Foreign Studies Policy Urged

A new survey of foreign language and area studies in the United States has concluded that nothing short of a "transformation of language teaching in America" is required to achieve desirable levels of foreign area expertise.

"*Beyond Growth: The Next Stage in Language and Area Studies*," which was funded by the Department of Defense at the behest of Congress, is the most comprehensive report of its kind in 15 years. Basically, it notes that the period of rapid and undisciplined growth in area studies has come to an end, and that the "laissez-faire" approach will not produce a balanced supply of experts.

Study director Richard D. Lambert of the University of Pennsylvania said at a press briefing that while some areas of the world—such as China, Japan, Latin America, and Western Europe—are enjoying abundant scholarly attention, coverage is very skimpy for Africa, South Asia, Southeast Asia, the Middle East, the Soviet Union, and Eastern Europe.

The fundamental problem has been that language and area studies suffer from lack of a coherent long-term policy, and funding has been tenuous and unpredictable since foundations fell away as mainstays of support in the late 1960's. Universities have been going back to basics at the expense of "scarce" languages. Resources have followed the whims of academic fashion (Southeast Asia is now "out," China is "in"). Students are discouraged from area studies because of the paucity of jobs—particularly in academia—and the inordinate length of time it takes to become proficient in a difficult language.

There is disciplinary as well as regional imbalance. Language expertise is disproportionately found among students of the humanities, while in the social sciences even area studies students tend to focus primarily on the disciplines—which, says Lambert, have become increasingly "theoretical, empirical, and American." He says it will be even more difficult to develop foreign area expertise among scientists since mission-oriented agencies are not set up to promote such specialized competencies.

The 400-page report abounds with suggestions aimed at getting maximum benefits with minimal increases in funding. For example, it suggests that certain institutions be supported in creating "segments" or critical masses of scholars in more exotic areas, leading to geographical concentration of certain specialties rather than allowing them to struggle and often wither in isolation.

With regard to language training, the report calls for new "pedagogical institutes" to do research and train teachers; for earmarking money to preserve teaching of "endangered languages;" for expansion of intensive language training facilities; and for the development of an objective way to measure a person's language proficiency.

The study group found a crying need for a federal-level body to set policy and ensure stable funding for area studies, but withheld judgment on whether this should entail setting up a new organization.

Lambert says the Department of Defense has responded "enthusiastically" to the survey and that action is being taken to coordinate military language-teaching activities along suggested lines.

Congress has yet to receive the report from the department, but concern about area studies has been growing in the legislature since the 1979 publication of the President's Commission on Foreign Language and International Studies.

In February, the House passed a bill (H.R. 2708) authorizing $150 million over 3 years for elementary and secondary school foreign language instruction. And Representative Paul Simon (D–Ill.), chairman of the House subcommittee on postsecondary education, has big plans for Title VI of the Higher Education Act, which is the major federal source of area studies funds. He has introduced a 5-year authorization bill which, starting in fiscal year 1986, would almost triple the current annual expenditure of about $33 million. Among other things, it would establish a center for international education within the Department of Education.—**CONSTANCE HOLDEN**

Washington. The report accused the United States of practicing "growing technological imperialism." It added that "the U.S. appears intent on controlling trade in high technology, either directly or indirectly, and recognizes that control of information technology in particular means power over others."

Richard Perle, assistant secretary of defense for international security, dismissed the ICL report in a recent interview with the British Broadcasting Corporation as "sour grapes." Perle said that "frankly it's the sort of remark I'd expect from a company which has lost its position at the forefront of the new technology."

Nevertheless, the charges have generated sufficient support to be taken increasingly seriously in political circles. Furthermore, several American-based computer companies, perhaps aware of the danger of reprisals from European governments, have also expressed their opposition to the Reagan Administration's plans for extending the scope of the Export Administration Act. IBM Europe, for example, has been among the most prominent in complaining that the controls could seriously affect its overseas business.

Oakley warned of even more serious consequences. He points out that, if European research workers are not allowed access to the most up-to-date American research in fields such as very large scale integrated circuits or computer-aided design, the only option will be to develop their own alternative systems, perhaps based on incompatible technical parameters.

"Our communities could drift apart because they could no longer buy each other's products," he says. "Indeed, by encouraging European countries to seek other partners, particularly, Japan, the U.S. could find itself facing an anti-American alliance."

One body which has been looking at the implications of current trends is the scientific committee of NATO. The committee, whose members are scientists appointed by governments in a personal capacity, takes pains to stress that its principal responsibility is to strengthen links between members of the NATO alliance by encouraging greater scientific collaboration, rather than servicing their military needs—a distinction which could itself become increasingly difficult to maintain.

Last October, the scientific committee devoted a special meeting to the problems raised by the growing imposition of controls on scientific information in the name of national security. A brief report