

## Intel Official Calls Language ‘Central’ to New Strategy

By Natela Cutter

Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center

MONTEREY, Calif., Nov. 6, 2012 – Undersecretary of Defense for Intelligence Michael G. Vickers was pleasantly surprised Nov. 3 when he encountered his former Spanish instructor at the Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center here while observing a Spanish language class.



Michael G. Vickers, undersecretary of defense for intelligence, speaks with Deanna Tovar, his former Spanish language instructor, whom he had not seen in decades. Vickers observed a Spanish language class at the Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center in Monterey, Calif., Nov. 3, 2012. DOD photo by Natela Cutter (Click photo for screen-resolution image);high-resolution image available.

“Although I was able to understand what was being discussed during the class, I was also a little bit worried, because I thought I was going to be re-tested in Spanish, which has atrophied somewhat,” Vickers said with a chuckle.

“It was wonderful to see my old student. When I saw his face, it all came back to me,” said Deanna Tovar, who had just begun her career as a Spanish instructor in the late 1970s when Vickers was her student and today is dean of the European and Latin American school.

“She was a great instructor, and I am not surprised to see her as the dean of the school and that she has done so well,” Vickers said.

As a young Special Forces soldier and then as an officer, Vickers graduated from the DLIFLC Czech course in 1977 and from the Spanish course in 1979 with top scores.

His unique experience at the Institute has influenced him throughout his career. Vickers has been credited for contributing to the withdrawal of Russian troops from Afghanistan in the 1980s. More recently, he was recognized as a key leader in the process that led to planning, locating, and killing the world's most wanted terrorist, Osama bin Laden.

As a two-time DLIFLC graduate, Vickers was the featured speaker at the center's 71st anniversary ball, attended by Defense Language Institute faculty, staff and leadership.

“When I was here for Czech, my professor told us that language is the most intimate expression of a nation's culture,” he said. “I know DLI really teaches culturally based language instruction, and I have certainly found that true when I have used languages operationally as a Special Forces officer and as a CIA officer.”

As the Defense Department's principal staff member and advisor regarding intelligence, counterintelligence, security and other intelligence-related matters, Vickers has a far-reaching view of how important foreign language and culture are to the future of national security.

“As we come out of a decade of wars, the world is getting more complicated, and there is more volatility, for example, across the Middle East,” he explained. “Having people with these [language] skills is tremendously valuable. If you are not going to have a lot there, you ought to have your best there.

“I think [language] is really central,” he continued. “Our new defense strategy focuses on Asia, North Africa and the Middle East region, and these skills will be paramount to that strategy.”

Though knowing some language goes a long way when conducting intelligence assignments or working in foreign countries in various capacities, Vickers said, high-level proficiency is vital for mission success. He used the Interagency Language Roundtable foreign language government scale to make his point.

“Higher-level skill is critical,” he said. “I have seen a number of times over the course of my career where even 3 Level Russian didn’t cut it on an important national security problem. You needed to be at the 4 Level to really exploit the intelligence that we need.”

Vickers, accompanied by Tim Clayton, the Defense Intelligence Senior Language Authority, and Glenn Nordin, his foreign language and area advisor, also observed an upper division 47-week Russian course called the Russian Arms Control Speaking Proficiency Course. The course is designed to prepare students to work for the Defense Threat Reduction Agency, DOD’s official combat support agency for countering weapons of mass destruction.

Commenting on all the changes that have taken place at the Institute over the past three decades, Vickers said he was most impressed by DLIFLC’s strategic outreach that takes place in 29 locations around the world and includes sustainment and pre-deployment training.

**Biographies:**

[Michael G. Vickers](#)

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*Michael G. Vickers, center, undersecretary of defense for intelligence, observes students of an upper division Russian course designed prepare students to work for the Defense Threat Reduction Agency. Vickers was accompanied by Human Capital Management Director and Defense Intelligence Senior Language Authority Tim Clayton while visiting the Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center in Monterey, Calif., Nov 3, 2012. DOD photo by Natela Cutter*

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*Michael G. Vickers, left, undersecretary of defense for intelligence, listens to a Nov. 3, 2012, briefing presented by Army Col. Danial D. Pick, commandant of the Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center, about the institute’s foreign language and culture training mission. DOD photo by Natela Cutter*

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*Michael G. Vickers, undersecretary of defense for intelligence, observes a Spanish class taught at the Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center in Monterey, Calif., Nov. 3, 2012. Vickers is a 1979 graduate of the DLIFLC Spanish course. DOD photo by Natela Cutter*

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*Michael G. Vickers, undersecretary of defense for intelligence, and Defense Intelligence Senior Language Authority Tim Clayton look at a working memory application on an iPad for Iraqi language demonstrated by Shannon Salyer, DLIFLC senior research scientist, Nov. 3, 2012. Salyer heads a brain fitness research project to speed up foreign language students’ vocabulary acquisition. DOD photo by Natela Cutter*

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