

# Regional Slating for Intelligence Military Occupational Specialties

A square peg in a square hole  
by MSgt Paul R. Carey

In a May 2015 edition of the *Marine Corps Times*, the acting undersecretary of defense for personnel and readiness stated, “this is a moment that calls for revolutionary change in the human resources practice of the DOD.”<sup>1</sup> This article, and several other publications, including “*Bleeding Talent: How the U.S. Military Mismanages Great Leaders and Why It’s Time for a Revolution*,” (Palgrave Mcmillan, 2012) by Tim Kane, have long called for change within the military personnel slating system and have attributed a disturbing loss of talent to this anachronistic human resources system. Nowhere is this more evident than in the intelligence occupational specialties within the Marine Corps, where a lack of technical expertise within its intelligence specialists and counterintelligence/human intelligence fields have made Marine Corps intelligence a well-rounded enterprise—but an enterprise lacking in depth and specialization. To solve this experience shortfall and give commanders the tactical and technical expertise in specific geographic regions, Marines in intelligence military occupational specialties should be exclusively assigned to a geographic region for their career.

The Regional Cultural Language and Familiarization (RCLF) program officially stood up in October 2012 through the publication of MARADMIN 619/12 and attempts to build

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**He should be an African regional specialist. (Photo by Sgt Marco Mancha.)**

regional and cultural professionals.<sup>2</sup> However, the RCLF is a non-binding training course, meaning a Marine completing the Northeast Asia RCLF block has no guarantee that he/she will be assigned in Northeast Asia or supporting operations in Northeast Asia. Even if a Marine serves in a billet supporting a respective geographic region, the Marine will be transferred in 2-3 years to an unrelated area of operations, taking the critical cultural knowledge and language expertise with them. Marines are assigned RCLF regions at random<sup>3</sup> under the auspices of the needs of the Marine Corps; however, there are more than a few instances of Marines with extensive cultural and language experience in one region are assigned another completely opposite region. Would it not be in the best interests of the Marine Corps to harness the past experiences of a Marine and use the RCLF to build upon those experiences vice starting from the ground up?

There are many anecdotal instances of intelligence Marines with cultural and language experiences never being used to their full potential, or in some cases, being used at all. Non-cryptologic intelligence Marines are often sent to the Defense Language Institute for one year or more, depending on the language, only to find themselves never using their target language. Marines are taught Chinese, one of the top foreign language needs across the DOD,<sup>4</sup> only to return to an intelligence battalion set to deploy to Iraq or Afghanistan, never getting the chance to use their newly learned language and cultural knowledge. This problem is common across the services, with the Army sending its Korean linguists to Iraq or taking their Arabic linguists to Iraq, then failing to use their language skills.<sup>5</sup> This represents a huge waste of money and manpower, not only from the several hundred thousand dollars required to train Marines to linguistic standards but from the redundancy caused by hiring civilian contractors to do the jobs we train our Marines to do.

To combat the lack of cultural and language experience and build upon the Marine Corps' "small cadre of professionals," Marines serving in the intel-



**An intelligence specialist with Chinese language skills that this CG of MARFORPAC needs may be assigned to MARFOREUR. (Photo by LCpl Wesley Timm.)**

ligence Military Occupational Specialties would choose or be assigned a region following completion of their respective basic intelligence school. This decision or assignment would be irrevocable and would essentially "lock" that Marine in to a specific geographic region tied to a combatant command. Following their regional assignment, Marines in certain intelligence specialties such as the CI/HUMINT field would be sent to language school then on to their next assignment. For the remainder of their career, this Marine will become intimately familiar with his assigned region and various languages through training courses like the RCLF and real life experiences; Marines in EUCOM who learned Russian as their target language would be given the opportunity to learn Ukrainian, Romanian, or Bulgarian and support the various military-to-military exercises, either on the ground as a CI/HUMINT Specialist or in a SCIF as an intelligence specialist, building products and briefing commanders as the technical experts of that region. Marines supporting the PACOM area of operations could find themselves assigned to any Marine Corps unit supporting that specific area of operations. However, Marines assigned to a geographic area, AFRICOM for instance, would not be sent to III MEF to support Ulchi Free-

dom Guardian in South Korea.

Adopting the idea of having Marine Corps intelligence personnel focused on one geographical area is similar to the recommendations set forth by then-MG Michael T. Flynn in his report, "Fixing Intel: A Blueprint for Making Intelligence Relevant in Afghanistan." Specifically, MG Flynn recommended that analysts divide their work along geographical lines and assimilate the entire intelligence picture vice each analyst looking at one specific subject. However, to implement the concept of geographic Marine Corps intelligence, the Marine Corps must make a fundamental shift in the assessment, selection, training, and retention of Marines in intelligence specialties. Today, civilian analysts in the Defense Intelligence Agency and other civilian agencies are better trained at analysis and writing as compared to military personnel, largely due to the military's penchant for grooming servicemembers and officers for leadership and management roles.<sup>6</sup> If the Marine Corps expects to maintain relevance in intelligence analysis and intelligence operations throughout the world, the Marine Corps will have to shift toward a specialization track vice the "well-rounded Marine" track. Taking a Marine who has spent 3 years in the EUCOM or AFRICOM area

of operations and sending them to a different geographic region or out of their military occupational speciality altogether may develop a well-rounded Marine—but at the expense of intimate knowledge and technical expertise of that specific geographic region, expertise that will take another 3 years to cultivate from scratch until the cycle begins again.

The goal is to make Marines true experts in their area of operations and provide the commander the tools necessary to succeed in operations other than war. In order to succeed, Marines must be culturally and linguistically astute and the Marine Corps must not only commit money to maintain these perishable skills,<sup>7</sup> they must commit to using these Marines with those perishable skills.

#### Notes

1. Andrew Tilghman, “Pentagon’s Quiet Push for Military Personnel Reform,” *Military Times*, (August 12, 2015), accessed at <http://www.militarytimes.com>.

2. Headquarters Marine Corps, MARADMIN 619/12, “Implementation of the Regional, Culture, and Language Familiarization Program,” (24 October 2012), accessed at <http://www.marines.mil>.

3. <https://www.mcu.usmc.mil/coacl/sitepages/index.aspx>.

4. Tracey A. North, “A National Security Crisis: Foreign Language Capabilities in the Federal Government,” (21 May 2012), accessed at <http://www.fbi.gov>.

5. Max Rosenthal, “Lost in Translation: How the Army Wastes Linguists Like Me,” *Wired*, (25 August 2011), accessed at <http://www.wired.com>.

6. Michael Flynn, Matt Pottinger, and Paul Batchelor, “Fixing Intel: A Blueprint for Making Intelligence Relevant in Afghanistan,” *Center for a New American Security*, (January 2010), accessed at <http://www.cnas.org>.

7. D.A. Anderson, “Rebuilding the Postwar Marine Corps,” *Proceedings*, 133(2), 2007: 44–48.



**Simply speaking Spanish does not make an intelligence Marine a country expert on Mexico or South America. (Photo by Sgt Adwin Esters.)**

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