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Development of foreign language capability as a valued human resource asset within the military

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ABSTRACT

English has held the status as a global language for many years, and has been the language in which the corporate and military sectors conduct their international operations. However, due to globalisation, technological advances and challenging economic times, the environments in which businesses and defence forces operate have evolved considerably. Defence forces are increasingly involved in non-traditional operations, in non-traditional geographical locations, working alongside non-traditional international security partners. In light of the changing role and expectations of the military, Conway (2005) suggests that the military sector has been guilty for too long of assuming that English, the traditional language of international diplomacy, politics, economics and military operations, will remain the prevalent language. While the corporate sector has recognised foreign language capability as a human resource asset, its importance and operational relevance is largely unacknowledged within the military sector.

The aim of this study was to examine how modern English speaking defence forces, such as the New Zealand Defence Force (NZDF), are addressing the issue of 'linguistic complacency' (Crystal, 2003), and what plans are in place to develop human resources as foreign language capable assets. For the NZDF, the concept is new. Consequently, a preliminary investigation into one of the single Services, the Royal New Zealand Navy (RNZN), was undertaken. It identified Mandarin Chinese, French, Hindi and Japanese as the foreign languages of greatest applicability to the Service. Census survey results of RNZN uniformed personnel indicated that over half of respondents had some second-language ability (of varying proficiency level) across more than forty languages. Despite the reported foreign language capacity, the results, when compared with the Service's desired skills sets, suggested that there are a number of gaps between the ideal and current capability requirements. A United States Department of Defense model for developing foreign-language capability was discussed as a blueprint for how the RNZN and NZDF could look to bridge these gaps through the strengthening of educational ties with defence partners.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

ADFA	Australian Defence Force Academy
ADFELPS	Australian Defence Force English Language Profiling System
ATLAS	RNZN Personnel Database
CBRIP	Capabilities-Based Requirements Identification Process
CEFR	Common European Framework Reference for Languages
DLILFC	Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center
DLPT	Defense Language Proficiency Test
EEC	European Economic Community
ELP	Council of Europe's European Languages Portfolio
FAMT	RNZN Fleet Activity Management Tool
FAO	Foreign Area Officer
FPTO	Fleet Personnel and Training Organisation
GAO	US Government Accountability Office
IAS	International Affairs Specialist
ILR	International Language Roundtable
IRT	Rasch Scaling Item Response Theory
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force
LMS	Learning Management System
LREC	Language Skills, Regional Expertise and Cultural Capabilities
MLF	Multinational Land Force
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation

NCO	Non-Commissioned Officer
NZDF	New Zealand Defence Force
PAS	Politico-Military Affairs Strategist
PAT	Process Action Team
PI	Potential Indicator
RAS	Regional Affairs Strategist
RMCC	Royal Military College of Canada
RMN	Royal Malaysian Navy
RNZN	Royal New Zealand Navy
SAF	Slovenian Armed Forces
SAS	Special Air Service
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNIFIL II	United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon
USA / US	United States of America