

**Statement for the Record
on Behalf of the
Office of the Director of National Intelligence
Before the
Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
Committee**



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Introduction

The United States faces a complex and rapidly shifting international security landscape in which the capability to accurately transfer into English the meaning of words written or spoken in another language is of paramount importance to successful intelligence operations around the world. Human skills in foreign languages, knowledge of cultures, and expertise in regions all play a key role in or directly support all foreign intelligence disciplines. For example, accurately translated documents obtained through open or covert sources often provide the information essential for precise interpretation of imagery, and accurate translations require cultural and regional expertise.

The complexity of the Intelligence Community's mission and the variety of countries and cultures relevant to our national security make it an absolute imperative that we have a deep and highly nuanced understanding of those cultures and the ability to communicate with their people. Human skills in foreign languages open the door to understanding the cultures and societal-governance structure of nations, non-state actors, and diverse interests of populations within geographic regions of interest to U.S. security. An intelligence analyst without language skills must rely on others' translations and interpretations, which may include error and unintentional or malicious bias in the transfer of meaning.

Over the last decade, since the terrorist attacks on our homeland, the Intelligence Community (IC) has taken aggressive and sustained measures to increase and integrate its foreign language capabilities in support of intelligence operations across the global spectrum. The Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI) is committed to developing the IC workforce and adopting language processing tools and technologies to meet National Intelligence Priorities. The following statement provides both the continuing challenges the IC faces and examples of integrated forums and programs that have been activated since the signing of the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act (IRTPA) of 2004 and establishment of the ODNI.

Challenges

Of the 7,000 recorded languages of the world, the Intelligence Community is challenged to collect and process information in about 150, many of these are among the less and least commonly or never taught languages. The technologic advances in communications and publications across the world and our ability to collect information in those languages have outpaced our capability to process that information. Our challenge is to identify or build and enable proficient human capability to process that information into actionable intelligence for decision makers at strategic and tactical levels. Insufficiency and lower proficiency with the federal and IC workforce continue to present barriers to timely exploitation of collected information in its period of usefulness. Thus, we add information to the historical files, but fail to add value within the context of live operations.

No “silver bullet” will solve the IC’s language problem—not even an unlimited budget for contractor support or the build-up of machine translation tools. It takes time to learn a language well; no real shortcuts exist, despite claims to the contrary. Even with an unlimited budget, which is not a possibility in our current economy—the IC could not “buy” its way out of the current situation by using contractors—there simply are not enough clearable people available who have the high foreign language proficiency levels the IC needs. Neither will technology be the ultimate solution in the near future. No machine “universal translator” will replace humans. Consequently, the IC will always need to train a portion of its workforce in languages critical to its mission.

Fortunately, the federal government has led the nation in transforming how language is taught to the higher proficiencies and has made great progress in transforming classes. Language classes taught today at the Defense Language Institute’s Foreign Language Center (DLIFLC), the Foreign Services Institute (FSI), and the National Cryptologic School (NCS) differ greatly from those taught in high school and college. Today’s language training graduates are better prepared and much more capable of speaking and interacting in the ways needed.

For the long-term, we have to dedicate the time and effort needed to educate; transforming how our schools and universities regard and teach foreign language and culture. Today’s academia simply will not produce, for the foreseeable future, the number of linguists the federal, state, and local governments need.

Research has shown the need to start at an early age to build superior skills in learning second or multiple languages. Our nation needs to overcome its resistance to learning languages. Language education must start younger than high school. The federal government needs to push for requiring daily, challenging language classes in our kindergarten through sixth (K–6) grades. The IC’s STARTALK program, which supports language students and teachers in the primary and secondary school system, is an essential first step. The IC’s and DoD’s investment in the National Security Education Program (NSEP) and similar scholarship programs of the Department of Education and State Department take our nation a critical step further in producing a viable pool of future employees and service members equipped in language and motivated to continue language study and work.

For the IC to truly succeed, the government and academia also need to encourage learning a language along with primary disciplines. Scientists and engineers can learn another language in addition to their occupational studies. Every other nation in the world emphasizes learning another language—usually English—and their scientists, doctors, engineers, and military leaders all learn other languages. The incorrect perception that learning a language takes too long and detracts from learning primary skill sets is detrimental to our capabilities. Instead, we need to promote the reality that language adds to those skill sets in a critical way.

Realistically, the IC's language needs will likely continue to outpace its capability. Consequently, the IC has focused on developing and applying new Human Language Technologies (HLT) that will enhance the performance of human linguists, collectors, and analysts in their diverse mission sets. While the automated technology of today can facilitate and enhance the application of human language skills, it cannot and will not replace the need for foreign language expertise in most analytic or collection tasks. Machine translation and speech communication tools are based on paired lexicons that must be vetted by true language experts. Human language technology has made breakthrough advances in the last five years, and the HLT tools available to the IC today can greatly enhance productivity. The challenge is to get linguists not using HLT resources today to do so.

Integration and Collaboration

The IC's language community is very collaborative; it shares ideas, curriculum, and tests. The present and past Directors of National Intelligence and the directors of key IC components, such as CIA, NSA, and DIA, have encouraged innovative concepts for integration and enhancement of foreign language capabilities across the community. Moreover, leaders of IC and other federal government institutions and programs work closely with academic leaders across the nation to improve the techniques used in the classroom.

The ODNI's Foreign Language Program Office (FLPO), under the Assistant Director of National Intelligence for Human Capital (ADNI/HC), was established to serve as a focal point for integrating community needs and for advocating enhancement of foreign language skills, cultural knowledge, and regional expertise on a cross-organizational scale. The ODNI, in collaboration with the USD(I), has led an aggressive campaign to support seventeen IC elements by increasing recruiting, training, education, and retention and by adopting language technologies to better tackle the collection and exploitation challenges.

An IC-wide forum of executive level language experts, the Foreign Language Executive Committee (FLEXCOM), addresses foreign language and cultural issues across the IC. Expert Groups reporting to the FLEXCOM now collaborate routinely in five enterprise segments:

1. operations,
2. education and instructional technology,
3. testing and assessment,
4. human language technology, and
5. culture and regional knowledge.

The Culture and Regional Knowledge Expert Group has implemented a community-wide review to determine the baseline of cultural and regional professional development resources currently existing in the IC with an eye to creating, with the Education and Instructional Technology Expert Group, a “one-stop shop” for IC language, culture, and regional expertise programs in the future. The group envisions a site similar to the Joint Language University’s (JLU) portal, which offers “one-stop shopping” for community-wide language training and resources.

In FY2012, the Director of National Intelligence released an IC Foreign Language Strategic Plan for 2012 to 2016. This plan sets two overall goals:

1. Double the capacity for IC foreign language exploitation and production in critical languages by 2016.
2. Ensure 25% of personnel in IC foreign language-enabled occupations have Interagency Language Roundtable (ILR) level 2 “Limited Working Proficiency” in a foreign language or recognized cultural knowledge or regional expertise at a similar level of understanding.

The desired outcomes and objectives of the IC Foreign Language Strategic Plan outline important steps the IC can adopt to most effectively leverage existing foreign language talent and to establish career-long programs for building and sustaining additional foreign language and cultural knowledge capabilities.

Enhancement Programs

The following categories exemplify the IC’s efforts to support and enhance capabilities in foreign language proficiency, cultural knowledge, and regional expertise:

- **Requirements:** The ODNI has led an effort to track and document foreign language requirements and capabilities across the IC, enabling the community to better analyze gaps and prepare for future programming decisions. In an effort to avoid duplicative data calls, the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Intelligence (USD(I)) partnered with ODNI to collect data through FLPO to track and document both National Intelligence Program (NIP) and Military Intelligence Program (MIP) language requirements and capabilities across the IC. The DoD Foreign Language Program also supports improved identification, vetting, and tracking of military and civilian personnel with language skills across the General Purpose, Special Operations, and Intelligence forces.
- **Recruiting:** The STARTALK program, managed by the National Security Agency, is a nation-wide, long-term educational initiative to provide foreign language learning opportunities to students (K-16) and professional development opportunities for foreign language teachers across the nation. The IC has also hosted two IC Virtual Career Fairs that focus on individuals with proficiency in critical foreign languages or with diverse backgrounds and who have the potential to further enable IC missions. The Heritage

Community collaborates with the both IC and DoD to assist recruitment efforts with native and heritage speakers.

- **Training:** Congress authorized the DNI to provide backfill equivalents, through the training FLOAT, allowing managers to release their workforce for critical foreign language and training in area skills. ODNI has established beginner-level acquisition and mid-level enhancement training opportunities for IC members to increase their skills and better support their operations. The ODNI has been collaborating with numerous agencies such as FBI, DIA, and CIA to execute this initiative. The ODNI also provides enterprise-wide licenses for self-paced on-line training in language and cultural orientation and established training and networking opportunities for IC foreign language instructors across the community. Expert vocabulary and domain training for technical and scientific translation and reporting is available, as are translation and interpretation workshop programs for IC linguists. Finally, the Services and DLIFLC support building national foreign language capabilities in the less and least commonly taught languages. Graduates go to federal careers with their newly acquired language capabilities.
- **Education:** The IC is investing in education and the nation's future. Our National Foreign Language Initiative provides support to undergraduate and graduate language studies at select universities across the U.S., even providing opportunities for select students to study abroad. By sponsoring the DoD-managed National Security Education Program (NSEP), the IC has invested in undergraduate and graduate level scholarships for students to study language abroad under the auspices of the Boren Awards Program, which recently expanded the scope of its offerings to the languages of Africa. NSEP also provides a scholars program for native/heritage speakers of critical languages to improve their English skills and prepare them for federal government service.
- **Operational Support:** The IC integrates its foreign language capability by allowing linguists to work across the community via Joint Duty Assignments. Additionally, the National Virtual Translation Center (NVTC) serves as a translation processing service to the IC and the federal government, processing translations in over 120 languages.
- **Human Language Technology (HLT):** The IC's linguists, collectors, and analysts encounter information in numerous formats (text, video, audio), languages, dialects, and domains, and they are beginning to use language technologies routinely to meet the wide range of challenges presented them. Throughout the IC, agencies are supporting integration of HLT, such as language and speaker identification, optical character recognition (OCR), speech recognition, and machine translation, in desktop tools and workflows. They are developing reusable and shareable digital resources, such as glossaries and parallel corpora, that individuals, instructors, students, and technologists can use in a variety of ways for different purposes. Finally, IC elements have begun to share HLT software across the community either as stand-alone systems or via web services.

Way Ahead

The IC is on a strategic trajectory to improve its capability through four harmonized focus areas: the foreign language-skilled workforce, human language technology, work process improvements, and an alignment of resources. The outcome of this strategic effort will include the following:

- A workforce with strong language skills, deep cultural knowledge, and regional expertise that will greatly increase IC capability and readiness.
- An increased IC capacity and capability for processing and exploiting foreign language material by integrating and deploying cutting-edge foreign language technology and tools.
- A fully integrated IC foreign language capability.
- Collaboration across the IC to understand and document the breadth and depth of foreign language capabilities and identified IC resources needed to maintain and enhance those capabilities.

Conclusion

The IC operates as an integrated enterprise that strives to collect, analyze, and disseminate accurate, timely, and objective intelligence. It is implementing the proper balance between long-term recruiting, workforce training, developing human language technology tools, and increasing the numbers of languages supported at professional levels of capability.

Foreign language skills, cultural understanding, and regional expertise constitute essential baseline capabilities for the IC's core mission objectives to combat violent extremism, counter the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, provide strategic intelligence and warning, integrate counterintelligence, enhance cyber security, and support diplomatic, military, and law enforcement operations.