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MEMORANDUM FOR: Deputy Director for Operations

FROM : Thomas Polgar
Chief, Personnel Management Group

SUBJECT : Foreign Language Skills Requirements
of the Operations Directorate

I. SUMMARY

1. This paper discusses the foreign language skills requirements of the Operations Directorate, takes stock of the unfavorable situation currently existing and submits recommendations for DDO approval.

2. Foreign operations require foreign language skills. While the proper mix of foreign linguists and operational qualifications has always been a problem, in recent years there has been significant net loss of active duty linguists and a reduction in the supply of linguistically-qualified potential new staffers. The foreign language skills in the Operations Directorate have shown a declining trend for many years. There is now a critical shortage of qualified linguists in several major and operationally important languages as well as in many less frequently used ones. Furthermore, we can project greater than average losses over the next five years because of the relatively high age of many of our most skilled linguists still on active duty. Out of Russian speakers at the professional (S-4/5) level as of 30 September 1977, or 56% were over 48 years old. So were 50% of the French speakers, 66% of the Italian, 64% of the German, 53% of the Chinese, 76% of the Japanese and 38% of the Spanish linguists. In all these groups we can expect a substantial number of retirements within the next several years; indeed many will have retired, not always voluntarily, by the end of this year. There is no way that the projected losses could be replaced by the Career Trainees and other personnel newly entering on

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duty. The Agency had [] new employees in CY 1977; 480 foreign language skills were claimed among this group, but only 63 claims resulted in verified speaking skills at the minimum professional level (S-3).

3. Against the above background, it is not surprising that several of our major stations abroad, and SE Division in Headquarters, are currently experiencing major shortages of linguistically-qualified personnel. These shortages are bound to have a detrimental effect on operations and production. With the indications that the situation will get worse, a number of recommendations are submitted to reverse the running trend and to bring about short-term relief through administrative measures.

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II. DISCUSSION

1. Because the bulk of our clandestine collection takes place in foreign countries and involves personal relations with non-English speakers, it follows that DO officers should be equipped to communicate in the environment in which they operate. Knowledge of foreign languages is essential for the understanding of local social and cultural factors bearing on political trends, for developmental activities, for certain debriefings and a variety of operational support.

2. Historically, the Operations Directorate and its predecessors could take pride in the high level of foreign language competence among their personnel. Two major factors contributed to this happy state of affairs: OSS had made a conscious and determined effort to recruit people with foreign language skills, and the continuing involvement of the U.S. military forces abroad provided an ample reservoir of young people with interest in and exposure to foreign environments. With the aging of the OSS group and the cut-back and changing functions of the military, the number of our active duty linguists as well as the supply of linguistically-qualified potential new staffers began to diminish. The problems caused by natural attrition were increased when the FY 1978 and 1979 reductions affected a number of linguists.

3. The unfavorable trends were duly recognized within and outside of the Directorate. The Language Development Committee, under the auspices of the Office of Training, has prepared thoughtful and detailed studies on the subject. The most recent report of this Committee covered FY 1977 and was distributed on 6 March 1978 as OTR 78-8129. The following is quoted from that report:

" . . . The skills at the higher proficiency levels in most languages are being lost faster than the rate of overall Agency attrition. Only about one-half of the Agency's Unit Language Requirements are currently staffed with language-qualified personnel. (Note: If Spanish were to be set aside, the overall statistics would

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look much worse. Spanish is the only language in which most current requirements are being met.)

" . . . The reasons for the steady decline of higher proficiency language skills are quite clear. As older employees whose employment goes back to World War II and the immediate post-war period retire, they are being replaced by employees who lack comparable language skills. This is a problem of not placing sufficiently high priority on language skills in the hiring of new employees (or the lack of language skills among the acceptable applicants).

"The other way to upgrade language skills is through training. Assignment of personnel to full-time language training for sufficiently long periods to register real gains requires careful personnel planning. The record in FY 1977 in which only about one-third of beginning-level students remained for a period approximating a full course of language study clearly indicates the difficulties.

" . . . During the period FY 1973--1977 there was a net loss of 19% of all Full Professional Proficiency (S-4) skills and 28% of all Native or Bilingual (S-5) skills."

4. The Language Development Committee estimated that by the end of FY 1982 20% of all current S-5 and 13% of all current S-4 speakers will be age 60 or older. In fact, we will be worse off than these figures would seem to suggest because the vast majority of our people retire earlier than age 60, the FY 1978--1979 reductions have hit a number of linguists whose important but specialized qualifications resulted in low-rankings by several panels, and not all Agency linguists are available for the Operations Directorate. The average age of skilled linguists in some of the operationally more important languages is as follows (as of 31 December 1977): Chinese, Cantonese 52.0,

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Chinese Mandarin 42.5, Czech 51.0, French 44.9, German 46.6, Greek 49.9, Italian 47.7, Japanese 49.0, Polish 50.4, Portuguese 43.4, Russian 47.3 and Spanish 42.2. Greater than average losses are projected over the next five years for Arabic, Cantonese Chinese, Czech, German, Greek and Italian, along with a number of less frequently used languages. The Directorate of Operations is already facing major language problems with respect to Arabic, Chinese, Czech, German, Greek, Italian, Japanese, Polish and Russian, and of course also numerous other languages of less frequent operational usage.

5. Translated into current operational terms, the linguistic qualifications of personnel available for operations abroad are actually worse than the overall statistics would suggest. The statistics provide the number of skilled linguists, but do not reflect such factors as availability for overseas service and the assignment of linguists to positions where their linguistics skills are not being used. The number of linguists available to fill specific overseas positions at any given time is but a fraction of the total number of linguists inventoried by the Office of Training. The Language Development Committee found that in FY 1977 the language unit requirements at several major stations were filled very inadequately:

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of the shortfall. Two caveats: Language competence at the particular stations may be higher than reflected in OTR statistics because people do improve language skills abroad but do not always have their new knowledge tested or recorded; on the other hand, the unit language requirements established for the several stations are rather on the modest side.

6. Unsatisfactory as the situation of recent years might have been, we should expect further deterioration, as indicated by the following: In French, a language in which today we are still relatively well off, there was a net loss of 17% of professional competence between Fiscal Years 1972 and 1977. However, based on the FY 1972--1977 rate of change, and taking into

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account the age of our French speakers, the projection for 1982 suggests that we will have lost 50.3% of professional level skills over the 10-year period. Comparable figures for some other operationally frequently used languages show the following cumulative net losses: Spanish 29%, Russian 37.6%, German 52.2%, Italian 57.8% and Greek 75%.

7. There will of course be gains at the lower levels of language skills during the period in question, but, without very special encouragement, few of the speakers at the 2 level will "graduate" to the professional level.

8. The obvious solution, to hire personnel with required language proficiencies who also have the potential for operational work, may not be within our means. OSS was able to call upon the vast personnel resources of the military services in time of war. The combination of the draft and the motivation for government service then prevailing in the professions, big business and academia provided a vast reservoir of talent from which to screen and select those who combined linguistic and operational skills. There is not today any national mechanism for the listing of linguistically-qualified persons with mobility and interest in foreign service. Furthermore, there has been a substantial reduction in the number of universities requiring a language to obtain a degree, a gradual breakdown of the European ethnic communities in the United States, accompanied by a decrease in the use of foreign languages in the American home, and an increasing trend toward minimizing the use of U.S. nationals by U.S. business abroad. (There are more U.S. companies represented in foreign countries than ever, but the U.S. nationals employed by the companies are largely in the senior ranks or with considerable vested interest in the continuation of their business careers.) In sum, among those Americans who are likely candidates for Agency employment, there are fewer with useful language skills today than in the past.

9. According to the Annual Report of the Language

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X1 Development Committee, 480 foreign language speaking skills were claimed by [] staff employees who joined the Agency in FY 1977, but only 63 of the claims resulted in verified speaking skills at the S-3 level or better. Among the 55 Career Trainees, 16 had foreign language competence at the S-3 or higher level. The average number of foreign language skills per Career Trainee was 0.29, about the same as in FY 1976 but a drop from 0.45 in FY 1973 and 0.54 in FY 1974.

10. The problems of acquiring personnel with existing language skills were demonstrated recently by the experience of SE Division, a component which has continuing high-priority requirements in several less-commonly available languages. Since 1 January 1977 SE Division screened the files of 96 applicants who claimed fluency in Eastern European languages. Fifty-three applicants were dropped as a result of file review. Of the 43 applicants whose files look good enough to proceed with language testing, 34 were eliminated because of insufficiency of language skills. Of the nine remaining applicants, one was washed out because of personal reasons. One withdrew because of a better offer from NSA, and one was dropped for security reasons. Six are still in process. Number hired since January 1977: Zero.

11. In Europe Division, of [] field case officer positions requiring intermediate-speaking competence in the difficult or less common European languages, only 34 are filled with language qualified incumbents. Only 15 officers are ready or in the pipeline to replace these 34. The situation is particularly difficult with respect to Finnish, Turkish and Greek, and to a slightly lesser extent with Italian and Portuguese. Europe Division considers that, while the situation is bad now, the future outlook for meeting language needs is grim.

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III. CONCLUSIONS

1. The problems of acquiring and maintaining the requisite foreign language skills for the Operations Directorate are difficult and complex, and there will not be any single solution. The current situation is unsatisfactory and detrimental to operational effectiveness, and worse is to be expected.

2. The Operations Directorate needs linguists not only for the pursuit of operations abroad but also for translations, transcribing and analysis. While there are some who can qualify in all of these functions, generally speaking there will be differences in the career goals and personalities of the individuals performing the specific tasks. People who like the language for the sake of language may not necessarily be the ones who will make aggressive operations officers, but may turn out to be fine translators. Those who have a foreign language because of family background, or who acquired it as a tool for personal or professional reasons, bring a great asset into the Agency and it should be a challenging task of screening and assessment to determine who should be channeled into the operational area or to other functions involving the use of foreign language skills. The assumption that foreign linguists are by definition also foreign operations officers has been disproved by experience and most recently by the low ranking given to noted linguists by the evaluation panels.

3. Recent measures in the personnel area, such as forced attrition of linguists and a ban on the hiring of annuitants, have reduced the needed language skills in the Directorate -- however desirable such measures might have been from other perspectives.

4. Management at all levels in the Directorate, as well as in the Office of Personnel and the Office of Training, will have to devote more attention to the procurement and subsequent care and feeding of language-qualified people and to the training of personnel who have aptitude and motivation -- above all, motivation -- for learning foreign languages.

5. The experts seem to be in agreement that professional-level language skills can be developed through

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training in the United States, combined with study or residence in the foreign country concerned. While it should be possible to make assignments sufficiently ahead to permit full-time language training, the reduced ceilings of the operating components and continuing intensive requirements for production and performance raise questions about the components' ability to free their people for language (and other) training. The operating components may well have to re-think their functions and structure -- but that is beyond the purview of this paper.

6. Rebuilding the foreign language skill reservoirs of the Operations Directorate will take time, effort and money. It will not happen quickly or evenly, but the main thing is to reverse the unfavorable trends. The following recommendations are submitted to accomplish that goal over a period of several years. Effective short-term solutions are limited to the hiring of linguistically-skilled annuitants, protection against selection-out of skilled linguists now on board and generous lateral-entry provisions for linguists to function as translators, transcribers or interpreters.

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IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Develop, in coordination with the Office of Training and the Office of Personnel, additional guidelines for the recruitment of language-qualified people for the several occupational categories required by the Operations Directorate. (✓)
2. The provisions of the Language Incentive Program should be simplified, liberalized and subsequently publicized to all personnel. ✓ (E)
3. Career Trainees should be assigned to full-time language training as soon as their first assignment abroad is identified, with transfer abroad following the completion of language training as soon as practicable. (✓)
4. Operating components should insist that operations, reports, and analyst officers develop qualifications in at least one major foreign language. ✓
5. Operations and reports personnel in countries where French, Spanish, German or Italian is spoken should be expected to achieve S-3 level prior to arrival at post. Achievement or maintenance of that level should be reflected in the Letter of Instruction and in the Performance Appraisal Report. ✓
6. Although the precepts for the evaluation and promotion of "D" careerists mention the importance of foreign language skills, evaluation panels should be instructed to give specific and strict attention to language qualifications in the competitive ranking of personnel. (✓)
7. With respect to the more difficult or less frequently used languages, formal instruction should be followed by a total immersion, best accomplished by sending the officer without family for three or four months to an area where the language is spoken, or to the Army language school at Monterey, California. (✓)
8. Panels should be instructed explicitly on the importance of full-time language training and be cautioned against the lower ranking of individuals (✓)

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solely because of time spent in language training.

9. Achievement of S-3 level or higher in full-time language training should be recognized by a Quality Step Increase, in addition to the provisions of the Language Incentive Program. ✓

10. Sponsoring components (preferably at the Branch Chief level) should monitor the progress of full-time language students. OTR should bring to the attention of the sponsoring component significant problems encountered with a student, such as excessive absenteeism. The necessity for discipline in language training should be stressed on components as well as students. ○

11. Drop-out or withdrawal from full-time language training should be justified in writing to the DDO, through CMS, with a copy to OTR. ○

12. Full-time students completing language training should be tested and the level of their proficiency recorded in personnel files. ○

13. Personnel returning from the field should have their foreign language proficiency tested and recorded in personnel files. ○

14. Foreign language proficiency which was demonstrably sufficient for operational purposes should be reflected in the Performance Appraisal Reports. ✓

15. The contract employment of annuitants with critical language skills should be encouraged.

16. Professional linguists should be evaluated for promotion purposes but should not be selected as long as they perform their foreign language-related tasks proficiently. ?

17. Establish procedures for hiring of professional linguists at the going market rate with respect to renumeration in order to permit the Agency to compete with private industry and other governmental entities for individuals with critical foreign language

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skills.

18. Establish meaningful career development programs for foreign linguists, including training and opportunities for qualified personnel to transfer to other career cones. ✓



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