited into the military without regard to language proficiency, but those who show aptitude may be sent to school for language.

The inability to hire people with language skills leads to a requirement for in-house training. In 2012, the State Department witness stated that the Foreign Service institute offers training in 65 languages and was expanding its efforts. The Foreign Service Institute trains individuals from other agencies, such as the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), USAID, and DoD. The FBI has its own Foreign Language Training Program as well. The Department of Defense operates the Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center (DLIFLC), which

trains about 3500 military students per year (many of them starting with little or no language background) in 22 languages.

The investment in language training is significant. The costs are in money, time, and waived requirements.

There is an additional cost when agencies don't plan for language requirements and don't require language in hiring. The Federal Government's needs are unstated and don't demonstrate a market for language skills. This affects the pipeline of students studying language since there is not a demonstrated market for language skills. It also, no doubt, affects the reaction of higher education as to how language is taught and proficiency developed.

In truth, there is no detailed understanding of total federal agency needs for foreign languages. One of the recommendations of the National Research Council's work was that Congress require the Secretary of Education, in coordination with other federal agencies, to publish a report every two years "...outlining national needs identified in foreign language, area and international studies, plans for addressing those needs, and progress made."(National Research Council, 2007, p. 244)

It would be useful to know some facts about the language needs of our Government from agencies who use language (perhaps using the NSEP list as a start). Some pertinent questions might be:

- How does your agency use foreign language in accomplishing your mission?
- What are the languages you need and at what proficiency?
- How do you find potential employees with language skills? What are your difficulties in finding them?
- How do you manage your language resources?

A total review of agency programs could provide the basis for national action to advance the foreign language agenda for the good of our country's work abroad, as we engage as cultural diplomats in support of global security.

## **THE PROMISE OF TECHNOLOGY**

There has been an intensive hunt for a technology solution to the nation's foreign language concerns. Technology programs and systems are varied with some developed by the Government and some the results of the efforts of private vendors. These programs and systems are in various states of development. They fall generally in the following categories:

- Voice interpretation. The search is for a device that will interpret the words of a speaker, and speak a response in the foreign language.

- Machine Translation. Machines can translate volumes of materials much more quickly than humans can. Unfortunately, machine translation is not perfect, and does for the most part require human review of documents deemed important to the user. The FBI predicted that demand for translation services will steadily increase. (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2012, p.2)
- Avatar based training holds promise for cultural training, as avatars negotiate a foreign culture and must react properly, as prompted by the user.
- Distance learning and language sustainment. Those who develop proficiency in languages need a way to sustain that proficiency or even grow it. There are private sector vendors to support this need, but some Government solutions exist as well through DoD's Joint Language University, the DLIFLC and the Foreign Service Institute.
- Enhanced use of technology overall. For example, the Department of Defense developed a website [www.cultureready.org](http://www.cultureready.org), "to foster a virtual community of people with interest or need for culture education, training, and readiness."
- Blended and adaptive learning – including a “flipped” classroom where technology enabled programs can be accessed outside of class, with more class time devoted to teaching. The use of technology for this purpose is being developed.

In addition, on September 15, 2015, the Department of Defense awarded a grant to the University of Hawaii to establish a Flagship Technology Innovation Center. This center will help to infuse the use of technology within the Flagship institutions and will probably produce lessons learned for other institutions.<sup>26</sup>

## CONCLUSION

*Today's military establishment, its active duty, reserve, and civilian personnel, must be trained and ready to engage the world with an appreciation of diverse cultures and to communicate directly with local populations. These skills save lives....They can save the lives of our personnel and can greatly reduce the risk to the indigenous, non-combatant populations that the military may be trying to protect or win over. Speaking the language with an appreciation of local culture is a potent tool in influencing a mission's outcome in our favor.*

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This is a quote from the beginning of the House Armed Services Committee report on DoD's language program (House Armed Services Committee, 2008, p. 9). It resonates with one of the opening quotations in this paper, that of Ambassador McEldowney, discussing the new complexities that all of our diplomats, from the officials in the State Department to the soldier on the ground, face when engaging with the world today.

<sup>26</sup> See: <http://www.hawaii.edu/news/article.php?ald=7439>

Understanding foreign cultures and regions is important, but adding foreign language to that understanding provides a decided edge critical to global security in all of its aspects, from war fighting, to assisting developing countries, to combatting disease.

This paper has hopefully demonstrated the importance of these skills, but has also demonstrated that there has not been a national will to solve these problems. There is no over-arching leadership for the development of national language skills. Absent that over-arching leadership, individual agencies have struggled to find the language expertise that they need, and have designed their own solutions and education which are still not solving the problem. The Department of Defense has taken (or been given) a leadership role for the country, with programs that support various agency needs. A broader, concerted national effort could offer great rewards and has been recommended over the years.

Like the explorers, travelers and traders of old, when our citizens touch the lives of those in foreign lands, each one is a cultural diplomat. For representatives of our federal government, that cultural diplomacy, with the added capability of foreign language, lays the groundwork for our global security.

Appendix A: Locations Where NSEP Award Recipients Fulfilled Service

Organization	Number of Placements
Broadcasting Board of Governors	8
Central Intelligence Agency	94
Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe	3
Corporation for National and Community Service	3
Department of Agriculture	27
Department of Commerce	91
Department of Defense	888
Department of Education	4
Department of Energy	34
Department of Health and Human Services	44
Department of Homeland Security	130
Department of the Interior	15
Department of Justice	59
Department of Labor	4
Department of State	632
Department of Transportation	7
Department of Treasury	30
Department of Veterans Affairs	28
Environmental Protection Agency	18
Executive Office of the President	16
Federal Communications Commission	2
Federal Judiciary	24
Federal Reserve	9
Intelligence Community (Contractor and Unspecified)	43
Inter-American Foundation	1
Millennium Challenge Corporation	8
National Aeronautics and Space Administration	24
National Science Foundation	10
Overseas Private Investment Corporation	5
Peace Corps	56
Securities and Exchange Commission	2
Small Business Administration	2
Smithsonian Institution	5
Social Security Administration	4
U.S. African Development Foundation	1
U.S. Agency for International Development	201
U.S. Congress	83
U.S. Institute of Peace	4
U.S. International Trade Commission	2
U.S. Postal Service	1
U.S. Trade and Development Agency	2
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>2,624</b>

(National Security Education Program, 2015. p. 85)

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