



(U//FOUO) Motivating 'Benched' Language Students

FROM: [REDACTED]
(S) Deputy Chief, Levant and North Africa (S2E3)
Run Date: 06/27/2006

(S) An S2 office introduces trainee language students to their future coworkers, with positive results...

(S) Back in January 2004, NSA launched the Language Enhancement Program (LEP), aimed at "building the bench" of tomorrow's cryptologic language analysts. (See [related article](#).) Today there are 180 LEP students at the National Cryptologic School; they are learning Arabic, Korean, Persian/Farsi, Chinese, and Pashto. If you hope LEP graduates will eventually call your office "home," please keep reading... there's an action for you in this article!

(S) When I heard that the newly created LEP would hire people with 2/2 skills (i.e. limited working proficiency) in commonly taught languages such as French, and cross-train them to a 3/3 level (i.e. general professional proficiency)* in critically needed, less-commonly-taught languages such as Arabic, my heart went out to those students. You see, I began my career as a Russian language student trapped at Airport Square for 9 months, with no idea what I had been hired to do; but at least I had survived 2 years of college Russian and I knew that my course would run for only 9 months before I'd be introduced to the real world of operations.

(S) These LEP students are a brave group, coming to learn a new foreign language and knowing that they must achieve a 3/3 level proficiency before they cross into the world of operations. So naturally, I developed a soft spot for these students, even though I had never met them.

(S) Then, in my former job in Counterterrorism and now in my current job in MENA**, I developed another soft spot -- for the Agency's Arabic linguists, who are too few and too overworked. I've often heard people tell these linguists to "hang in there" because Arabic students will eventually come to the rescue. But how will these "benched" students stay motivated long enough to graduate from the LEP? I knew that if they could just get a glimpse into the exciting world of operations, they'd have a better chance of staying with the program. So, I combined these two soft spots for the common good and instigated a "LEP Students' Day in the Life of the Levant/North Africa Division" event.

(S) I chose the word "instigated" carefully, because I just solicited the help of linguists and intelligence analysts in my division, threw in some organizational planning (like what kind of drinks and snacks to have on hand) and stirred the pot a bit. The result was a day that inspired and motivated the LEP students, and reminded seniors linguists that enthusiastic and well-trained help really is on the way.

(S) If you hope LEP graduates will eventually call your office "home," I encourage you to host some students for a day. It's not hard to do; we even have a "LEP-Day Planning for Dummies" guide to share. (Contact me at [REDACTED] nsa for a copy.) The LEP students are on the bench today, but they'll be in the bullpen and on the mound before you know it!

(U//FOUO) Notes:

*See [USSID AP2150](#) Section 5 for further info on proficiency levels.

**MENA = Middle East North Africa

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TOP SECRET // SI / TK // REL TO USA AUS CAN GBR NZL
DERIVED FROM: NSA/CSSM 1-52, DATED 08 JAN 2007 DECLASSIFY ON: 20320108