



SOCIAL SCIENCES AND LANGUAGE DEPARTMENT OF THE MILAN RASTISLAV ŠTEFÁNIK ARMED FORCES ACADEMY AND UNITED STATES ARMY CIVIL AFFAIRS: THE IMPORTANCE OF LANGUAGE IN RELATIONSHIP BUILDING AND MILITARY CAPACITY

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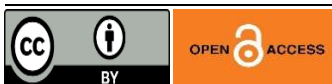
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ABSTRACT

The complex environment of military operations revolves around an intricate interplay where forces conduct activities in concert to achieve desired end states. Training exercises provide opportunities to rehearse tactics and develop systems to improve interoperability. U.S. Army Civil Affairs placement in Slovakia in support of Operation European Assure, Deter, and Reinforce developed relationships across the country to enhance resilience, build cooperative partnerships, and strengthen the NATO alliance. Language is the foundational requirement of interoperability and determines the efficacy of multinational cooperation. The existing relationship at the Milan Rastislav Štefánik Armed Forces Academy can be expanded to ensure training exercise frameworks are postured for success with participants capable of communicating effectively.

KEYWORDS

language support, cooperation, communication, interoperability



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INTRODUCTION

An authentic relationship is one in which both parties work in partnership with shared values in pursuit of mutually beneficial goals. This type of substantive relationship results in mutually beneficial end states as their shared purpose unites the parties in their journey. The relationship between United States Army Civil Affairs and the Social Sciences and Language Department of the Milan Rastislav Štefánik Armed Forces Academy demonstrates this type of dynamic relationship and manifestation of North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) principles working in concert. With senior leader support, this relationship can be expanded and set conditions for the military concept of interoperability in the context of multinational exercises. An existing framework exists that can be broadened in advance of multinational training events to ensure Slovak and United States military participants maximize their

operational exchanges. As cadets at the academy are the future leaders of Ozbrojené sily Slovenskej Republiky (OSSR), senior leader support for future Civil Affairs teams contributing English language support to the Social Sciences and Language Department serves a strategic purpose for effective bilateral exchanges and military training with a force that is competent in English language proficiency.

1 U.S. ARMY CIVIL AFFAIRS IN SLOVAKIA

I have had the fortune as a United States Army Reserve Civil Affairs Team Chief to participate in an enduring relationship with the Milan Rastislav Štefánik Armed Forces Academy and contribute to the example of a dynamic and substantive working relationship. World events have created proximity under the auspices of the NATO to enhance collective defence and demonstrate to the world the strength of our alliance. This unifying purpose is in fact written into the fabric of the Slovak Republic in the preamble to the Constitution stating that the Slovak nation is focused on *“the interest of continuous peaceful cooperation with other democratic countries”* (Constitution of the Slovak Republic, 1992, p. 2). It is also encouraged within the Slovak Republic National Defense Strategy in the guidance to celebrate the benefits of Slovakia’s participation in the NATO alliance.

NATO’s vision includes pursuit of a “world where sovereignty, territorial integrity, human rights and international law are respected and where each country can choose its own path, free from aggression, coercion or subversion” (NATO 2022 Strategic Concept, 2022, p. 2). These sacred goals are the reason the government of the Slovak Republic has invited U.S. Army Civil Affairs to work by, with, and through the Slovak Armed Forces to build relationships, share insights, and increase the readiness of both the United States and Slovak Armed Forces military in the context of collective security. The mandate to provide “training and advice” stipulated by the Slovak Republic for U.S. Army Civil Affairs in Slovakia provides the avenue for Civil Affairs to interact with civilian staff at the Academy while also participating in military engagements (Official Statement of the National Council, 2020).

2 MULTINATIONAL COOPERATION: INTEROPERABILITY

Our command guidance has been succinct, direct, and clear from the start in that our placement in Slovakia is to reinforce collective security on NATO’s eastern flank by establishing partnerships, building relationships, and sharing resources across a variety of civil and military actors to strengthen the unifying nature of NATO in Slovakia. It is the solidarity of collective defense and the associated anticipatory relationship building that increases each participant’s capacity to thrive in advance of crisis, conflict, or natural disaster. The Academy invitation shows a connection between NATO and the underlying mechanisms that strengthen a military within collective defense. The English language support provides a venue to engage in interpersonal interactions while also remaining steadfast in building technical skillsets that

shape future relationships in the multinational operational environment. U.S. Army literature announces that interoperability *“is the ability of alliance forces and, when appropriate, forces of partner and other countries to train, exercise, and operate effectively together in the execution of assigned missions”* (Multinational Interoperability: Reference Guide, 2016, p. 72).

This literature boldly states that interoperability *“clearly involves more than communications”* and is exemplified in *“synergy among members”* (Multinational Interoperability: Reference Guide, 2016, p. 72). Therefore, communication establishes itself as the initial, foundational, and driving prerequisite of working in partnership in the multinational environment. It cannot be inappropriately viewed as a luxury but reinforces itself as of primary importance. In fact, General Chris Cavoli discussed the importance of language to the United State’s Senate when discussing the technical requirements of military materiel and the ability to read manuals in English (US Military Leaders Testify About EUCOM, 2024). U.S. Army literature alludes to the human dimension as it states that the *“need for interoperability at the tactical level continues to go lower and lower”* referring to the interpersonal realities of working in multinational partnership (Multinational Interoperability: Reference Guide, 2016, p. 1).

The cooperation between the Armed Forces Academy and Civil Affairs is important considering the baseline requirement of partnership including the ability to communicate. Interoperability becomes increasingly complex once standard operating procedures, doctrine, and tactics, techniques, and procedure frameworks are incorporated. All these concepts reinforce the importance of supporting the language development and work done by the Social Sciences and Language Department.

3 U.S. ARMY CIVIL AFFAIRS

As members of the United States Army Reserve, we each arrived in Slovakia with civilian skillsets. As a Licensed Clinical Social Worker at Veterans Affairs with experience in therapeutic settings, I am familiar with the shared journey of therapist and client. Elvins and Green (2008) speak at length about the importance of the therapeutic alliance, where both parties work in unison towards an agreed upon goal. The therapeutic alliance views the interaction as one between equals, where each actor stands to learn from the other’s insight and experience. While I am not intending to apply this analogy rigidly in the current context of our placement in Slovakia; the comparison has apt variables. We are guests in Slovakia and consistently are privileged to enjoy Slovak hospitality. Our invitation to Slovakia is to function as the interface between civil society and the military. We work in partnership sharing insights, skills, and grow in unison through the equitable power dynamic. As a result, we have admired the resilience of Slovak institutions, the strength of its democratic processes, the might of its military, and the friendship that is the output of our interactions at the academy. This access is an ideal venue to leverage in advance of multinational exercises to enhance its efficacy by ensuring Slovak participants are competent in English.

4 INTEROPERABILITY: THE HUMAN DIMENSION

Senior leaders appreciate the importance of partnerships as multinational exercises are designed to strengthen the alliance and develop the shared understanding of military tactics that collective defense relies on. The U.S. Army Combined Arms Center discusses the focus of multinational force interoperability and the priority of training for collective defense as a cohesive unit with allies and partners. This involves not only technical and tactical requirements within military formations; but reaches into the familiarity required within interpersonal interactions. U.S. Army literature on interoperability, or the requirements for how to work alongside NATO allies, discusses how *“the human dimension builds the basis of mutual understanding and respect that is fundamental to unity of effort and operational success”* (Multinational Interoperability: Reference Guide, 2016, p. iii).

Our role in Slovakia involves interacting within human dimensions to build working relationships with our partners. Specifically, this involves partnership with Civil Military Cooperation at the 57th Detachment. As both of our military’s primary civil component focused force, we typically identify opportunities within civil society to strengthen civil resilience and increase societal capacities in advance of times of need. This adheres to our fundamental roles within the civil component to address NATO Article III baseline requirements for resiliency. However, it is our extended relationship with the Armed Forces Academy where we are addressing the human dimension that is vital to interoperability. It is here where we understand the gravity of our work alongside our Slovak friends, allies, and partners in Slovakia. The Milan Rastislav Štefánik Academy graciously extended an invitation for increasing partnership between our countries through direct engagement. This invitation demonstrated supreme insight in foreseeing novel avenues to celebrate the NATO partnership through interactions at the academy. This is the pathway for senior leaders to leverage an existing relationship to ensure that multinational exercises take place between military forces that can effectively communicate with each other.

5 MILAN RASTISLAV ŠTEFÁNIK ARMED FORCES ACADEMY AND THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

The Social Sciences and Language Department has the monumental task of ensuring the cadets at the academy can communicate in multiple languages. This important task prepares cadets for their honorable service in the Slovak Armed Forces in support of the Slovak Republic and potential missions as part of the United Nations and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Their creative problem solving resulted in extending an invitation for a relationship with U.S. Army Civil Affairs in providing English language support.

The halls of the Academy display a profound quote by Ludwig Wittgenstein that reads *“the limits of my language mean the limits of my world.”* Philosophical paradoxes abound when considering the possibility or inability to describe something that doesn’t necessarily exist. In the emotional realm this relates to fleeting sensations that are therefore difficult to

articulate. In the military context, this challenge is limited by one's own command of doctrine and the subsequent ability to relate this in another language. This is to say nothing of the future difficulty in high stress situations. Regardless, the practical application of expanding one's world through developing language to minimize those concepts that escape expression remains the focus of the Social Sciences and Language Department. This expansion of vocabulary and support to the development of cadet lexicon is where our Civil Affairs team enjoys conversations and direct engagement. Our demonstration of native English discourse provides an innovative addition to the language instruction at the academy.

From my experience as a Licensed Social Worker, the expansion of one's world relies on increasing awareness which fundamentally requires accurate assessment and ascribing of the correct term to one's experience. This refers back to the Ludwig Wittgenstein quote that inherently encourages expansion of vocabulary to make the abstract tangible, to give name to the immaterial, to ultimately tame the nebulous realities of existence that cause strife. In fact, within the therapeutic world, the heart of recovery is in "*naming the unnamable*" or the ability to ascribe terminology which enables understanding (Maddick, 2011). Cadets face the pending trial of leadership that is further intensified by multinational environments reinforcing the importance of strengthening their English skills. Leaders must be able to issue orders and clearly explain direction to subordinates to accomplish the mission. They must have English skills to cross language barriers that exist when working with multinational NATO partners. In multinational exercises, partner forces must be able to communicate directly and across a variety of mediums communicating their placement in the field and their plans for future movement. In the context of training, language is therefore the foundational determinant of a worthwhile exercise. Forces that cannot talk to each other create chaos in an exercise and in a time of crisis will fail to provide security or retain stability.

Way Forward

The conversations Civil Affairs has had with cadets include topics of military tactics, leadership, and general cultural exchange. The existing invitation for Civil Affairs can be expanded in advance of exercises to set conditions for effective training events. Military tactics, described as "the employment, ordered arrangement, and directed actions of forces in relation to each other" relies on military units understanding of doctrine and subsequent ability to communicate (Tactics, 2023, 3-3). In pressured environments, the chance for error greatly increases. Combined arms maneuver creates endless complexity with its (widespread application of highly accurate and lethal weapons, the high degree of tactical mobility, ever-present sensors, and a complex operational environment) (Tactics, 2023, Glossary-22). The existing relationship at the academy shapes the language capability of the next generation of Slovak leaders which explains the interest from academy leadership. While this relationship is oriented towards long term effects in the language development of cadets, it could also be oriented towards short term goals in advance of exercises.

Future Civil Affairs Teams could focus exclusively on military terms, concepts, and tactical vocabulary to increase the effectiveness of Slovak personnel participating in an exercise. Senior leaders could ensure that deliberate engagements take place on a routine basis to ensure language development is geared towards a training exercise increasing the likelihood of success and utility for increasing interoperability. Cadets could work in tandem with Civil Affairs to welcome units participating in pending exercises to shape the language capability of the training audience.

Cadets would interact with members of the OS SR resulting in further inspiration as they embark on their leadership trajectory. While ambitious in nature, a focus on language development creates desired end states for a multitude of actors. This expansion would retain the utility of U.S. Army Civil Affairs in assisting language development at the academy. The new dimension would create novel avenues for cadets to grow in their language skillset while creating proximity to experienced members of the OSSR. Encouraging participation from OSSR soldiers who would take part in multinational exercises completes the utility in expanding language development at the academy.

CONCLUSION

The cooperation between Civil Affairs and the Armed Forces Academy reflects commitments to NATO's strategic concept, namely, the military and non-military tools that create a robust deterrence capability. The unifying principles of the NATO alliance and the desire to build substantive partnership are critical in the current age. The ability to express oneself in English is an intuitive requirement of working within the multinational environment and one that expands one's inward and professional experience as encouraged by Ludwig Wittgenstein. The U.S. Army Civil Affairs presence in Slovakia also demonstrates bilateral commitment to partner cooperation across various actors in Slovakia. The gravity of the partnership isn't observed in any isolated extraordinary event but adheres to the simple accumulation of a steadfast commitment.

Allen (1902) encourages the commitment to *"when one understands that the great things of the world and of life consists of a combination of small things, and that without this aggregation, of small things the great things would be nonexistent"* (Allen, 1902, p. 45). The partnership investment with the academy and dedicated time to this accumulation of small things benefits the future leaders of Slovakia and can ensure successful training events. With a small but substantive change incorporating the OSSR in advance of exercises, language development could set future conditions for an effective force capable of communicating in English. We have been fortunate to contribute, through our enduring presence and interactions revolving around language support, to the strength of the NATO alliance in Slovakia through our partnership at the Armed Forces Academy.

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