

Language preparedness in the Zeitenwende Era: a Strategic Imperative for Global Peace and Understanding

This presentation stresses the critical need for modern language training in military contexts, covering key aspects like methodologies, student programming, and leadership advocacy. It explores approaches such as communication language teaching, task-based learning, immersive experiences, and gamification. Student programming focuses on on-demand learning, updated classrooms, technology integration (AI and VR), and career path management. Senior leadership's role involves advocating for agile decision-making and expedited funding in response to geopolitical shifts, highlighting the global security importance of language training for fostering peace and understanding.

The NATO BILC Conference convenes this year amidst pressing global challenges: Vladimir Putin's re-election in Russia, the ongoing invasion of Ukraine, escalating tensions in the Middle East, and multiple threats to peace in Asia. The military historian Victor Davis Hanson cautioned recently that we are facing our "most dangerous time since the 1930s." In this era of intense power competition, defense security cooperation is paramount. My presentation underscores the urgent necessity for language training in military contexts as *a "sea change" takes place in matters related to global security. I will address key considerations such as modern methodologies, linguistic career programing, and leadership advocacy.* By way of introduction, let's highlight the imperative of language training for military purposes in this moment of history.

On February 27, 2022, Chancellor Olaf Scholz delivered the Zeitenwende speech in response to the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine. He characterized the invasion as a "historic turning point" (German: Zeitenwende) and declared a significant shift in Germany's defense policy, utilizing a €100 billion fund to boost military spending.

Today, in the broader context of the NATO Alliance's global concerns, this present "Zeitenwende" era signifies a shift in power dynamics and the emergence of a multipolarity of interests propelled by the threat of an expanded war on the European continent, further hostility between Israel and Iran, the economic expansion of the BRICS block of nations, and heightened great power competition with China.

My remarks today are predicated to the idea *that the only way we can prevail in in great power conflict is with allies and partners. Language acquisition is fundamental to this effort.* Safeguarding peace and liberty---even prevailing in conflict with powerful adversaries, relies on strengthening alliances for enhanced security cooperation outcomes that span an array of languages and cultures.

In the setting of a global "Zeitenwende," a military language training program should prioritize three key elements to enhance interoperability and overall readiness: First, modern learning methodologies. Second, a student-centered approach in training and career path programming; and Third, a steadfast advocacy from senior leadership to inform and influence policy and funding.

These three components merge academic growth with practical expertise and becomes a catalyst for the cultivation of enduring and fruitful international partnerships. Military language training fosters the look of success in defense security cooperation. The current "global turning point" causes us to reassess how to forge robust partnerships to tackle global security challenges cooperatively.

Although security cooperation is inherent to the NATO Alliance, there are perennial challenges to fully leverage these relationships fully and to enhance credible deterrence. In today's increasingly contested and volatile global landscape, language and cultural expertise facilitates collaboration, reduces misunderstandings, and is paramount to military conflict management. Successful language professionals are crucial for intelligence collection, effective communication in multinational operations, and ensuring clear and precise communication in high stakes situations. They ensure interoperability, force multiplication, and ultimately contribute to a better, more peaceful world.

Modern methodologies for learning a new language include communication language teaching that is student centered; task-based, immersive, using of online platforms, and gamifications. These approaches emphasize practical language use, real-life tasks, and technology integration to enhance the learning process. At the Defense Language Institute English Language Center (DLIELC) at Joint Base San Antonio, Texas (where I serve), we began a significant shift toward modernizing our methods for English Language Instruction (ELI) back in 2022.

In case you are not familiar with DLIELC, our mission is to provide language testing, curriculum development, and instruction to support Department of Defense (DoD) security cooperation objectives worldwide. Annually, we train 6,000 International Military Students and U. S. Army and Coast Guard trainees on our resident campus as well as in all six geographic combatant commands. DLIELC also executes the largest Field Studies Program in the DoD to provide an understanding of U. S. democratic institutions and American cultural values to our allies and partners.

Two years ago, we recognized our own "Zeitenwende" and began an on-going initiative to seek out and implement the best practices from military and private sector sources around the world. Our modernization initiative is currently underway, and (within the U. S. DoD) we are leading the charge of what we call the classroom of the future.

In our ongoing journey toward modernization of English Language Training (ELT) at the DLIELC, a series of strategic initiatives are propelling us into a new era of immersive and effective language instruction. It remains a work in progress, but we are moving forward, and I would like to share some thoughts with you based on my experience.

1. The shift toward modernization began with a commitment to providing an immersive training experience through the integration of tech platforms, allowing students to engage with language learning beyond the traditional classroom setting. The DLIELC classroom is now viewed collaborative learning space equipped with resources and technology to enhance the overall educational environment.
2. For professionals in the private sector, it may seem surprising that the implementation of a robust Learning Management System (LMS) has been a significant challenge so far as we must collaborate with higher command to ensure adherence to security protocols.
3. Embracing cutting- edge technology, we have introduced Artificial Intelligence (AI) in testing and interactive content, enhancing the adaptability and personalized nature of our language programs.

DLIELC already used Virtual Reality in the Aviation Language Training Center and we look forward to broadening its application other Specialized English Courses.

4. Our commitment to modernization extends to providing students with individual student devices, ensuring wireless coverage, and establishing tech-enabled classrooms. Attention to all modalities, encompassing auditory, tactile, and kinesthetic elements, forms a cornerstone of our approach, creating a dynamic and inclusive learning atmosphere.

5. Yet, the pursuit of modernization language training doesn't stop there. The development of interactive digital content, spearheaded by qualified e-learning engineers, involves addressing Digital Rights Management issues to ensure ethical and secure access to educational resources.

6. In tandem with these technological advancements, we understand the critical role of instructor development. Our educators undergo continuous training to stay abreast of the latest teaching methodologies, ensuring they are well-equipped to deliver high-quality language instruction in this rapidly evolving landscape.

Ultimately, championing modernization should be a catalyst for innovation. An innovative language program will incorporate technology for interactive learning, adaptive assessment, and virtual collaboration. It should emphasize real-world language applications, cultural sensitivity, personalized learning paths.

As we continue to embrace these initiatives, DLIELC is at the forefront of shaping the *"military classroom of the future,"* where modern methodologies and technological innovations converge to create an optimal environment for language acquisition with a view toward national security and defense.

Student Programming and Talent Management

A student-centered programming approach to language training and career development places the individual learner at the forefront of the educational experience. Of course, the pursuit of preparing military students with the linguistic expertise essential for their roles, a comprehensive approach also encompasses a multifaceted strategy, ensuring they possess the necessary skills and support for linguistic readiness. There should be a synergy between training, career programming and mission requirements.

1. Prioritizing both linguistic and technical skills

To begin, we must prioritize the development of both linguistic and technical skill sets, recognizing that a well-rounded proficiency includes not only language mastery but also the career competencies required for effective communication in diverse military scenarios.

This is more difficult to achieve than you might imagine.

Since I just made a few remarks about student programming, I would like to take a step back and parenthetically address the matter of talent procurement. Our military services already have personnel with some level language, culture and regional expertise. Recruiting for readiness is a fundamental step in shaping a linguistically adept military force. Recruitment processes should be tailored to identify individuals who not only exhibit linguistic potential but also showcase a commitment to readiness, and who possess the required skill sets. These are individuals who understand the strategic importance of

language in military operations and are motivated to contribute to (inter)-national security through their linguistic capabilities. [e.g. USAE]

Once recruited, the emphasis on readiness training ensures that military students are equipped with the practical skills necessary for effective communication in real-world scenarios. This training goes beyond language proficiency alone, encompassing situational awareness, cultural competence, adaptability, and awareness of readiness indicators (e.g. based on AFORGEN model) – all crucial elements for successful military operations.

Talent management is a continuous and dynamic aspect of this “turning point” approach, recognizing that linguistic expertise is an asset that requires careful cultivation and utilization. Our Alliance needs to implement strategies to identify **and nurture** talent within our military ranks, ensuring that individuals with linguistic proficiency are strategically placed and provided with opportunities for career advancement.

A “Zeitenwende-worthy” commitment to training language expertise for military students is a holistic journey that starts with *procuring and retaining* individuals who embody LREC competencies.

Talent management that is characterized by a transformational cycle of commitment, preparedness, and readiness (i. e., AFORGEN) equips this unique class of personnel with linguistic and technical skills, and fosters a cadre of talented individuals whose contributions to national security are not only *linguistically sound but strategically significant*.

This *integrated approach to linguistic readiness* reflects our dedication to preparing military students for the diverse challenges they may encounter in their service.

In essence, a student-centered programming approach empowers learners to actively participate in their language training and career development, fostering a sense of ownership, motivation, and ultimately, success.

Leadership Advocacy

In setting forth the critical components of a modern military language training program, I stress the importance of senior leaders committing to informing policy and influencing funding decisions. While not a senior leader, I bring valuable insights as an ELT Specialist with expertise in academics, policy and planning, actively participating in key defense language meetings.

To adapt to dynamic demands, decision-makers should establish *agile* processes, considering the unpredictable nature of turning points. I propose reconsidering the traditional fiscal approach, especially in response to the growing demand for digital ELT content. The shift to paperless training requires high-level adjustments, addressing issues like digital rights management and reconsidering funding based on reimbursements for material costs.

Here is a proposal for agile decision-making processes in response to geopolitical shifts:

1. Codification of Workforce Billets and Skill Levels across the Services

Efforts are already underway by Senior Language Authorities in the United States to codify the required billets for civilian, military, and contractor roles across the Services. This includes delineating knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSA) at the apprentice, journeyman, and master levels. This codification provides clarity in role expectations, ensuring a standardized approach to skill development and proficiency. It promotes the look of success.

2. Mandating Intermediate and Advanced LREC Training

This is a subset of the codification of workforce billets. Recognizing the critical role of Language, Regional Expertise, and Culture (LREC) skills, senior-level leaders should mandate intermediate and advanced LREC training as an integral component of a linguist's career path. This ensures that professionals progress through a structured regimen, aligning their language proficiency with the increasing demands of their roles.

3. Enacting Talent Management Policies

To optimize the utilization of language professionals and promote their retention throughout their careers, senior leaders should adopt increasingly holistic approaches to talent development ensuring that language professionals receive ongoing professional development opportunities to meet evolving KSA requirements. Furthermore, such policies should foster a supportive career life cycle that promotes skill utilization and continuous improvement.

By implementing these measures, high-level leaders will use their influence to fund and create a more resilient, skilled, and strategically aligned language workforce capable of meeting the diverse linguistic challenges within the military and contractor domains.

Finally, why does this matter? Allow me to reiterate: The only way we can prevail against a host of adversaries and security threats is with allies and partners; therefore, language preparedness is a strategic imperative.

Consider the following issues that impinge on our Alliance:

1. **Great power competition:** China's rising economic and military influence, potentially making it the predominant global superpower, has implications for trade, diplomacy, and security, especially in the Asia-Pacific region.
2. **Continual Geopolitical Shifts:** Evolving geopolitical posturing may redefine global power dynamics, with nations like Russia, India, and Brazil gaining influence on the world stage and promoting unexpected alliances within the BRICS paradigm.
3. **Cybersecurity Challenges:** Cyber threats will remain a significant challenge to national security, requiring governments and businesses to invest in enhancing cybersecurity defenses and strategies.
4. **Artificial Intelligence and Emerging Technologies:** The advent of artificial intelligence, quantum computing, and biotechnology can reshape geopolitics, introducing new possibilities for warfare, surveillance, and economic disruption.
5. **Pandemic Response and Preparedness:** The COVID pandemic underscores the importance of global health cooperation and preparedness. This may drive increased investment in public health infrastructure and international collaboration to address future pandemics.
6. **Global Climate Action:** The ongoing concern of climate change will persist, prompting countries worldwide to address greenhouse gas emissions and adapt to climate impacts, impacting international relations such as peacekeeping in regions where violent competition for scarce resources takes place.

These trends indicate a persistently complex and transformative global landscape, presenting both challenges and opportunities for nations worldwide. In recognition of these turning points, **a strategic refinement** of the process to optimize language acquisition is a force multiplier because it fosters successful interoperability and, ultimately, promotes the benefits of understanding.

Strategic language preparedness in this “Zeitenwende” has three key elements: modern methodologies, student programming, and leadership advocacy. Indeed, just makes sense. Language preparedness is as vital now as ever to prevail in conflict, but more desirably, to promote peace through understanding.