

# **DoD REGIONAL AND CULTURAL CAPABILITIES THE WAY AHEAD**



*Department of Defense June 2007 Summit*

## **REGIONAL AND CULTURAL EXPERTISE: BUILDING A DoD FRAMEWORK TO MEET NATIONAL DEFENSE CHALLENGES**

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PERSONNEL AND  
READINESS

**UNDER SECRETARY OF DEFENSE**  
**4000 DEFENSE PENTAGON**  
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***DoD Regional and Cultural Capabilities: The Way Ahead***

The *DoD Regional and Cultural Capabilities: the Way Ahead* is the outcome of an unprecedented gathering of senior leaders from the Department of Defense to focus on mission demands for regional and cultural capabilities and develop a framework for synchronizing policies, plans, and programs to meet these demands. The Summit provided a forum for an enterprise-wide dialogue on the need to raise the bar on the Department's ability to better understand different cultures and societies and work more effectively with the Interagency Community and global partners to lay a firm foundation for security in the 21st Century. Summit participants agreed that an intense focus on regional and cultural capabilities is critical if we are to grow leaders, operators and analysts who understand both the broader regional, as well as the cultural contexts, in which they perform their jobs.

The stakes are extremely high. We must begin immediately to address the challenges the Department is facing in building the regional and cultural capabilities we need for the defense and security of the Nation. We must discern and prioritize demands and take the necessary actions to address requirements. An integrated solution that engages all sectors will be needed to achieve our goals. Collectively, we can and will make a difference.

This document represents the views and recommendations of Summit participants and is meant to serve as a foundation for expanding the dialogue within and beyond the Defense community.

David S.C. Chu

**DOD REGIONAL AND CULTURAL CAPABILITIES:  
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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### DOD REGIONAL AND CULTURAL CAPABILITIES: *THE WAY AHEAD*

#### *Vision*

*Our vision is robust national defense strengthened through the application of regional and cultural competencies as integral capabilities of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Total Force.*

“The world is flat,” or at least that is the view of Thomas Friedman. Globalization and rapid advances in information technology have combined to create a world that is more interconnected than ever before. As a result, it is increasingly important that we have an advanced knowledge of other languages, regions, and cultures. The same is now true for the Department of Defense. The Global War on Terrorism and the continued threat to our interests overseas reinforce the critical need to improve the regional and cultural capabilities of the Department. The Department has made significant progress in the transformation of language, and now it is time to address mission requirements for regional and cultural competencies. Toward that end, the Department convened a Summit in June 2007 to discuss these needs. Participants were challenged to consider why the Department should be interested in cultural and regional capabilities, what decisions need to be made in regard to these competencies, how we discern demands and how we should prioritize and focus our resources to achieve our objectives.

Summit participants' views and recommendations are reflected in the Summit White Paper. Participants agreed that success in this important endeavor will require an integrated approach, as the actions and recommendations are interdependent, and will demand strong leadership to:

- **Build a DoD Regional and Cultural Capabilities Strategic Plan;**
- **Establish common terms of reference and a typology for identifying, developing, measuring, and managing regional and cultural capabilities;**
- **Define and prioritize the Department's strategic and operational demands for regional and cultural capabilities;**
- **Operationalize the Department's regional and cultural needs; and,**
- **Partner with the public and private sectors in solutions.**

The Department's success in accomplishing this agenda requires immediate and long-term collaboration with the Interagency Community, academia, and international partners, as no one sector has all of the solutions or resources. The way ahead must address short-term needs, but be rooted in a comprehensive, long-term strategy that involves multiple organizations at all levels.

This framework will guide the Department toward a 21st Century vision that transforms the way we think about regional and cultural capabilities in meeting national defense challenges.

*Most Members of Congress view Pentagon transformation as a weapons issue, but it is more than that. We need a cognitive transformation. We give our forces exquisite situational awareness using satellite imagery of targets, digital images of friendly forces, live feeds from UAVs of the battlefield, but what they need more of is cultural awareness. Indeed, they must know the firepower of the enemy, but they must also know their willpower and intent. And this will require that we do a much better job of understanding cultures and societies that are dramatically different from our own.*

*Honorable Steve Israel  
United States House of Representatives*

## **Building a DoD Framework to Meet National Defense Challenges**

### **PURPOSE**

This White Paper responds to the urgent need for building a Department of Defense framework to meet national defense challenges, both now and in the future. It reflects the views and recommendations of Summit participants which included senior DoD military and civilian leaders, as well as subject matter experts within the Department, and serves as a catalyst for transforming the regional and cultural capabilities in the 21st Century Total Force. In collaboration with other Executive Branch agencies, the Congress, academia, and our international partners, the Department must build on the successes of language transformation and enhance our national security and defense.

This White Paper can be viewed as a sequel to the *Call for Action for National Foreign Language Capabilities* paper that emerged from the National Language Conference that the Department of Defense, in partnership with University of Maryland's Center for Advanced Study of Language, hosted in June 2004. It responds to the urgent need for building a Department of Defense framework to meet national defense challenges, both now and in the future.

### *Vision*

*Our vision is robust national defense strengthened through the application of regional and cultural competencies as integral capabilities of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Total Force.*

### **BACKGROUND**

In June 2004, the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, in collaboration with the Director of University of Maryland's Center for Advanced Study of Language, hosted the first-ever National Language Conference. This extraordinary

meeting of almost 400 national and international leaders and specialists in foreign language capabilities was conducted within the broader context of the remarkable national efforts in responding to the 1957 launch of Sputnik. Calling the tragic events of 9-11 another ‘Sputnik moment,’ the participants in the National Language Conference were challenged to “take action on the foreign language and cultural capabilities of the Nation.” The *Call to Action for National Foreign Language Capabilities* that emerged from the conference provided a virtual roadmap for the way ahead – both for the Department of Defense and for the Nation. Progress since the June 2004 National Language Conference has been dramatic. The Department has fundamentally transformed its approach to foreign language capabilities. Whereas before, language skills were viewed as critical primarily for intelligence analysts, Foreign Area Officers, and other regional specialists, language skills are now seen as critical operational capabilities - just as important as weapons - on the battlefield and across the entire array of Departmental missions.

Significant language initiatives have been implemented at the national and local levels over the past three years. The President’s National Security Language Initiative, launched in January 2006, is providing millions of dollars to increase the number of Americans learning critically needed foreign languages through new and expanded programs, from kindergarten through university and into the workforce. The National Security Education Program through its National Flagship Language Program is addressing the urgent and growing need for Americans with professional levels of competency in languages critical to national security and economic success. School systems nationwide have taken up the challenge to begin language training at an early age. Leaders and experts from the Departments of Defense, State, and Education meet and discuss foreign language policies and programs. Congress has passed language-related legislation to provide both financial incentives and overarching direction for initiatives in the government and private sectors in order to improve our national foreign language capabilities.

Now that we've made good progress in implementing the *National Call to Action for National Foreign Language Capabilities* initiatives, it is time to address regional and cultural capabilities. We know from first-hand accounts of military operations around the world that the ability to converse in a foreign language must be accompanied by an understanding of the cultural context of both the language and the people who speak it. The Global War on Terrorism and the continued threat to our country drive home the need to take action on the regional and cultural capabilities of the nation with the same sense of urgency with which we have taken on the foreign language challenges. We must ensure that language, regional and cultural competencies become a fundamental component of the Department's DNA.

Success in this critical endeavor will require an integrated approach, as the actions and recommendations are interdependent, and will demand strong leadership to:

- **Build a DoD Regional and Cultural Capabilities Strategic Plan;**
- **Establish common terms of reference and a typology for identifying, developing, measuring, and managing regional and cultural capabilities;**
- **Define and prioritize the Department's strategic and operational demands for regional and cultural capabilities;**
- **Operationalize the Department's regional and cultural needs; and**
- **Partner with the public and private sectors in solutions.**

## **THE URGENT NEED FOR DEPARTMENT INTEGRATION**

In response to the Quadrennial Defense Review, National Security Strategy, Strategic Planning Guidance, Stability, Military Support for Security, Transition and Reconstruction Operations Directive, Irregular Warfare Implementation Roadmap, and other strategic Defense documents that stress the criticality of language, regional and cultural capabilities, the Department has taken a number of steps to address the importance of these competencies. It has sponsored socio-cultural studies to better understand its relevancy to counterinsurgency, the Services have established operational culture training centers, and the Army is placing Human Terrain Teams and cultural advisors in Brigade Combat Teams to ensure that all activities account for the human terrain dimension of the battle space. In addition, Services have sponsored conferences to share "best practices" and "lessons learned" with one another. All of these efforts have been invaluable in accelerating the availability of critically important cultural awareness knowledge. However, in order to move forward cohesively and systematically toward improved readiness and capabilities, Department-wide integration and synchronization are needed.

To ensure a joint approach in identifying, assessing, and prioritizing military and civilian regional and cultural competencies, we must:

- **Develop and oversee the implementation of a Department of Defense regional and cultural capabilities strategy across all sectors;**
- **Establish relationships among the major stakeholders in meeting the Department's needs for improved regional and cultural capabilities**

## **THE REGIONAL AND CULTURAL EXPERTISE SUMMIT: BUILDING A FRAMEWORK TO MEET NATIONAL DEFENSE CHALLENGES**

Recognizing the need to synchronize regional and cultural capabilities policies, plans, and programs into an integrated framework, the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness hosted the *Regional and Cultural Expertise Summit: Building a Framework to Meet National Defense Challenges* in June 2007 in the National Capital Region. He charged the more than 120 senior military and civilian leaders to explore the Department's demands for regional and cultural capabilities, develop innovative solutions that would sharpen our ability to better understand different world cultures and societies, and work more effectively with our global partners to lay a firm foundation for national defense in the 21st Century. He challenged Summit participants to consider why the Department should be interested in cultural and regional capabilities, what decisions need to be made in regard to these competencies, how we discern demands and how we should prioritize and focus our resources to achieve our objectives.

In the course of the Summit, former geographic combatant commanders and other senior military and civilian leaders made strong statements about the criticality of language, regional and cultural capabilities and the urgent need for these competencies for leaders, operators, and analysts throughout the entire mission environment. They shared numerous "real-world" examples that confirmed the need for a "new team of leaders" with a different set of competencies if we are to be successful in addressing the transformative changes in post-Cold War international affairs.

Participants in this Defense summit identified the need for regional and cultural competencies at multiple levels and proposed immediate and long-term initiatives to enhance our capabilities. Participants agreed that we must have strong leadership and a focused strategy if we are to achieve our goals. This resulting document identifies actions that must be considered in the "way ahead."

## **ACTION: *BUILD A DOD REGIONAL AND CULTURAL CAPABILITIES STRATEGIC PLAN***

*The nation's lack of foreign language capability and regional expertise is an issue that I have thought about and worried about for a long time, both as the Director of CIA and then as the president of a large university, and now as Secretary of Defense. This is a problem that has been a long time in developing and that will take quite some time to fix.*

*Honorable Robert Gates  
Secretary of Defense*

*The Department needs a Regional and Cultural Capabilities Strategic Plan that defines mission requirements for regional and cultural competencies, identifies critical decisions that must be made in addressing these needs, and lays out a path for defining, prioritizing, and operationalizing solutions. The objective of this plan should be to educate, advocate, and build consensus with those inside and outside the Department.*

We must:

- Clarify responsibility for leadership in the creation and execution of a comprehensive, integrated Regional and Cultural Capabilities Strategic Plan, and in the implementation of this "White Paper."
- Review and integrate existing DoD policy and doctrinal documents, along with new guidance, into a 21<sup>st</sup> Century DoD Regional and Cultural Capabilities Strategic Plan.
- Ensure the Strategic Plan identifies specific actions required to develop regional and cultural competency, to include both short-and long-term solutions. Base the Strategic Plan on empirical research and include a typology to better understand what constitutes regional and cultural competency and what role they can and should play in our national defense strategy.
- The Strategic Plan must include the following initiatives to more effectively respond to new security challenges:
  - **Build or expand career and learning paths** that include language, regional and cultural skills as core competencies for officers, enlisted members, reserves, Service academy students, and civilian employees, and provide opportunities to build these skills through training, immersion, and educational opportunities. We must recognize what has been done to date and build on these programs.

- **Implement assignment policies** that build and sustain language, regional, and cultural competencies as core competencies to build relationships with allies, foreign governments, and international organizations.
- **Ensure incentives** that elevate language, regional, and cultural competency in career progression and promotion.
- **Ensure the future force structure and military occupational specialty designation systems are in place** to provide the flexibility to respond to new and emerging personnel demands with the right people and the right competencies.
- **Enhance Professional Military Education and training** from small unit to joint levels to transform language, regional and cultural competencies to a capabilities-based approach across the full spectrum, to include Service, Joint, Interagency, intergovernmental, and multinational operations.
- **Employ recruitment and accession programs** to attract and retain individuals with existing language, regional, and cultural expertise or aptitudes.
- **Review and streamline the current security clearance process** to take full advantage of heritage populations who want to be of assistance, but are often hampered by lengthy clearance procedures.
- **Import the use of technology** for training, tracking, measuring, and assessing language, regional and cultural skills (i.e. a centralized database available to all Components containing up-to-date regional and cultural resources).
- **Partner with the public and private sectors** to share best practices and research materials, and to pursue collective solutions.

**ACTION: ESTABLISH COMMON TERMINOLOGY AND A TYPOLOGY FOR IDENTIFYING, DEVELOPING, MEASURING, AND MANAGING REGIONAL AND CULTURAL CAPABILITIES**

*Officially, the DoD Dictionary defines culture as "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." This definition runs counter to how the term is defined in all social science disciplines and reflects a highly materialist view that offers no value for any non-kinetic operation where the indigenous population's opinions must be taken into account. The DoD dictionary offers no definition for society, ethnic group, tribe, etc.*

*Dr. Montgomery McFate  
Cultural Anthropologist  
Institute for Defense Analyses*

*The Department has no common terms of reference for "regional capabilities" and "cultural capabilities," thus communication across organizations, and even within organizations, is suffering from a lack of clarity. The DoD Regional Proficiency Guidelines provide the first step towards building a typology for measuring and managing regional and cultural capabilities.*

We must:

- Conduct empirical research to clarify what constitutes regional and cultural competencies, and to establish a foundation for policy and practice.
- Use standardized terminology to identify, develop, measure, and manage regional and cultural capabilities and to focus DoD programming, resourcing, training, and recruiting priorities appropriately.
- By Component, identify the scope of the knowledge, skills, and abilities needed by echelon, function, and mission for the purpose of coding billets.
- Develop and implement a measurement process and assessment tools for managing regional and cultural readiness in different areas of the world, for identifying gaps, and for setting resourcing priorities that will close these gaps.
  - Assess regional and cultural capabilities against the demands in order to perform risk analysis.
  - Track regional and cultural capabilities in an accessible, DoD-wide database.

- Ensure empirical research is the foundation for building a measurement model, assessment tools, and an automated competency management system for this kind of decision-making.

**ACTION: *DEFINE AND PRIORITIZE THE DEPARTMENT'S STRATEGIC AND OPERATIONAL DEMANDS FOR REGIONAL AND CULTURAL CAPABILITIES***

*Regional and cultural capabilities are key to opening doors to build rapport and lasting relationships. We need people who are streetwise and savvy, not people who are experts in the technical jargon. Even basic skills go a long way in earning respect and trust. And we must figure out how to grow and sustain the right language, regional and cultural capabilities when we don't know where we'll go. It is critical that we build capabilities for the future.*

*Lieutenant General David P. Fridovich  
Director, Center for Special Operations  
United States Special Operations Command*

*Department of Defense strategic documents point to the need for language, regional and cultural capabilities for the complex threat environment of the 21st Century and stress the importance of these skills in achieving national security goals. This theme continued to resonate at the recent Department of Defense Regional and Cultural Expertise Summit, during which a senior military commander stated that "the most significant challenge faced by our Services in multinational operations today is not classical military operations on the ground, but the lack of language, regional and cultural competence."*

We must:

- Integrate regional and cultural capabilities as core, fundamental capabilities in the warfighter's toolbox.
- Define, identify, prioritize, and catalog current and future regional and cultural competency demands within the current requirements system. Leverage existing organizations (e.g. Joint Forces Command (JFCOM)) as integrators of the prioritized regional and cultural competency demands.
- Structure regional and cultural training to meet the operational requirement - "One size does not fit all." However, as a minimum, foundational regional and cultural training should be provided to all personnel.
- Leverage resources against prioritized existing and potential capabilities needs.

## **ACTION: OPERATIONALIZE THE DEPARTMENT'S REGIONAL AND CULTURAL NEEDS**

*The Department is currently developing, implementing, and evaluating programs designed to increase the regional and cultural competencies of individuals and organizations. Each Component's programs include a mixture of Professional Military Education, pre-deployment unit training (generally using mobile training teams), and individual self-study development and sustainment training. Most current programs distinguish between levels of proficiency needed in regional and cultural competency – generally by echelon, position, and mission.*

We must:

- Develop training programs for the Total Force early and throughout their careers to ensure the capabilities are available when needed. These competencies should be enhancements, rather than obstacles to promotion and career progression.
- Integrate regional and cultural competencies at all levels of Professional Military Education and sustain a life-long career of learning and development in these competencies.
- Examine if the current focus for the Service Academies toward practical disciplines (such as engineering and physics) at the expense of social sciences is still relevant for the Department in building twenty-first century leaders.
- Employ specialized recruiting tactics and incentives to build up the regional and cultural capabilities of the Total Force. Targeted academic disciplines could include language, linguistics, cultural anthropology, sociology, international relations, political science, diplomacy, psychology, human development, leadership studies, history, religion, military science, economics, geography, and facilitation and conflict negotiation.
- Improve the security clearance system processes to expedite investigations and take full advantage of available human capital from diverse backgrounds.

**ACTION: PARTNER WITH THE PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SECTORS  
IN SOLUTIONS**

*There is no disagreement that language is only the starting point for true understanding among people. Good language teachers have incorporated culture into their classrooms for years under the rubrics of communicative competence, "actes de parole," content-based instruction, sociolinguistics, and cross-cultural awareness. What is lacking is a systematic curricular policy and approach that takes the work of those good language teachers to the next step: defining and teaching culture as integral to other disciplines. Our 21st Century global world demands it.*

*Renée Meyer  
Associate Director of Education and Training  
National Security Agency/Central Security Service*

*The Department must reach out to other segments of the government (Federal, state, and local), to academia, and other sectors of society for innovative ideas and solutions in meeting the complex, critical demands to develop regional and cultural competence throughout the Department. This is a national issue that can only be solved with the full support and involvement of all sectors of society.*

*We must:*

- Initiate a national discussion to address the serious regional and cultural competency gaps in the country, beginning with a national conference to identify issues of common interest with other sectors of society.
- Partner with the Department of Education to establish national standards that ensure the integration of cultural components into existing language programs at the elementary, secondary and university levels. We can't assume regional and cultural competence will be a product of our Nation's schools, especially in the short-term.
- Solicit the resources of the War Colleges, the Regional Centers, other Federal Agencies (such as State's Foreign Service Institute), civil society at large, our university system, heritage communities, foreign individuals working in the US, and our allies. Additional funding for and utilization of the Regional Centers is imperative.

## **SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS**

The Department of Defense is faced with a critical challenge: how to integrate regional and cultural competencies amid all of the other competencies needed by the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Total Force. Success will depend on a multi-pronged approach that integrates high level leadership and interest, effective policy guidance, focused resourcing, and decentralized execution by the Components.

The Regional and Cultural Expertise Summit builds on the efforts already underway in the Components and the synergy of the Defense Language Transformation initiative. Now the momentum and pace must increase. The requirement for regional and cultural competencies must be included in planning documents, guidance and doctrine. Regional and cultural developmental programs must be identified and funded through the ongoing POM process as a key warfighter tool. Filling the scientific research void should be a high priority, as should enhancing Professional Military Education and recruiting of individuals with specialized regional and cultural competencies.

The need for regional and cultural competence is real and critical, and now is the time for the Department to focus its attention on defining this need in sufficient detail to provide the team of leaders, operators, and analysts with the mission-critical knowledge and skills they need to operate at peak performance. As the Department aggressively takes the next steps toward an integrated plan, it must partner with private and public organizations and our international partners. Collectively, we can and will make a difference.