



Soldiers from the U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School speak with indigenous role-players during the Psychological Operations Qualification Course at Camp Mackall, North Carolina, on 16 June 2021. The soldiers were trained in culture, language, social sciences, civil analysis, and planning in complex ambiguous environments to carry out psychological operations and succeed in the special operations community. Training in Mandarin Chinese is deemed among the highest priority languages for special operations forces. (Photo by K. Kassens, U.S. Army)

Army SOF's Chinese Language Challenge

1st Lt. Alexander Mosher, U.S. Army

The 2022 *National Defense Strategy* declared that the “[People’s Republic of China] remains our most consequential strategic competitor” and rightly affirmed the Department of Defense’s (DOD) renewed focus in the Far East.¹ As recognized by the deputy secretary of defense in *A Roadmap for Cultivating and Managing Skilled Language, Regional Expertise, and Cultural Talent (LREC)*, the critical

language gap is among the U.S. military’s most alarming deficiencies, precluding it from fulfilling the 2022 *National Defense Strategy*. This roadmap not only reprimanded the DOD’s present failure to meet current language proficiency standards but also charged leaders to heighten those standards.² Both directives apply to Army special operations forces (SOF), who require Chinese speakers with urgency. Unfortunately, as

Why Special Operation Forces Require Language Proficiency

SOF plays a key role in assignments below declared, armed conflict and in high-risk missions where unconventional warfare is preferred to conventional practice. This unique problem set requires both foreign language proficiency and cross-cultural fluency.⁵ Specifically, Special Forces' missions of unconventional warfare (i.e., directing an insurgency against an occupying power), foreign internal defense, and special reconnaissance; psychological operations' mission of military information support



West Point Cadet Christopher Clarkin (left), a Chinese language major, observes and engages with members of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) during the thirteenth annual U.S.-China Disaster Management Exchange that took place 16–19 November 2017 at the Oregon National Guard's Camp Rilea Armed Forces Training Center in Warrenton, Oregon. U.S. Army Pacific hosted the exchange with the PLA to foster mutual trust and understanding while sharing lessons learned to enhance disaster response in the Pacific region. This year marked first time U.S. Military Academy West Point cadets participated in the event. (Photo by Sgt. Tyler Meister, 115th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment)

operations and deception; and civil affairs' partnership with government agencies and foreign militaries to secure U.S. diplomatic ends, all require foreign language proficiency.⁶ Besides a necessity for mission success, language proficiency has other positive second and third order effects. SOF personnel with language ability strengthen relationships with foreign partners and can communicate with local populations to meet day-to-day needs.⁷ SOF language requirements are determined by theater special operations commands. Theater special operations commands consider both current language needs as well as future contingencies when creating language capability requirements.⁸

The fruits SOF provides conventional forces cannot be overstated if SOF personnel are qualified to carry out their mission with foreign language proficiency. History provides no better example of this than T. E. Lawrence, also known as Lawrence of Arabia. Although the term "special operations" had yet to be coined, Lawrence's career as a British officer during and after the First World War spanned psychological operations, irregular warfare, and civil affairs. Beginning while an undergraduate at Oxford and continuing after graduation, Lawrence took extensive expeditions to the Middle East on archeological surveys while studying Arabic.⁹ His language

documented by a 2023 report from the Government Accountability Office (GAO), SOF fails to produce personnel who maintain elementary Chinese or who reach working proficiency.³ Due to the present and overwhelming importance of the Chinese language, this article will exclusively assess Chinese language acquisition among Army SOF. Specifically, this article proposes two recommendations to address the shortcomings of SOF's current Chinese language education program. First, the DOD should enhance language programs directed at ROTC cadets, thereby increasing the pool of Chinese speakers for SOF to recruit from. Second, SOF recruiters should utilize a forthcoming LREC database to target those already proficient in Chinese.⁴

ability combined with his position directing Arab workmen meant he became “thoroughly conversant with the intricacies of their tribal and family jealousies, rivalries and taboos ... [along with a] remarkable ability to identify with the feelings and personal priorities of individual Arabs ... that enabled Lawrence to win the confidence and acceptance of the Arab people.”¹⁰ After the advent of the First World War, Lawrence returned to the Middle East to advise and direct an Arab revolt against the Ottoman Empire.¹¹ Lawrence’s Bedouin irregulars committed constant and deep attacks against Turkish rail and communications infrastructure, forcing the Turks to disperse their troops and enabling conventional British forces to take the offensive, which culminated in the capture of Damascus.¹² This episode is a textbook example of SOF acting as a force multiplier. With little investment of men or material, an advisor-driven campaign of unconventional warfare delivered decisive results. However, foreign language proficiency was and will be a nonnegotiable precondition of success.

A Brief Explanation of the Interagency Language Roundtable Scale

The federal government, including the DOD and SOF, use the Interagency Language Roundtable (ILR) scale to measure foreign language ability.¹³ A cursory understanding of this scale is necessary to understand SOF’s Chinese language deficiencies. The scale has six “base” levels starting at 0 and ending at 5. A score of 0 means no proficiency and a score of 5 indicates native proficiency. A “+” indicates an ability more advanced than the base level to its left but less advanced than the subsequent level (e.g., 2+ is more advanced than 2 but less advanced than 3).¹⁴ The Defense Language Proficiency Test (DLPT), which measures reading and listening comprehension, and the Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI), which measures speaking ability, are the most common tests to use this scale.¹⁵ Most second language learners will remain between levels 1 and 3, namely:

- Level 1 Survival Proficiency: One can exchange greetings, introduce oneself, and understand simple questions and commands.
- Level 1+ Elementary Proficiency: One can discuss beyond survival needs such as making travel

accommodations or conversing on basic aspects of family and work.

- Level 2 Limited Working Proficiency: One can give and understand straightforward instructions and narratives.¹⁶
- Level 2+ Limited Working Proficiency Plus: One can understand most native speech and meet most work requirements.¹⁷
- Level 3 General Professional Proficiency: One can participate in most formal, informal, and professional settings with confidence.¹⁸

SOF’s Current Failure to Meet Proficiency Standards

Even though foreign language proficiency is critical to SOF’s mission, a recent review of SOF’s language ability has found it lamentably and recklessly low. The report in question was published by the GAO in October 2023. Army SOF personnel receive initial language training from four to six months (six for Chinese) to reach an ILR of 1+ (i.e., elementary) proficiency. Afterward, Chinese speaking SOF personnel are expected to study at least 120 hours per year to maintain that proficiency.¹⁹ SOF’s standards mandate that at least 80 percent of SOF personnel meet ILR 1+ for their assigned language in any given formation. The report found that less than half of SOF personnel completed any foreign language sustainment training. Including those who did not study at all, the average SOF member spends a mere fifteen to twenty-one hours per year in language study. It comes as no surprise then, that the report found “no more than three of the eight active-duty Army SOF formations, under the control of 1st Special Forces Command, had 80 percent of personnel achieve the minimum proficiency goal for their assigned foreign languages in a given year during fiscal years 2018 through 2022.”²⁰ The ILR 1+ standard is

1st Lt. Alexander Mosher, U.S. Army, is a fire control platoon leader in 69th Air Defense Artillery Brigade at Fort Cavazos, Texas. He holds a Bachelor of Arts in East Asian Studies from the University of Virginia and studied abroad through the Project GO program four times. His latest score on the DLPT for Mandarin-Chinese was 2+/2+. He has deployed to Bahrain.



already low. (Not until one reaches ILR 2 could one give and understand straightforward instructions.) An operator who could speak Chinese at the 1+ level may benefit personally in a Chinese speaking environment where he could order food and hail a taxi, but to work with partners and allies, he would still depend on a translator. The report found that commanders give language sustainment training low priority due to competing demands. SOF personnel who failed to maintain minimum language standards faced few or no consequences.²¹

The GAO recommended two policy changes to ensure SOF meets its own language standards. First, “establish and enforce consistent procedures that specify the consequences for SOF personnel that do not meet minimum foreign language proficiency standards,” and second, “hold unit commanders accountable for monitoring and reporting quality information about

Soldiers from the U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School's (USAJFKSWCS) Language, Regional Expertise, and Culture program's Chinese language course participate in a Language and Culture Day event on 25 April 2024 during Heritage Week at Fort Liberty, North Carolina. The event featured various performances, exhibits, language demonstrations, and food sampling from the eleven current languages taught at USAJFKSWCS. (Photo by K. Kassens, U.S. Army)

the extent to which SOF personnel are completing required annual sustainment and enhancement training hours.”²² These are good recommendations, but at best, if implemented, SOF personnel would sustain ILR 1+, which might convenience them while abroad but would fail to enable them to work with foreign partners without translators. For complete sufficiency, SOF requires Chinese speakers at ILR 2, 2+, and 3 levels, that is, working and general professional proficiency.²³ Furthermore, the strategic outcome of the

LREC roadmap produced for the Office of the Deputy Secretary of Defense mandated the DOD change training requirements to “increase productions of higher [foreign language] proficiencies.”²⁴ The roadmap noted that an aggressive approach in LREC talent management was needed to meet strategic challenges, particularly in regard to irregular warfare.²⁵ Both SOF’s current means of recruitment and language education are inadequate to the task.

SOF Chinese Education in Comparison

For SOF to recruit and develop ILR 2 and higher Chinese speakers, it must first understand the requisite time and effort needed to gain Chinese proficiency. The State Department categorizes languages on a scale of I to IV, with IV considered as “super-hard languages” or “languages that are exceptionally difficult for native English speakers.”²⁶ Category IV languages, of course, include Chinese. The State Department’s long-standing practice to develop Chinese proficiency is ten months of full-time language study stateside to reach ILR 2 and an additional ten months of study in Taipei or Beijing to reach ILR 3.²⁷ Another point of comparison is Chinese majors at West Point who, studying Chinese less single-mindedly than their diplomatic counterparts, usually reach ILR 2.²⁸ Contrasting the State Department’s versus SOF’s standard practices of Chinese language education, SOF’s defects are obvious. One cannot develop Chinese proficient enough to work with partners nor understand adversaries from a mere six months of study. Evidenced by the fact that more than half of SOF personnel decline to study their assigned language at all, most SOF personnel lack the motivation necessary to sustain and improve their Chinese even if they did reach ILR 2.

The period in which DOD personnel with the motivation to learn Chinese have the resources and time to do so is college. Hence, to solve SOF’s Chinese language woes, it behooves the DOD to improve both the quantity and quality of Chinese students among ROTC cadets. With officers who have achieved Chinese proficiency prior to commissioning, SOF will have a talent pool of motivated Chinese speaking officers to recruit from rather than wholly relying upon its current members to reach and maintain

elementary proficiency. The DOD has two programs targeted toward Chinese language study among ROTC cadets: namely, Project Global Officer and the Language Flagship Program. Both have their respective strengths and weaknesses.

Project Global Officer

Project Global Officer (Project GO) is an initiative of the Defense Language and National Security Education Office (DLNSEO) to meet objective two of the *DOD Strategic Plan for Language Skills, Regional Expertise, and Cultural Capabilities*; namely, “build, enhance, and sustain a Total Force with a mix of language skills, regional expertise, and cultural capabilities to meet existing and emerging needs in support of national security objectives.”²⁹ The program provides scholarships for ROTC cadets to study strategic languages in a region where they are natively spoken. Typically, an American university is paired with an overseas university. The domestic university’s language department and study abroad office will oversee the application process and logistics, while the foreign university will provide most of the language instruction in country. This program only occurs in the summer.³⁰ At first examination, one might think it lacks the defects of SOF language education. The program occurs in regions where the target language is natively spoken, meaning that students should have consistent practice in an immersive environment. As it occurs in the summer, students should study the language intensively without distractions. If students pair Project GO with domestic classes during the regular school year, they should have consistent and rapid progress.

As the author with extensive personal experience can attest, Project GO rarely meets its potential. The DOD’s metrics of success are a stumbling block to their own end. The DOD’s *Implementation Plan for LREC* subobjective 2.1.1Ma states, “Increase the percentage of new active-duty officer accessions who are identified (tested or self-professed) as possessing a foreign language skill from 4.4% in FY11 to 6.0% by the end of FY16.”³¹ Since success is measured by the total number of officers who merely possess a foreign language skill of any level, Project GO’s goals are in turn lamentably low, namely “a minimum proficiency goal of ILR skill level 1 for all Project GO and ... increasing the number of Project GO participants reaching



ILR level 2.”³² An IRL 1 student can satisfy courtesy requirements and read very basic information.³³ Study abroad scholarships are an extremely expensive way to produce officers who can read a few items on a Chinese menu and ask for directions. If ILR 1 officers are the benchmark of success, then there is no need to study abroad at all. It would be far cheaper and as effective for DLNSEO to encourage cadets to take a semester of Chinese domestically. Implicitly, Project GO aspires to higher goals. For summer 2025, two out of three programs offer year two and year three level Chinese classes. Only one program offers year four.³⁴ Still, the low metric that measures success creates perverse incentives which in turn attract unmotivated students. ILR 1 can be achieved in a single summer semester offering year one Chinese classes. There are far more cadets who have never studied Chinese than those who have. The price tag per student, regardless

Students practice the Chinese characters in a calligraphy class in Taiwan. (Photo courtesy of Project Global Officer)

of which level Chinese course is taken, is the same. Hence, the incentive, both monetary and measurable, is to have as many students as possible. A paucity of higher-level Chinese students encourages programs to fill their seats with students who lack any Chinese experience taking year one classes. What sort of students are these? They have all been in college for at least a year (some two or three) and declined to study Chinese. Yet when applying to Project GO, they attest they are motivated language learners. They are evidently not motivated enough to study Chinese in a nonexotic locale. These students are not motivated to study abroad but to go abroad at the DOD’s expense. They treat Project GO as a vacation and upon returning to the United States, rarely use Chinese again,

either academically or in their military career. Sixteen percent of Project GO cadets reach the 2, 2+, and even the ILR 3 levels. These few almost certainly combine Project GO with language courses during the regular school year.³⁵ Out of the vast majority of Project GO cadets, 70 percent only score a 1 or 1+ on the Oral Proficiency Interview, and 14 percent fail to even meet OPI 1.³⁶

Improving Project GO

High intensity study abroad can and should be an effective means to rapidly improve language ability. In this regard, the gold standard for Chinese summer study abroad is Princeton in Beijing (PiB). Project GO used to provide scholarships for cadets to attend PiB up to the summer of 2018. PiB has key attributes that make it effective:

- **Attribute 1: High intensity.** PiB is commonly called “Prison in Beijing” due to how many hours students study in their personal time while attending four hours of class and an hour of tutoring each weekday. Only highly motivated language learners can expect to succeed.³⁷
- **Attribute 2: Total immersion.** Students vow to only speak Chinese throughout the program. This is also known as a language pledge. Those found speaking English are penalized, sometimes by expulsion from the program. Additionally, students live and study where standard Mandarin is predominant and necessary for most activities. Some study abroad programs claim to have a language pledge but decline to enforce it, which in effect, is to lack a language pledge.
- **Attribute 3: High academic standards.** PiB students have daily and weekly examinations. Students who consistently fail these examinations are penalized.
- **Attribute 4: One-on-one tutoring.** American students are paired with a personal tutor outside of normal classroom attendance for at least an hour on weekdays.³⁸

Language Flagship Program

Fortunately, DLNSEO has one outstanding program that produces ILR 2 and higher Chinese speaking officers, namely the Language Flagship Program. The Language Flagship partners with thirteen

domestic universities to offer intensive Chinese instruction and advanced coursework beginning freshman year to produce professional language proficiency by graduation. Flagship participation is often combined with federal service, including commissioning future military officers with “professional-level language proficiency in critical languages ... to reduce the Services’ burden of costly language training and retraining of mid-career officers.”³⁹ Upon graduation, Flagship students studying Chinese may complete a year-long immersion program at Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center (DLIFLC) domestically or at National Chengchi University in Taipei. The results of the Language Flagship Program’s combination of long-term consistency, high intensity, and immersion speak for themselves. After completing their capstone, 27.8 percent of students had an ILR speaking proficiency of 2+ and 70.2 percent had a speaking proficiency of 3 or higher. As of the publication of DLNSEO’s 2023 annual report, there were twenty-eight Army ROTC cadets studying Chinese in the Language Flagship program.⁴⁰

Improving ROTC Chinese Education

As has been demonstrated, the requisite time and effort needed to gain Chinese proficiency precludes most SOF personnel from obtaining it. The DOD personnel who do have the time and resources to gain Chinese proficiency are undergraduates. Therefore, it behooves DLNSEO to expand, improve, and reform Chinese language programs directed at ROTC cadets. The Language Flagship’s Chinese-Mandarin programs are incredibly successful at producing ILR 2+ and ILR 3 Chinese speakers. The Language Flagship should increase recruitment of first-year cadets at universities where they are presently and expand to other universities where a large portion of the student body is enrolled in ROTC. Project GO should be reformed to meet its full potential. First-year Chinese courses should be eliminated; summer study abroad for students with no Chinese language experience is a vacation on the DOD’s dime. Instead, Project GO should offer second-, third-, and fourth-year Chinese courses modeled upon the best practices of PiB. Those practices include penalizing students for failing weekly examinations and breaking their language pledge, with penalties as harsh as expulsion.⁴¹ This change will significantly



decrease the total number of participants in the short term, but the quality of language instruction and students will more than make up the difference. DLNSEO should develop a fifth-year capstone immersion course for qualified students of Chinese at non-Language Flagship universities, including West Point. The Language Flagship's fifth-year immersion capstone is decisive in Chinese students reaching the IRL 2+ or 3 levels. Although students at non-Language Flagship programs cannot enroll in Language Flagship specific coursework, their universities often offer comparable programs for advanced students.⁴²

SOF Recruitment

SOF needs Chinese speakers of ILR 2 or above for mission self-sufficiency. SOF's current language program is not designed nor likely to produce personnel who understand Chinese at that level. College is the best period for the DOD to produce officers with Chinese proficiency; however, even if DLNSEO follows the suggestions above to reform Project GO and expand the Language Flagship Program, it will take years before SOF has a large enough pool of capable Chinese speaking officers to recruit from.

Zhijian "Kevin" Yang interacts with his Mandarin Chinese students in November 2015 at the Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center's (DLIFLC) Asian School I in Monterey, California. Yang grew up during China's Cultural Revolution in the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s in Hohhot, the capital city of China's Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region. (Photo by Patrick Bray, DLIFLC Public Affairs)

Therefore, for SOF to improve its readiness in the short term, it could aggressively recruit officers and soldiers who already understand Chinese at ILR 2 or higher. Fortunately, a required action of the DOD's LREC roadmap is to "develop and field a centralized DoD LREC database."⁴³ Armed with the forthcoming database, SOF recruiters could conveniently target capable Chinese speakers. Due to the urgency Chinese speakers are needed, it would behoove SOF to provide them with additional preparation before selection, thereby increasing their odds for success.⁴⁴ (The Special Operations Preparation Course and Special Forces Preparation and Conditioning Course both already exist to prepare candidates for selection.)⁴⁵ Deliberate recruitment of Chinese speakers would have positive second- and third-order effects. Past language learning success is the best indicator

of future language learning success, and the pivot to Asia will require SOF personnel to know other difficult Asian languages. One should not forget that SOF language requirements account for possible contingencies. For example, in the event of conflict with the People's Republic of China, collaboration with Tibetan partners is a possibility due to Tibetans' long-standing dissatisfaction with their "autonomous" status within the People's Republic of China.⁴⁶ Operators working with Tibetans in their diaspora communities within Nepal, Bhutan, India, and elsewhere would need proficiency in Tibetan; however, in Tibet proper, state-mandated boarding schools use standard Mandarin as the primary language of instruction.⁴⁷ Hence, to communicate with many Tibetan fighting-age males, those same

SOF personnel would not only need to know Tibetan proficiently but Chinese as well.⁴⁸

Military readiness does not and will not rely upon strength of arms alone. SOF can and will be a force multiplier, especially when far theaters of war call for irregular warfare. For an advisor-driven campaign of unconventional warfare, the *raison d'être* of Special Forces, success requires a sympathetic local populace capable of undertaking an unconventional campaign that also melds into larger war aims.⁴⁹ But even if these preconditions are met, one remains that would bring the whole effort to naught; advisors who can neither communicate with local partners nor understand foreign adversaries. At this time, no language is more critical than Chinese, and the United States neglects its mastery at its own peril. ■

Notes

1. U.S. Department of Defense (DOD), *2022 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America* (U.S. DOD, October 2022), III, 1.
2. U.S. DOD, *A Roadmap for Cultivating and Managing Skilled Language, Regional Expertise, and Culture Talent-Phase I* (Defense Language National Security Education Office, August 2023), 1–4.
3. U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO), *Special Operations Forces Enhanced Training, Analysis, and Monitoring Could Improve Foreign Language Training Proficiency*, GAO-24-105849 (U.S. GAO, October 2023), <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-24-105849>.
4. U.S. DOD, *A Roadmap for Cultivating and Managing Skilled Language, Regional Expertise, and Culture Talent-Phase I*, 5.
5. U.S. GAO, *Special Operations Forces Enhanced Training*, GAO Highlights; Kyle Mizokami, "Confused by All the U.S. Special Forces? Here's a Guide," *The Reboot* (blog), *National Interest*, 21 August 2021, <https://nationalinterest.org/blog/reboot/confused-all-us-special-forces-here%E2%80%99s-guide-192216>.
6. "Special Forces," GoArmy, accessed 15 January 2025, <https://www.goarmy.com/careers-and-jobs/specialty-careers/special-ops/special-forces>; "Psychological Operations," GoArmy, accessed 15 January 2025, <https://www.goarmy.com/careers-and-jobs/specialty-careers/special-ops/psychological-operations>; "Civil Affairs," GoArmy, accessed 15 January 2025, <https://www.goarmy.com/careers-and-jobs/specialty-careers/special-ops/civil-affairs>.
7. U.S. GAO, *Special Operations Forces Enhanced Training*, 4–5.
8. *Ibid.*, 10–11.
9. James Schneider, *Guerrilla Leader: T. E. Lawrence and the Arab Revolt* (Bantam Books, 2011), 7–15.
10. John Mack as quoted in Schneider, *Guerrilla Leader*, 13.
11. John Arquilla, *Insurgents, Raiders, and Bandits: How Masters of Irregular Warfare Have Shaped Our World* (Ivan R. Dee, 2011), 159, 164.
12. *Ibid.*, 166–68; Schneider, *Guerrilla Leader*, 238–40.
13. U.S. GAO, *Special Operations Forces Enhanced Training*, 7.
14. "Descriptions of Proficiency Levels," Interagency Language Roundtable (ILR), accessed 15 January 2025, <https://govtilr.org/Skills/ILRscale1.htm>.
15. "DLPT Relevant Information and Guides," Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center, accessed 15 January 2025, <https://www.dliflc.edu/resources/dlpt-guides/>.
16. U.S. GAO, *Special Operations Forces Enhanced Training*, 7.
17. "Interagency Language Roundtable Language Skill Level Descriptions—Speaking," ILR, accessed 15 January 2025, <https://govtilr.org/Skills/ILRscale2.htm#2+>.
18. U.S. GAO, *Special Operations Forces Enhanced Training*, 7.
19. *Ibid.*, 5, 7, 26.
20. *Ibid.*, 21, 26–27.
21. *Ibid.*, 7, 25, 30–31.
22. *Ibid.*, 34–35.
23. *Ibid.*, 7.
24. U.S. DOD, *A Roadmap for Cultivating and Managing Skilled Language, Regional Expertise, and Culture Talent-Phase I*, 7.
25. *Ibid.*, 3.
26. "Foreign Language Training," U.S. Department of State, accessed 15 January 2025, <https://www.state.gov/foreign-language-training/>.
27. David Brown (former member of the Senior Foreign Service), in discussion with the author, 14 March 2024.
28. "Foreign Language: Chinese Major," U.S. Military Academy at West Point, accessed 21 January 2025, <https://www.westpoint.edu/academics/majors-and-minors/foreign-language-chinese-major>.
29. "Objectives," Project GO, accessed 21 January 2025, <https://www.rotcprojectgo.org/objectives>; U.S. DOD, *Strategic Plan for Language Skills, Regional Expertise, and Cultural Capabilities* (U.S. Department of Defense), 8, 15.
30. Project GO also offers domestic programs where cadets study a foreign language at an American university over a summer semester. The author has personally never attended any domestic

Project GO programs and will forgo commenting on their effectiveness.

31. Defense Language National Security Education Office (DLNSEO), *Implementation Plan for Language Skills, Regional Expertise, and Cultural Capabilities* (U.S. DOD, January 2014), 8.

32. DLNSEO, *National Security Education Program 2023 Annual Report* (U.S. DOD, 2023), 44.

33. *Ibid.*, 82; "Interagency Language Roundtable Language Skill Level Descriptions—Reading," ILR, accessed 15 January 2025, <https://govtilr.org/Skills/ILRscale4.htm>.

34. "Find a Program," Project GO, accessed 28 January 2025, https://www.rotcprojectgo.org/programs?field_language_target_id=629&field_course_level_target_id=All&field_course_type_target_id=56&field_school_target_id=All&field_program_start_date_value=&field_program_end_date_value=&field_location_program_value=.

35. DLNSEO, *National Security Education Program 2023 Annual Report*, 45.

36. *Ibid.*

37. Teresa Irigoyen-Lopez, "Summer Language Programs," Princeton University, 1 August 2018, <https://admission.princeton.edu/blogs/summer-language-programs>.

38. "Academics," Princeton in Beijing, accessed 21 January 2025, <https://pib.princeton.edu/academics>.

39. DLNSEO, *National Security Education Program 2023 Annual Report*, 28.

40. *Ibid.*, 25–32.

41. Expulsion should be retained as a means to enforce the language pledge, but discipline need not begin there. Project GO faculty should build working relationships with their students' respective ROTC cadre and determine less harsh penalties for initially breaking the language pledge. For example, most students would quickly rectify their actions if threatened with demotion from a prestigious leadership role.

42. For example, language pledge dormitories.

43. U.S. DOD, *A Roadmap for Cultivating and Managing Skilled Language, Regional Expertise, and Culture Talent-Phase I*, 8.

44. See "Nuclear Propulsion Officer Candidate," Navy.com, accessed 21 January 2025, <https://www.navy.com/>

[careers-benefits/education/nupoc](https://www.navy.com/careers-benefits/education/nupoc). Deliberate recruitment does not suggest lowering selection standards. Rather, it allows special operations forces (SOF) to raise its standards regarding Chinese proficiency. Other selective programs, such as the Navy's Nuclear Propulsion Officer Candidate program, recruit deliberately, precisely because they have high standards and specific education requirements.

45. Stew Smith, "An Overview of Special Ops Prep Courses and Pre-Selection Programs," Military.com, 25 April 2018, <https://www.military.com/military-fitness/military-workouts/special-operations-fitness/overview-special-ops-prep-courses-and-pre-selection-programs>.

46. See CNN Wire Staff, "Timeline of Tibetan Protests in China," CNN, 31 January 2012, <https://www.cnn.com/2012/01/31/world/asia/tibet-protests-timeline/index.html>. The last case of major civil unrest occurred in 2008 in conjunction with the Beijing Olympics. However, protests in Tibet have occurred on and off since the fifties.

47. Constance Kassor, "Tibetan Diaspora: Hardships and New Realities," virtual lecture, 2023, 22 min., 0 sec., part of *Tibet: History, Culture, and Religion*, The Great Courses, <https://www.thegreatcourses.com/courses/tibet-history-culture-and-religion>; "China: UN Experts Alarmed by Separation of 1 Million Tibetan Children From Families and Forced Assimilation at Residential Schools," United Nations, 6 February 2023, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2023/02/china-un-experts-alarmed-separation-1-million-tibetan-children-families-and>.

48. See Kassor, "How the Tibetan Language Invented an Empire." The U.S. State Department considers Tibetan a Category III language; however, it comes with its own unique challenges. Spoken Tibetan is a member of the Sino-Tibetan language family. Because written Tibetan was appropriated from the Gupta script of northern India, it shares many similarities with Sanskrit, an ancient Indian language of the Indo-European language family. Those learning Tibetan as a second language might find this combination challenging. SOF preparing for such a contingency would require a talent pool of gifted and highly motivated language learners.

49. Arquilla, *Insurgents*, 158–59.