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DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE LANGUAGE AND CULTURAL AWARENESS TRANSFORMATION

Testimony of Andrew F. Krepinevich, President¹

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for the opportunity to appear before you today, and to share my views on the value of cultural awareness and language training for the United States armed forces. My remarks are intended to place this issue in a broader strategic context, in the hope that this will allow the subcommittee to evaluate its significance better. I will discuss the likely shape of the future security environment, the types of challenges the U.S. military should be prepared to confront, how it might respond to these challenges, and what all of this suggests about the importance of cultural awareness and language training. In addition, I will address the issue of possible tradeoffs that might be required if the Services expand their focus on these types of training.

INTRODUCTION

...asymmetric warfare will remain a mainstay of the contemporary battlefield for some time.

...arguably the most important military component in the War on Terror is not the fighting we do ourselves, but how well we enable and empower our partners to defend and govern their own countries. The standing up and mentoring of indigenous armies and police—once the province of Special Forces—is now a key mission for the military as a whole... The same is true for mastering a foreign language...and building expertise in foreign areas.

Army soldiers can expect to be tasked with reviving public services, rebuilding infrastructure, and promoting good governance. All these so-called “nontraditional” capabilities have moved into the mainstream of military thinking, planning, and strategy—where they must stay.

Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates
Remarks to the Association of the United States Army,
October 10, 2007²

¹ Before the United States House of Representatives Committee on the Armed Services, Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee.

² Accessed at <http://www.defenselink.mil/speeches/speech.aspx?speechid=1181> on July 2, 2008.

In order to assess the value of any particular piece of equipment or form of training, it is necessary to have a sense of what tasks the armed forces will be asked to perform, and where they will be operating in the years to come. During the 45 year-long Cold War the U.S. military focused primarily on structuring, training and equipping itself for conventional combat against the Soviet Union and its allies on the European continent and at sea. Following the Cold War, our armed forces have found themselves conducting operations, often irregular and protracted in character, in places such as Somalia, Haiti, Bosnia, Kosovo, Afghanistan, and Iraq that to some would have seemed highly implausible only months before they were undertaken. If the experience of the last seventeen years tells us anything, it is that we are likely to continue to find our armed forces deployed, often for protracted periods of time, and typically in operations among the indigenous populations, rather than around them. As I will discuss presently, it is not only past experience, but strong current trends that argue for this conclusion.

Consequently, as we look ahead, the U.S. military should be prepared to confront a more diverse array of opponents, including third-tier rogue powers, transnational terrorist organizations, indigenous insurgent groups, as well as potential great power rivals. Rather than focusing on one particular geographic area, U.S. forces will likely be required to prepare for contingencies in widely dispersed locales. Moreover, U.S. soldiers, marines, sailors and airmen will increasingly be asked to perform a range of tasks quite different from those associated with conventional combat operations.

THE FUTURE SECURITY ENVIRONMENT: A DISORDERED WORLD?

What will the future security environment look like? Although it is impossible to say for certain, a number of trends suggest that the United States may be on the verge of confronting a “disordered world” in which the principal threats to U.S. security are more likely to emanate from irregular forces and ungoverned spaces than they are from the great power rivals that posed the gravest threats during the last century. These trends include the continuing use of irregular tactics and strategies by state and non-state adversaries alike; the empowerment of non-state opponents due to a revolution in communications and the proliferation of increasingly advanced weapons; and the growing prospects of internal instability, state failure, and even state collapse in a number of fragile nations due, in part, to worrisome demographic trends.

The Rise of Irregular Warfare

The current trend toward irregular warfare did not begin with the counterinsurgency (COIN) campaigns that the United States has undertaken in Afghanistan and Iraq. In fact, the entire post-Cold War era has been dominated by irregular warfare contingencies. To be sure, the First Gulf War in 1991 and the conventional combat operations phase of the Second Gulf War in 2003 involved major, combined-arms air and ground operations. However, both of these conflicts vividly demonstrated the enormous overmatch that exists between the United States military and those that might choose to

challenge it by waging conventional warfare, as Saddam Hussein's military did not once, but twice.

The U.S. military's performance in irregular warfare campaigns has not met with the same success as it has enjoyed in conventional combat. The difficulties encountered should not have been a surprise. Following the Vietnam War ground our armed forces were optimized for conventional warfare. The catchphrase "No More Vietnams" reflected the military's desire to avoid protracted, ill-defined conflicts. General William DePuy, one of the Army's leading thinkers, viewed the 1973 Middle East War as a godsend of sorts, as it enabled the Army to reorient itself back toward a more familiar, almost comfortable threat to U.S. security: the Soviet Army in Central Europe. The "No More Vietnams" attitude was heartily seconded by the American people and civilian leadership. It spawned the Weinberger and Powell doctrines of the 1980s and the "Exit Strategies" discussions that preoccupied political and military leaders during the deployment of U.S. ground forces in the 1990s. The U.S. military became increasingly structured, trained and equipped to fight short, conventional wars. When this proved unworkable, the intent became to set clear limits on the duration of U.S. force deployments to avoid "another Vietnam."

Unfortunately, as our generals are fond of reminding us, "The enemy gets a vote," and many of our enemies—especially those espousing a violent radical Islamist creed—have "voted" against taking on the United States with conventional forces, opting instead for irregular warfare.

There are three primary reasons for this:

- First, as noted above, the U.S. military has overwhelming dominance in conventional warfare;
- Second, and consequently, even if they wanted to confront the United States conventionally, most of our enemies simply lack the human and material resources to build conventional forces on anything like the scale and level of sophistication required to pose a serious challenge to our military; and
- Third, and perhaps most important, the U.S. military, and other first-rate militaries like Israel's, have proven far less effective in combating enemies waging irregular warfare than those engaged in conventional war.

To buttress their line of thinking, our enemies can cite from an impressive run of successes by non-conventional forces, including the U.S. defeat in Vietnam, and the withdrawals from Lebanon in the 1980s and Somalia in the 1990s; Soviet losses in Afghanistan; and Israel's inability to prevail over the Iranian-backed irregular forces of Hezbollah in the Second Lebanon War. Given these factors, it seems likely that the U.S. military is destined to face adversaries waging irregular conflicts unless these adversaries gain an advantage in conventional warfare (an unlikely occurrence in the

foreseeable future), acquire nuclear weapons, or the U.S. military demonstrates an ability to deal effectively with the irregular warfare challenge.

The Diffusion of Information and Military Technology

Not only should we expect that many existing and prospective opponents will resort to irregular warfare well into the foreseeable future, but we should also assume that they will be able to do so more effectively than in the past. This is due in large part to a revolution in communications that has diffused to the lowest levels of society, as well as the growing availability of advanced weapons and military technologies.

Terrorist groups and insurgent forces have already demonstrated their ability to use mass media and information technology skillfully to communicate, recruit and organize new members, create and disseminate propaganda, and share “lessons learned” from their efforts. Moreover, the diffusion of advanced military technology (such as rockets and missiles, precision-guided munitions, advanced explosive charges, etc.) is significantly enhancing the capabilities of irregular forces, a trend that is likely to continue for some time. Perhaps most worrisome are the efforts of groups such as al Qaeda and the The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) to acquire weapons of mass destruction.

Demographic Trends and Instability in the Developing World

While the proximate causes of disorder are likely to be the deliberate actions of terrorist groups, insurgent forces or rogue nations, the underlying causes of instability can often be found elsewhere, for example in demographics. At present, many nations in the developing world are at risk of experiencing increased instability due in part to one or more demographic trends.

One such trend has been termed the “youth bulge.” The fertility rates in developed states, to include the United States and its traditional allies in Australia, Canada, Europe, Japan, and South Korea, have been declining for some time and are now quite low. Along with the increased longevity characteristic of most developed nations, these low birth rates have led to rapidly aging populations. By contrast, many nations in the developing world have high fertility rates that have only recently begun to decline. As a result, young adults make up an unusually large portion of these populations. Youth bulges are heavily concentrated in sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East—an area stretching from Morocco to India. The other main high concentration of youth population runs from Mexico, through Central America, and along South America’s northwest coast.

What is the strategic significance of these youth bulges? A disproportionately youthful population, especially when combined with high levels of unemployment and increased urbanization, tends to give rise to higher levels of instability in comparison with societies not experiencing youth bulges. In fact, a number of studies have demonstrated that nations

experiencing youth bulges are far more likely to suffer civil conflict than those that are not.³ The reasons for this are relatively straightforward. In societies where the economy cannot absorb large numbers of new workers, frustration often ensues. Unable to find work or life stability, young men in particular often feel alienated from society. In countries with urban populations, the incidence of these men forming associations based on their common hostility toward society increases. Furthermore, their generally low level of education contributes to making them easy prey for radical elements looking to exploit their anger.

Consider, for example, the case of Nigeria. Despite its potential wealth from its rich oil resources, Nigeria's demographic profile remains in a classical pyramid shape with an enormous youth base narrowing to a small percentage of elderly at the top. Specifically, an astonishing 44 percent of Nigeria's population is under the age of 15. When combined with rampant poverty, little to no public infrastructure in many parts of the country, an uneducated population, and endemic government incompetence and corruption, Nigeria is a prime candidate for state failure.

Sex ratios present another demographic trend of concern. Worldwide, the ratio between boys and girls has historically stood at roughly 103-105:100. That is, for every 100 girl births, between 103-105 boys are born. In parts of Asia and the Middle East this balance has been disrupted for a number of years. In China, for example, the male-female birth ratios have climbed from 109 males per 100 females in 1982, to 116 in 1995, to roughly 120 in 2000.⁴ The reasons for this deviation include the enduring cultural preference for sons, low or sub-replacement fertility (due in part to Beijing's "one child" policy), and the general availability of gender-based abortion.

How much does this surplus of males matter? Some argue that as the male demographic increases, and as males enter the 15-34 age range, they have the potential to cause considerable internal instability. This age group is known to be responsible for the preponderance of violence in societies; moreover, the majority of this group's acts of violence are perpetrated by unattached males. If this is true, then parts of Asia and the Arab world could be entering a particularly long and tense period.⁵

A third demographic factor likely to contribute to disorder and instability is the HIV/AIDS epidemic. At present, this epidemic is largely concentrated in Sub-Saharan Africa, where over two-thirds of the planet's estimated 30.6 million infected adults (aged 15-49) reside. Correspondingly, this region

³ Richard P. Cincotta, Robert Engelman, Daniele Anastasion, *The Security Demographic* (Washington, DC: Population Action International, 2003), p. 48; and Henrik Urdal, "A Clash of Generations? Youth Bulges and Political Violence," *International Studies Quarterly*, 50 (2006), p. 617.

⁴ Nicholas Eberstadt, "Four Surprises in Global Demography," *Orbis*, Fall 2004.

⁵ Valerie M. Hudson and Andrea Den Boer, "A Surplus of Men, A Deficit of Peace," *International Security*, Spring 2002, pp. 5-38.

accounted for 1.6 million of the estimated 1.9-2.4 million adult and child deaths worldwide from the disease in 2007.⁶ The most severe outbreaks are in Botswana, Zimbabwe, Swaziland, Lesotho, Namibia, Zambia and South Africa. Over 20 percent of these countries' populations are infected with HIV, and each country is losing between 10 and 18 percent of its working-age population every five years.⁷ The result is a downward spiral in which economic growth is difficult to sustain and pressures on the government purse—to generate new skilled labor, treat those suffering from the disease, and care for children left orphaned—threaten to destabilize the already fragile regimes that characterize the region. Should this eventuality be realized, the international community may be faced with a humanitarian crisis on a scale never before seen.

Because of the prevalence of these three worrisome trends and the high probability that they will continue to escalate in the foreseeable future, they must be considered significant contributing factors to an increasingly disordered world. In other words, these demographic trends have the potential to cause a great deal of instability in the years to come, possibly in regions (like the Middle East) or nations (like Nigeria) where the United States has significant strategic and economic interests. Moreover, the possibility of state failure or state collapse—whether due to demographic trends alone or in concert with other factors—magnifies the problems discussed above, as irregular forces could benefit from these developments by gaining new sanctuaries and recruits to augment their strength.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE UNITED STATES MILITARY

Given this partial assessment of the future security environment, what implications can be drawn for the U.S. military on the value of cultural awareness and language training? Perhaps the most important, overarching observation is that, as noted by Secretary Gates, irregular conflicts stand to be far more common in the years ahead than conventional wars; this being the case, the need for cultural knowledge and language skills within the U. S. armed forces becomes increasingly clear.

Before discussing recommendations to this effect, however, it is important to note that the rising prevalence of irregular warfare is likely to affect the ground forces—the Army and the Marine Corps—disproportionately, as they will be the Services that are most involved in conducting counterinsurgency and stability operations, and advising and training indigenous forces. The Navy certainly has a significant, albeit limited, role to play, both in terms of building partner capacity and conducting operations in littoral areas. Of the four Services, the role of the Air Force, while still important, is likely to be comparatively modest. That being the case, efforts to increase cultural awareness and language training should focus primarily, but not exclusively, on the ground forces and to a lesser extent the Navy.

⁶ UN AIDS 2007 estimates, accessed at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/AIDS_pandemic, on April 17, 2008.

⁷ Richard P. Cincotta, Robert Engelman, and Daniele Anastasion, *The Security Demographic* (Washington, DC: Population Action International, 2003), p. 63.

Retain and Improve the Military's Ability to Conduct COIN Operations

Given the experience of the past six-plus years, in addition to the previously-discussed trends that are likely to shape the future security environment, it seems only prudent to make sure that the U.S. military remains capable of successfully executing counterinsurgency operations and other forms of irregular warfare.⁸ The need to do so provides one of the most important reasons for the Services to emphasize cultural awareness and language training. As the authors of the Army's recently published counterinsurgency field manual argue:

Successful conduct of COIN operations depends on thoroughly understanding the society and culture within which they are being conducted...Thus, effective COIN operations require a greater emphasis on certain skills, such as language and cultural understanding, than does conventional warfare. The interconnected, politico-military nature of insurgency and COIN requires immersion in the people and their lives to achieve victory.⁹

Emphasize Building Partner Capacity as a Core Military Mission

Counterinsurgency operations are manpower-intensive and often take a decade or more to achieve their intended goals. The American public, however, prefers wars to be short, decisive, and successful, while it tends to tolerate protracted engagements only if the perceived stakes are high and sufficient progress toward victory is being made. The prospects of an increasingly disordered world suggest that the number of terrorist groups, insurgent forces, and similar threats could multiply in the years to come. These factors, when taken together, and in conjunction with the size limitations associated with a volunteer military, provide a strong argument in favor a U.S. strategy that emphasizes "building partner capacity"—training and equipping indigenous military forces in countries threatened by radical elements, and the forces of our allies and partners. This line of thought acknowledges America's finite resources, manpower limitations, and political constraints, and promotes cooperation with allies and partners to supply the forces required for sustained irregular operations. Because building partner capacity requires U.S. forces to work closely with host nation forces or other indigenous groups, cultural awareness and language skills will be increasingly valuable in the years to come.

⁸ Irregular warfare comprises insurgency; counterinsurgency (COIN); unconventional warfare (UW); terrorism ; counterterrorism (CT); foreign internal defense (FID); stabilization, security, transition, and reconstruction (SSTR) operations; strategic communications; psychological operations (PSYOP); information operations (IO); civil-military operations (CMO); intelligence and counterintelligence activities; transnational criminal activities, including narco-trafficking, illicit arms dealing, and illegal financial transactions, that support or sustain IW; and law enforcement activities focused on countering irregular adversaries Briefing, US Special Operations Command, SOKF-J9 Futures Directorate, "Irregular Warfare JOC," January 2007. Accessed at www.dtic.mil/futurejointwarfare/strategic/cdeday1_iwjoc.ppt on July 5, 2008.

⁹ U.S. Army Field Manual 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*, pp. 22-23.

Nontraditional Tasks Will Become “Conventional”

To the extent that the U.S. military will increasingly be expected to engage in irregular warfare operations, U.S. service men and women will also be expected to perform tasks that have traditionally been considered outside the domain of conventional combat operations, but which are vital in these types of environments. As Secretary Gates noted, this may include reviving essential services, rebuilding public infrastructure, promoting good governance, and all of the various tasks that fall within those broad categories. This in turn suggests that the military must be prepared to operate “among the people” much more than in the past. Language training and cultural awareness will therefore be critical enabling capabilities.

General Purpose Forces Must Become More “SOF-Like”

Insofar as special operations forces are distinguished in part by their linguistic skills and knowledge of specific regions or nations, the need to increase the language skills and cultural awareness of the rest of the military suggest that they must, in a sense, become more “SOF-like.”

This will especially be the case if general purpose forces increasingly take on the mission of building partner capacity—training and advising indigenous forces—so that SOF can focus more of their time and effort on direct action missions, which remain a significant aspect of counterinsurgency operations and the broader war on terrorism.

To summarize, as the security environment changes, the U.S. military must adapt as well. Many of the changes the Army and Marine Corps are undertaking, and should continue to pursue, highlight the importance of language training and cultural awareness. Moreover, because the trends that are now shaping the security environment are likely to persist for some time, the value of increased instruction in these areas will likely only grow over time.

TRADEOFFS

If the military is to expand its focus on cultural awareness and language training, what tradeoffs will it have to make, both in terms of time and resources? While specific recommendations are beyond the scope of my testimony today, I would like to suggest that the military’s continuing relatively high emphasis on conventional operations is to some extent misplaced, and thus provides an area where resources and personnel might be divested, with relatively minimal risk to the nation’s security, in order to support language and cultural training, as well as other “soft” skills that are particularly useful in irregular warfare.

At present, the ground forces are increasing their active end-strength by 92,000 troops—with 65,000 going to the Army and the remainder to the Marines. The Army plans to utilize the additional soldiers to create six brigade combat teams (and associated combat support and combat service support elements) in addition to the 42 currently planned, for a total of 48. The Marine Corps plans to use their end strength increase to stand up a regimental combat

team to round out their three division-wing teams.¹⁰ Although these forces are advertised as being “full-spectrum” capable, both moves suggest that the additional U.S. ground forces will be trained and equipped primarily for conventional, high-intensity ground combat operations. Is this the best use of these additional forces? If experience since the end of the Cold War is any indication, the answer is: not likely.

In response to proposals that ground forces specialize to a greater degree in irregular warfare, the Army and Marine Corps are quick to note that, given the potential stakes and effects of major combat operations (MCOs), they cannot ignore conventional war contingencies. However, this argument, while valid, carries far less weight than it did during the period following Vietnam, when Soviet armies posed a threat that far exceeded that of any rivals pursuing irregular warfare. The evidence strongly suggests that no one wants to play the role of Saddam Hussein’s Republican Guard, either now or in the foreseeable future. One searches in vain through the pages of military journals to find stories of countries assembling tank armies to oppose us. Truth be told, the two countries most often cited by our military leaders as opposing the United States in major combat operations involving large-scale conventional forces—North Korea and Iran—lack even a Republican Guard mechanized force, let alone a Soviet tank army.

As members of this subcommittee well know, the threat from North Korea stems from its budding nuclear arsenal, ballistic missiles, special operations forces and artillery (perhaps armed with chemical or biological agents) positioned in caves and mountains near the demilitarized zone (DMZ). Moreover, the mountainous DMZ itself is perhaps the most heavily fortified territory in the world, with both flanks anchored on the ocean. The South Koreans have both the incentive and the resources (a population twice that of the North and an economy dozens of times greater) to field ground forces capable of blocking any attempt by North Korean forces to advance south—a concept Pyongyang seems ill-disposed to execute in any event.

Iran, having witnessed first-hand the American military’s quick victory over Saddam Hussein’s conventionally armed and organized militaries, and the subsequent difficulties that same military faced when confronted with irregular operations, would not likely be attracted to Saddam’s method of challenging the U.S. Moreover, it is the Iranians who have armed and trained groups like Hezbollah and Hamas, and who are providing support for Iraqi irregular forces like the Mahdi Army. Discussions of Iranian military power center on Tehran’s quest for weapons of mass destruction, its terrorist networks, and its ability to close the Strait of Hormuz to shipping traffic by developing anti-access/area-denial capabilities. Were the U.S. military to confront Iran in a major combat operation—now or a decade from now—

¹⁰ “DoD News Briefing with Under Secretary of Defense David Chu, LTG Stephen Speakes, and LTG Emerson Gardner from the Pentagon,” US Department of Defense Transcript, January 19, 2007, available at <http://www.defenselink.mil/transcripts/transcript.aspx?transcriptid=3871>.

Tehran's conventional forces would almost certainly be a secondary consideration.

Put another way, given the overwhelming success of our ground forces in conventional warfare operations, and the shift of rival militaries and nonstate entities toward irregular warfare, orienting 48 active Army brigades, 28 National Guard brigades, and three Marine Corps divisions primarily on conventional warfare operations would appear to reflect a desire to prepare for the kinds of challenges we would prefer to confront, rather than those we will most likely encounter.

To be sure, our ground forces must remain dominant in conventional (or what the 2006 QDR calls "traditional") operations. However, it does not follow that the Army and Marine Corps must be principally, or even primarily, devoted to this task. Consider that, thanks to the gains in effectiveness realized by our armed forces, improvements in their ability to fight as a joint force, and the U.S. military's enormous advantages in advanced capabilities (e.g., precision munitions; C4ISR), only one heavy Army division was needed to defeat the Iraqi army in the Second Gulf War.¹¹

Simply stated, while the Army and Marine Corps have clearly placed an increased emphasis on irregular warfare capabilities, to include language and cultural training, they nevertheless remain predominantly focused on conventional combat operations. Should it be necessary to make tradeoffs in order to support enhanced cultural awareness, language training, or other skills that are particularly crucial to winning an irregular warfare campaign, drawing resources away from conventional capabilities is an option that should be seriously considered.

SUMMARY

In an era dominated by irregular warfare challenges, the United States military is more likely to undertake missions requiring irregular warfare capabilities rather than traditional large-scale ground combat operations. A key component of military readiness will be the ability to understand the cultures of, and communicate with, people from many regions of the world. Increased language and culture training will ultimately prove to be a powerful weapon in the American military's arsenal. As the development of institutional language and cultural expertise requires significant time as well as resources, I commend the committee for raising awareness on this important issue and encourage it to continue exercising its oversight responsibilities by supporting the military's efforts to create sufficient language and cultural awareness capacity to meet both existing contingencies and those that are likely to emerge in the coming years.

¹¹ One Marine division was also involved in the major combat operation, as was the Army's 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) along with some brigade-sized maneuver elements.