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Disconnected Networks: Notes Toward a Different Approach to Filling the South Asia Expert Gap

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In the wake of September 11, 2001, public debate flourished in the United States regarding the dearth of experts with foreign language skills working in diplomacy, national security, and law enforcement. The debate is one of long standing: its resurrection in 2001 mirrored the concerns of a national debate that took place in 1957 following the Soviet launch of *Sputnik*. The outcome of that earlier exchange was the National Defense Education Act of 1958, legislation which created "area studies" in the United States and instituted programs at universities throughout the nation for the study of modern languages deemed critical.

Similarly, the outcome of the post-9/11 debate about critical foreign language and area study in the United States was a major increase in funding for the programs created by the National Defense Education Act. Some of these funds have been earmarked specifically to increase US national expertise on Central and South Asia, the Middle East, and Russia/the former Soviet Union. Increasing funding in this way assumes that the lack of national expertise in these fields can be remedied by creating more experts through the application of more funding. With respect to expertise on the South Asian region, however, unless concerted attention is focused on the reasons those programs are not already producing experts engaged with the policy world, increasing funding will not increase expertise in Washington. This article argues that the problem is not quantitative, but qualitative – specifically, one of networks – and offers some solutions to bridge the gap.

A budgetary windfall, the aftereffect of September 11, is presently moving through academic institutions across the United States. Public Law 107-116, signed by President George W. Bush on January 10, 2002, infused a fresh US$21 million in federal cash for the Higher Education Act's Title VI/Fulbright-Hays programs, which support language and

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area studies. The increased funds doubled fellowship support for students studying foreign languages deemed "critical" for US interests and are intended to create new positions, materials, and technologies for training in those languages and areas. This was a 26% increase, the largest for Title VI in the history of the program – and it underscored the recognition that there just aren't enough people with language and area-specific knowledge participating in analysis and policymaking about regions with obvious relevance for US interests.

The increase brought Title VI support to $98 million for fiscal year 2002, a level likely to be maintained in the near term if next year's Office of Management and Budget estimates are any guide: the OMB estimate for fiscal year 2003 contains $103 million for Title VI funding.[1] This funding is designed specifically to increase attention and expertise in four prioritized world regions: Central and South Asia, the Middle East, Russia, and the Newly Independent States/former Soviet Union states (see Appendix for complete text). Some highlights include:

- An increase of US$20,478,000 for the Title VI/Fulbright-Hays programs to increase the number of international experts (including those entering government service and various professional disciplines) with in-depth expertise and high-level language proficiency in the targeted world areas of Central and South Asia, the Middle East, Russia, and the Independent States of the former Soviet Union;