

Introduction

Reflecting on the Past and Future of the Premier Scholarly Event for Department of Defense Language, Regional Expertise, and Culture Scholars

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Abstract

This introduction applies the “Hindsight 20/20” theme to the history of the symposium as an event, while making the argument for continued language, regional expertise, and culture (LREC) education across the force. It begins by reviewing the history of the symposium, followed by a reflection on lessons learned from the 2020 event, before concluding with a summary of the enclosed papers that collectively suggest the need for greater LREC research and teaching on the themes discussed herein.

LREC Symposium History and Lessons Learned

The idea for the Air University (AU) LREC Symposium began as a response to three concerns at AU in the 2014–2015 period. First, we wanted to showcase the work done in the LREC area by students, faculty, and staff at AU, as a way to improve awareness of the contributions of the Air Force Culture and Language Center (AFCLC) to AU and the Department of the Air Force. We were seeing many well-researched student research papers that were not getting the attention we thought they deserved, either at AU or more broadly. Second, we wanted to provide a venue for discussions about LREC education, training, *and* practice that we felt did not get enough attention in local or national circles. There are conferences focused on military history, international relations, foreign language teaching and learning, and armed forces and society, but none that covered all these topics for the Department of the Air Force or military audiences at large, and few that address LREC-related best practices in military operations and planning. We saw a niche that could be filled, much in the same way that AFCLC was set up to fill the gap in LREC education, training, research, and practice. Finally, the mid-2010s were an era of enduring budgetary constraints, resulting in limited travel funds for professional development. We hoped to provide a setting for our colleagues to present their work locally if they could not do so nationally or internationally.

The first LREC Symposium was restricted to personnel at Maxwell AFB and Gunter Annex, both in Montgomery, Alabama, with a few invitations extended to nonmilitary or non-Maxwell/Gunter people in the local area. We had a few dozen presenters and attendees and felt the event was enough of a success to propose a second annual event. The second annual symposium (and every one since) opened participation to anyone in the Department of Defense (DOD), the general public, and even to international partners. The papers in this special edition represent some of the best works presented at our fifth annual event, which hosted more than 2,000 attendees, as you will read below.

Planning for the 2020 event began well before the COVID-19 pandemic changed the world. The “Hindsight 20/20” theme was chosen because the year 2020 called to mind this phrase. And with our US efforts drawing down in Afghanistan and Iraq, it seemed to be a good time to reflect on the growth of LREC education and training in the military since 2001. Back in 2019, the coordinating committee had no way of knowing that this theme ironically foreshadowed the fact that this meeting would turn out to be historic in its own right. The lockdowns and disruptions to everyday life that began in March 2019 had by June led the committee to transition to planning for an all-virtual event. We had never coordinated a virtual symposium before. The planning team met the myriad technical, managerial, and intellectual challenges with energy and creativity.

Going virtual meant that we could open the event to vastly more participants than ever before, including people presenting and attending. Over 120 people presented on a total of 75 panels, and almost 2,100 individuals registered to attend. The scope of the event was nearly 600 percent bigger than all previous years’ figures combined in terms of overall participation. The potential impact of the greater number of views on the content presented, some of which was recorded and still lives online, was correspondingly much more significant.

Thus, one lesson learned is that AFCLC ought to continue to entertain virtual or hybrid formats for future events, even after things return to “normal.” This is something that much of the industrialized world is also discussing in 2021 as we gradually shift back to more in-person work events. Virtual events—from small meetings to large, multiday gatherings—are often more cost-effective for sharing ideas than in-person gatherings. However, virtual events are arguably less productive for encouraging ad hoc networking characteristic of large in-person conferences. On balance, there are benefits and drawbacks to both approaches. Rather than simply returning to in-person meetings because many of us prefer to interact face-to-face, the relative strengths of the virtual, or hybrid, formats ought to be accounted for when discussing goals and objectives for information sharing toward the generation of new ideas and professional contacts.

Beyond lessons pertaining to the event's virtual format, the specific conceptual challenges that came to light while planning and executing this event are worth considering in more depth. These deal with core themes that comprise a separate set of evolving lessons learned.

There are working conclusions to be drawn about the opportunities that emerge when military and nonmilitary audiences interact at the LREC Symposium. As noted earlier, this event brings together career professionals in the military and academia who share an interest in LREC across DOD programs. These groups of people represent a cross-section of society that tends to be acutely aware of what the US military is doing domestically and abroad, while also being conversant with popular and scholarly debates about these activities. Participants tend to be both operationally savvy and strategically or intellectually curious and/or established thinkers in their own right (for example, military university educators often present their research at the symposium). In summary, these groups include various people who do not often come together elsewhere, and their interactions create the potential for original thinking to emerge about broad themes related to the US military in the world.

Whereas many people living outside the continental United States first encounter Americans in military uniforms, this fact is not immediately apparent to many people living inside the continental US, particularly people who have not themselves served in the Armed Forces. The first US citizens that many foreign nationals, especially in the most important ally and partner countries (like Germany, Japan, and South Korea), get to know are members of the US Armed Forces. The United States' global/overseas-facing persona is armed, possesses a right to violence, and tends to have a lot of resources compared to host nationals. There is an ongoing risk that civil society, particularly in the US "mainland," (i.e., not Hawaii, Alaska, the US territories, or overseas installations), is relatively out-of-touch with the view held by many people in foreign countries of US culture as heavily militarized. More frequent scholarly exchanges between US military and civil society stakeholders might help narrow gaps between competing discourses about the culture and the shifting relevance of the American global presence toward more adept relations with allies, partners, and adversaries the world over.

The issue of the US global footprint and its ongoing challenges was an important theme at the 2020 event, as exemplified by Dr. David Vine's keynote presentation followed by several presentations related to global US military basing. Dr. Vine's work, and the topic of whether the US military presence should be scaled back, were discussed at several engaging panels. It became clear as the event progressed that some in the military community may have been a little uncomfortable with these conversations—particularly those which talked around the ques-

tion of whether the US “ought” to be abroad in the first place. As teachers, we know that when someone reacts with discomfort to an idea, this could signal the fact that real intellectual engagement is about to take place. By opening a space to engage with genuinely challenging questions, last year’s symposium created opportunities for personal and institutional reflection. For example, the aforementioned questions fostered a heated, yet polite, exchange of ideas among speakers, participants, and event planners alike. Ultimately, to one degree or another, various US government departments, civilian academics, and not-for-profit groups are actively questioning the scope and rationale behind the global US military presence.

Last year’s symposium was held during what was a polarizing time just prior to the 2020 US national election. After the symposium, we began to consider whether this USAF center with a research and teaching mission ought to host such charged discussions if they risk projecting bad optics—which is to say, giving the impression that we are against the global military presence simply because we are asking questions about it. As academics, we think that as long as difficult topics are contextualized well, they can be entertained at these yearly gatherings. This may mean stating clearly that academic speakers can push boundaries of what is politically correct, status quo, or acceptable in DOD strategic messaging. As suggested, the DOD should be having better conversations with civil society on certain topics, the role of the US military in the world being one of the most important of them.

We believe that military and civil society need to know what is happening in the outposts of the US overseas military footprint. Foreign nationals who host bases and the US military members who are sent abroad are aware of some of the day-to-day headwinds they face that implicate populations living both inside and immediately outside the proverbial fences bordering installations. In other words, many people—inside and outside military installations—are aware of what the US military is doing, how they are doing it, and often if they are not doing things as efficiently as they could be. This knowledge can be operationally and strategically consequential, and indeed it is used by global protest groups with an ax to grind against the global US military. Viewed positively, these contested issues are where we find an opportunity for growth. The intellectual, ethical, and practical questions that emerge when one considers the specific details of what goes on in US installations abroad are interesting from an academic perspective, and they have profound implications for global operations (and strategy) as well. More US citizens and nationals in and outside of the US military ought to be aware of, and engaged with, policies that send Americans abroad every day.

Authors who contributed to this special edition have provided much-needed visibility about the on-the-ground footprint of America in the world in their papers, which also consider the linguistic, regional, and cultural contexts in which they are operating. What follows is a summary of these papers.

Contributed Paper Summaries

Brig Gen Leonard J. Kosinski, USAF, participated in the 2020 Symposium as a featured speaker. His talk was entitled, “Going Multinational in Defense: Lessons for Developing Military Leaders,” which is also the title of his dissertation-in-progress from the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University. The article included herein is based on an interview transcript with Dr. Jessica Jordan and is entitled, “Multinational Business Organizational Models and the US Air Force: An Interview with Brig Gen Leonard J. Kosinski, USAF.” The article is presented in the style of a transcript, with Dr. Jordan’s questions followed by General Kosinski’s answers. Compared to the other papers in this special edition, this transcript is presented in a less formal writing style to reflect the nature of the conversation.

As the title implies, General Kosinski is advocating for adopting some of the best lessons learned in the academic studies of multinational businesses leadership to the management of what he calls “multinational military organizations.” With this project he “seeks to contribute to the development of a theory on military strategic alliances, incorporating the knowledge-based view, which informs scholars, defense policymakers, and practitioners on the implications of knowledge and integration of forces in seeking higher level military capabilities through multinational cooperation” (p. 16). The enclosed interview transcript unpacks what he means by this while exploring how he came to pursue this research. The transcript also touches on various case studies he is using to advance the idea that merging organizations and cultures—a difficult challenge—lies at the heart of what is meant by the adjective *multinational* in these examples.

General Kosinski told stories during his symposium presentation about growing up in Japan, specifically in Iwakuni from grades 7–11. These formative years shaped his view of himself in the world and his view of Japan and its people. His personal background along with his ever-growing professional credentials endow him with a decided advantage to weigh in on contemporary questions about US–Japan relations. While listening to his symposium talk, we appreciated his depiction of the US Armed Forces as a group with an international presence that employs personnel who are only sporadically valued as culture or language experts. We also agree that if one of America’s key strengths is to continue to be its relationships, they should be made into a more central focus of efforts by educating

and training uniformed representatives of the US government for forward positions across the globe.

Maj Logan H. Barlow's "*Erga Omnes Securitas: International Security and Reliance on Sustainable Partnerships*" draws upon original research he conducted while an Air Force Fellow. This research includes interviews with key leaders, politicians, and scholars, along with observations and Japanese government data he gathered while working in Japan as a Mansfield Fellow. His research sheds light on the ways that Japanese and US units make decisions about multilateral training events, while arguing that security cooperation could be improved by some easily implemented policy recommendations. These include increasing exchanges of people, assessing large-scale exercises from the unit perspective, and restructuring and planning in an innovative way.

Major Barlow finds that personal relationships are at the core of successful government cooperation, at every level. He adds that positive human interactions are going to continue to be paramount for future security cooperation, especially in this dynamic region, and suggests that this will require cultivating cross-cultural competence among individual USAF personnel. These recommendations resonate with many other papers in this special edition—in many ways, he speaks for the other contributing authors when he writes: "if a healthy human-based mutual understanding can be fostered on a regular basis, then sustainable security relationships will continue to be a cornerstone of stability in numerous regions around the globe" (p. 28). As a KC-135 Instructor Pilot and certified Indo-Pacific Command (INDOPACOM), Japanese-speaking Foreign Affairs Officer who worked with various large Japanese businesses as well as Government of Japan ministries, Major Barlow's insights are based on a wide breadth of professional experience in Japan. What is more, his academic background as a Mansfield Fellow infuses his research with a depth and rigor characteristic of a graduate thesis, an excerpt of which he reworked for this project.

US Air Force captains Julian Gluck and Byron Muhlenberg's "Opening the Door to Cultural Understanding and Mutual Cooperation: Multinational Military Partnerships and Educational Outreach" argues for improved cultural understanding as the basis for strengthening US relationships with allies in INDOPACOM. The co-authors cite academic studies along with anecdotal observations from experiences working in Japan in different operational capacities, including distinguished visitor support and assignments and exercises with multinational partners. Gluck and Muhlenberg have different strengths and cite various successes and failures they personally observed that they bring to bear on their argument that the DOD could improve operations significantly by investing in cultural education for Airmen.

For example, Captain Gluck discusses his experiences at Cope North, when he participated as a B-52 pilot and a Japanese Language Enabled Airman Program (LEAP) scholar who was able to interpret multilateral exercise instructions for his Japanese counterparts. Some challenges he witnessed during this operation included language barriers due to the dearth of bilingual participants, most of whom were from the Japan side. This is important because “mission planning, briefings, sorties, and debriefs were less effective due to language barriers and the cultural differences that existed with planning and analytical processes.” In addition, he points out that nations’ varying levels of classification of tactics, techniques, and procedures, although essential for security, may diminish “full interoperability” between forces. (p. 43).

Captain Muhlenberg’s experiences include twice serving in contracting management roles in Japan, such as his current role as Director of Business Operations at Misawa AB, as well as traveling to Hokkaido to support the bilateral exercise Northern Viper where he assisted the Marines in synchronizing port operations. He echoes his co-author Captain Gluck, in arguing that in all his activities in Japan involving the USAF and Japan Air Self-Defense Force “determined interaction over the course of the operation was the key to success” (p. 43). He goes on to caution that increased interactions between forces is not the same thing as cultural understanding, which is a point that the co-authors clarify in the final section of the paper.

The authors summarize their respective experiences in joint exercises by saying that exercises tend to get off to a rocky start because “there is not rapport yet between the two sides or there is a lack of knowledge of the other’s culture, problems for which there are not enough experts to fill in these and other possible gaps” (p. 44). They also suggest that while the AFCLC does a good job hosting various language and culture programs and courses for the USAF and US DOD, overall, too few of these kinds of opportunities exist. What is more, they suggest that there is a lack of awareness of the existing AFCLC opportunities. They recommend: (1) greater training and education for people going abroad, (2) proliferating greater utilization of the regional experience identifier subset of the Special Experience Identifiers (SEI) to leverage personnel’s language capabilities and/or cultural savvy, and (3) facilitating even better outreach about existing programs. They suggest that this outreach could consist in part of efforts toward galvanizing “involvement and cooperation with local and regional civic groups” (p. 45).

MSgt Timothy, US Space Force, is a LEAP scholar in Tagalog who draws extensively upon his own experiences in the article “Strengthening Interoperability through the Language Enabled Airman Program: Perspectives from the 2018 to 2019 US–Philippine ISR Mission.” As an active-duty service member directly

involved in intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) missions, per regulation MSgt Timothy's name is limited to rank and first name only. He argues that achieving the 2018 *National Defense Strategy* call for more interoperability with allies and partners like the Philippines will require focused US assistance to help advance these nations' national and multinational military and humanitarian operations (and in the future, autonomy), while also ensuring that US war fighters receive even better cultural and linguistic education.

He opens by describing an ISR mission in which the US–Philippine mission relied heavily on US resources and labor before identifying specific operational gaps and opportunities upon which he makes two types of recommendations. These are: (1) providing more local interagency support and bilingual documentation to bridge language gaps, and (2) cultivating more awareness of LEAP across the force to maximize its reach. His recommendations come directly out of the operational context in which he has been working, and they provide a much-needed glimpse into the highly sensitive military relations in the Philippines in which, as MSgt Timothy makes clear, culture and language competence are of vital importance for interoperable mission success.

The next article by Capt Jasmine Bogard, USAF, returns the reader's focus to Japan, while bringing the examination in to a more localized context to consider global implications of an exemplary program. In, "Expanding Cultural Competencies: Exposing All Outside the Continental United States Airmen to the Local Populous," Captain Bogard draws upon anecdotal and experience-based evidence assembled during her time at Misawa Air Base, Japan, where she is the Assistant Director of Operations assigned to 35th Operations Support Squadron, 35th Fighter Wing.

This article reworks her symposium presentation, in which she described being inspired by the longstanding Misawa AB course for Airmen newly assigned to Japan. She cites academic literature on microaggressions and "othering" to contextualize several instances of cultural *faux pas* she witnessed that had the potential to impact US operations in Japan. Next, she summarizes portions of the US *National Defense Strategy* dealing with alliance building and interoperability, both of which require cultural competence in her assessment, before outlining common barriers to such competence including inadequate cultural awareness and insufficient language proficiency. Finally, she provides an example model of cultural competence drawn from academic literature before stitching all these ideas together to suggest specific qualities the Department of the Air Force ought to ensure are part of a proposed program to bolster cultural competence for all Airmen assigned OCONUS. The article does a good job of putting the reader in the shoes of someone witnessing an American making a preventable gaffe abroad

before walking us through research on how to prevent these moments buffered by real-world programmatic examples toward a conclusion replete with specific recommendations that senior leaders could read and potentially act upon immediately.

Lieutenant Shaquille James' contributed commentary piece, "What Would a North Korean Do? Washington Must See Issues from Adversaries' Perspectives in Order to Move Past Outmoded Policies," walks readers through his thought process for untangling the thorny issue of how to (re)formulate an effective foreign policy toward North Korea (DPRK). He starts with an example of insights he gleaned one day when he was talking with a member of the North Korean defector community and moves into an exposition of the vexing questions about the DPRK facing US leaders before providing recommendations about how to begin answering some of these questions.

Lieutenant James is doing the work of seeing North Korea "like" a North Korean, while of course not "as" a North Korean, to argue that their point of view must be understood if progress toward better relations is to be achieved: "in order to form effective policy and have a real shot at solving things once and for all, the outstanding questions regarding Pyongyang's desires, intentions, and willingness must be resolved" (p. 74). Lieutenant James argues that since leaders in Washington have unfortunately often made decisions based on bad assumptions, a deeper understanding of the constraints faced by a broad range of people who live in the DPRK might help leadership move away from a tendency to treat this country as a monolith. He contends that ultimately, "failure to truly understand North Korean intentions, goals, and what can realistically be expected of them," has historically pervaded the US policy orientation (p. 71). Lieutenant James' years of education in the Korean language and his relationships with the defector community have afforded him proximity to voices from this country that can otherwise be difficult to understand.

Conclusion

Future symposia should continue to build on the best of what is showcased by sharing good ideas widely so that they will be more likely to make a difference. Indeed, the desire for these ideas to have an impact outside of the event itself is the primary motivation behind our effort to pull together this special issue of the journal. Far too often, those of us in professional military education hear stories about military members' experiences in operational settings wherein they recognized an inefficiency or opportunity for improvement, wrote up their ideas and passed them up the chain of command, only to find that ultimately nothing came of their efforts. This is an understandable state of affairs, to be sure, given the ever-

present constraints on time, money, and personnel that are most often focused on retrospective rather than forward-looking program reviews. Bottom-up innovation is difficult to create in the first place, difficult to pass upward to people who could mobilize change around innovative ideas, and difficult to resource in a big bureaucracy even after it is embraced by the right people. However, we must keep trying to share ideas borne out of operational contexts with people in higher levels of policy making and implementation. We hope this special issue will amount to one step in this direction.

Dr. Jessica Jordan

Dr. Jessica Jordan is Assistant Professor of Regional and Cultural Studies (Asia) at the AFCLC. She received her Ph.D. in History (Modern Japan) from the University of California, San Diego and has taught courses on the history of Japan, Micronesia, Southeast Asia, WWII in Asia and the Pacific, and the world since 1500. Her dissertation research involved interviewing several dozen Northern Mariana Islanders about their memories of life under Japanese colonial rule (1914-1945), and she is currently revising chapters for publication as peer-reviewed articles. Her teaching and research interests include: historiography, modern colonialism, nationalism and ethnicity/race, and the politics of memory.

Dr. Patricia Fogarty

Dr. Patricia Fogarty is Assistant Professor of Cross-Cultural Relations at the AFCLC. Dr. Fogarty has worked at AFCLC since 2009, and finished her PhD in Anthropology in 2012. Her dissertation research revolved around the work of an internationally funded development agency in the Republic of Moldova (a former Soviet state). Through the topic of development, she explored Moldovans' experiences of citizenship, national identity, and corruption. Research conducted since joining AFCLC has included documenting the intercultural experiences of Airmen of all ranks and AFSCs. Teaching and research interests include: general cross-cultural awareness and competence; ethnic and national identity; the effects of corruption on military operations; incorporating cultural property protection into professional military education, exercises, and wargames; civil-military organizational relationships in humanitarian and stability operations; and the use of museums and heritage sites for political ends.