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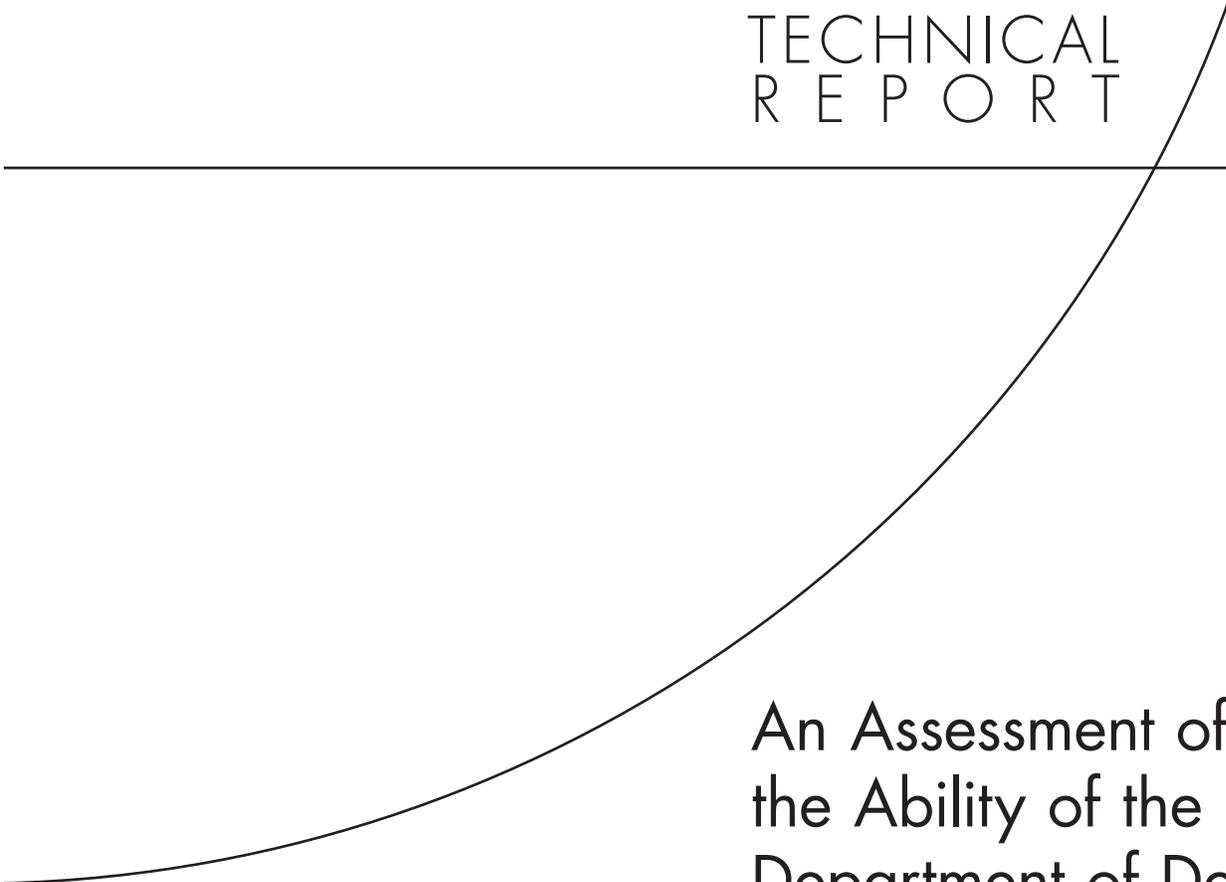
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An Assessment of the Ability of the U.S. Department of Defense and the Services to Measure and Track Language and Culture Training and Capabilities Among General Purpose Forces

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Summary

The Defense Language Office (DLO) tasked MITRE Corporation and the RAND National Defense Research Institute (NDRI) at the RAND Corporation, two federally funded research and development centers (FFRDCs), to jointly address questions concerning the U.S. Department of Defense's (DoD's) ability to measure and track the language, regional expertise, and culture (LREC) training and capabilities of general purpose forces (GPF). Using interviews with LREC practitioners and policymakers, a policy review, an academic literature review, and an analysis of survey data, the report addresses the following four questions. A more extensive summary is provided in Chapter Five of this report.

Research Questions

1. According to the Best Available Data, What Is the Relevance of Language, Regional Expertise, and Culture Training and Capabilities to Overall Unit Readiness and Mission Accomplishment?

Most LREC practitioners and policymakers interviewed for this study expressed the opinion that LREC capabilities are critical to the readiness and effectiveness of some units performing specific missions. Many interviewees argued that LREC capabilities are needed but that each unit or individual does not necessarily need the same types and mixes of skills as every other unit or individual. Because many of the required LREC skills differ by mission and task, it is critical to measure LREC mission readiness at the mission and task levels.

A substantial amount of anecdotal evidence, as well as policy, implies that LREC skills are essential to mission effectiveness. However, there have yet to be any rigorous, formal studies of whether receipt of LREC training is linked to improved individual job performance or unit mission accomplishment in the military. Several efforts have begun the process of collecting data, which could be used to assess such a relationship, through surveys (e.g., the Status of Forces Survey of Active-Duty Members [SOF-A] and a recent endeavor by the U.S. Marine Corps to interview redeploying marines).

A small but growing research literature uses data from service members with field experience to assess their perceptions of whether LREC training and skills are associated with job performance. Although these studies suggest that some basic knowledge (e.g., common words and phrases, local norms and customs, appreciation of foreign cultures) is useful, they do not indicate that these skills are essential for successfully performing one's job. Further, this line of research does not establish a causal link between LREC and mission effectiveness.

2. How Does the U.S. Department of Defense Currently Track Language, Regional Expertise, and Culture Training and Capabilities of General Purpose Forces?

The Language Readiness Index (LRI) provides systematic tracking of DLPT scores and self-reporting on language capabilities. More information will be added in 2012 regarding regional and cultural expertise. However, people interviewed for this study expressed concern that determining language, regional expertise, and cultural readiness—particularly for GPF, who may have very low levels of proficiency—may require additional sources of information. Not everyone with foreign-language skills receives FLPB or takes the DLPT or even the tests for very low proficiency. Not everyone who completes a self-reporting questionnaire fills out all information. Cultural and regional training is often done by the unit and is often tracked only at the unit level (i.e., the commander assumes that all members of his or her unit have completed the training, but there is rarely tracking of the information by individual so that, when the soldier joins a different unit, the new commander will know whether the soldier has had the training).

Aside from DLPT data, there is little tracking of other LREC capabilities among GPF. Some potentially relevant data (e.g., use of the language at home as a heritage speaker) are collected (e.g., at entry into a service, in Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center [DLIFLC] interviews) but are not reliably tracked or available to unit commanders. As many interviewees pointed out, such data as home use of languages, university study, and prior deployments may indicate language and cultural or regional expertise, but currently no existing data allow for any reliable predictions of expertise.

Some types of language-related data are being pulled into the Language Readiness Index (LRI). The LRI is an effort currently being undertaken by DLO to create a combined database for tracking language qualifications of individuals across all services. However, in its current form, it does not include data on regional expertise or culture. It is not clear when the LRI will be fully operational, and it will likely undergo revisions as users provide real-time feedback.

3. To What Extent Does This Tracking Reflect Unit Readiness and the Ability to Accomplish Missions?

All interviewees indicated that tracking of language and culture is insufficient to adequately reflect unit readiness and the ability to accomplish missions. For DLO's purposes, it would be most useful to have a DoD-wide recommendation with respect to what constitutes mission readiness for GPF, similar to requirements for weapon training, equipment, and other readiness factors. Unfortunately, despite numerous concurrent studies about various aspects of LREC training and capabilities, making a "readiness recommendation" at this juncture would be premature and speculative at best. More analysis is needed.

4. How Can the U.S. Department of Defense Improve Tracking of Language, Regional Expertise, and Culture Training and Capabilities to Adequately Reflect Unit Readiness?

The recommendations in this report are based on policy, directives, and related academic literature, as well as the opinions provided in the interviews with LREC practitioners and policymakers. Both short- and long-term recommendations for improving LREC tracking and assessing the linkage between LREC training and skills and mission readiness and success are presented. The ultimate end goal of the recommended activities is to develop a set of readiness metrics, both at the general level for all GPF and at the mission-specific level. If LREC training is designed to bring the GPF to a very low but operationally effective level of training, there

must be a mechanism in place to track that training, those skills, and the resulting operational effectiveness of the unit. None of those mechanisms is currently in place.

Recommendations

Short-Term Recommendations
Short-term recommendations include the following.

Recommendation 1: Standardize Language, Regional Expertise, and Culture–Related Terms
There is currently confusion about the term *LREC*, which is sometimes used to mean all of language, regional expertise, and culture and sometimes used to mean courses satisfying a military directive. Developing a common vocabulary could be accomplished through discussions and agreements at management meetings and through providing the terminology via a DLO website that can be accessed by key stakeholders in the LREC world. These stakeholders include not only DoD and service-level representatives of the Defense Language Action Panel (DLAP) but also researchers who are conducting studies related to LREC.

Recommendation 2: Develop Measures of Mission Effectiveness
It is not clear what it means to be mission effective or to achieve mission success. Given that defining these terms is necessary before the linkage between LREC training and skills can be assessed, these terms should be operationalized in a way on which key stakeholders agree. Workshops, such as those being conducted by the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), could help to identify assessment approaches and measures. One approach may be to utilize focus groups of experts from the military and perhaps also from foreign partners to determine success metrics.

There will likely not be a single measure that adequately reflects mission effectiveness, nor will the association between LREC training and skills and mission effectiveness be one-to-one. That is, many other factors will influence the course of missions and how successful they are, and any means to collect data should attempt to capture all these different pieces of information.

Recommendation 3: Develop Standardized Language, Regional Expertise, and Culture After-Action Reports to Assess the Link Between Language, Regional Expertise, and Culture Training and Capabilities and Mission Success and Effectiveness
Standardized LREC after-action reports (AARs) would collect data that could then be used to assess the association between LREC training and skills and mission success (as defined in recommendation 2). This information would be collected across services, locations, and mission types. Such a systematic data effort would provide quantitative data that could be analyzed to estimate the connection between LREC skills and capabilities and mission success. The standardized AAR should include fields pertaining to the mission (e.g., type, date, region or location), characteristics of the unit and its members (e.g., LREC training received, self-reported skills, heritage speakers), and metrics of mission effectiveness and success (e.g., commander ratings, objective measures).

Recommendation 4: Develop Standardized Surveys for Deployed and Recently Deployed General Purpose Forces

As we noted in recommendation 3, which is aimed at commanders, additional data that could be used to link LREC training and skills to mission readiness and success could come from recently deployed GPF service members.

Long-Term Recommendations

Long-term recommendations include the following.

Recommendation 5: Develop an Infrastructure for Language, Regional Expertise, and Culture Data

This infrastructure would facilitate obtaining information on, evaluating, and researching LREC expertise, including the impact of this expertise on unit readiness and mission effectiveness. The LRI is a significant step toward improving data accuracy and making collected data more widely available. Means of developing this infrastructure would include standardizing terms, improving data accuracy, improving guidelines for self-reporting, and providing guidelines and information to unit commanders, officers, and researchers on using these data. It also includes development of a website or other knowledge-management structure to make data, evaluations of data, and other related LREC studies available to key stakeholders, including researchers.

Recommendation 6: Develop a Causal Model Linking Language, Regional Expertise, and Culture to Mission Success

One way to develop a causal model is to develop a bottom-up process in which smaller units are related and linked to one another. Such an endeavor is designed to link specific types of training and skills to specific mission outcomes. While a more detailed data-collection program will initially be expensive and time-consuming to establish, it would better automate data collection in the future. It will also supply valuable data to training providers to enable more-tailored courses. In addition, such a program would help to enable better management and development of LREC skills throughout a service member's career in the military. This approach is similar to what is being done by the Marine Corps in tracking and training by task.

Extensive work has been conducted by the Irregular Warfare Capabilities-Based Assessment Campaign from 2007 to the present. It has issued a Joint Operating Concept (now being updated) on the doctrine, organization, training, materiel, leadership and education, personnel, and facilities (DOTMLPF) change recommendations (DCRs) or initial capability documents for irregular warfare, defeating terrorist networks, preparation of the environment, security force assistance, foreign internal defense, unconventional warfare, joint civil affairs, and theater and army military information support to operations. The majority of these documents list language, regional expertise, and cultural capabilities as capability gaps that affect mission accomplishment. The analysis goes down to mission-essential task and condition level. These capabilities are needed to perform the missions and form the basis for readiness assessments.

In a similar vein, the Joint Staff–led Capabilities-Based Requirement Identification Process (CBRIP), based on Universal Joint Tasks, requires the geographic combatant commands to identify the language and regional and cultural capabilities required for their missions. When approved by the Joint Requirements Oversight Council, these geographic combatant

command–expressed needs go to the force providers as demand signals. The force providers determine necessary quantities to meet these demands and alter their manning documents accordingly. The goal is to be able to use the LRI to match force requirements to language capability inventory to track overall force readiness from a language perspective. Work continues on developing regional proficiency inventory tracking and to enable a readiness comparison.

The end goals of establishing a causal model are to (1) link LREC training and skills to mission success and (2) provide sufficient data to establish what it means to be "LREC-ready." Although the approach outlined in this report is bottom-up in that it builds on individual tasks, once established, it will lend itself to a higher-level recommendations about minimum levels of LREC capabilities. Extensive validation is needed.

Recommendation 7: Develop Tests of Training (i.e., Learning) That Are Associated with Skills That Have Been Linked to Mission Readiness

Recommendation 6 suggests that both tracking and training be linked to operational missions (e.g., task-based training) to link LREC to mission effectiveness. Also, as noted in recommendation 4, surveys of GPF either while in the field or after having just returned may provide valuable insight on the effectiveness of LREC training. Training and assessment should be simultaneously developed in order to ensure that students are taught knowledge, skills, and attitudes that are accurately reflected in testing and assessment mechanisms (i.e., students are not tested on things that were not taught).