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MILITARY TRAINING

Strategic Planning and Distributive Learning Could Benefit the Special Operations Forces Foreign Language Program



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Highlights of [GAO-03-1026](#), a report to the Senate and House Committees on Armed Services

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Strategic Planning and Distributive Learning Could Benefit the Special Operations Forces Foreign Language Program

Why GAO Did This Study

Of the 44,000 special operations forces (SOF) that perform difficult, complex, and sensitive military missions on short notice anytime and anywhere in the world, more than 12,000 (28 percent) have a foreign language requirement to operate in places where English is not spoken. In the Senate Report on the Fiscal Year 2003 National Defense Authorization Act, Congress mandated that GAO review SOF foreign language requirements and training. In this report, we (1) assess the U.S. Special Operations Command's recent actions to improve the management of the SOF foreign language program and the delivery of training, and (2) identify ways for the command to deal with ongoing challenges that limit SOF personnel's access to language-training opportunities.

What GAO Recommends

To improve the management and delivery of language training, GAO is recommending that the Secretary of Defense direct the U.S. Special Operations Command to (1) adopt a strategy and strategic planning and (2) incorporate distributive-learning approaches. GAO also recommends that the Secretary evaluate proficiency pay incentives and pay and allowance funding for SOF reserve and guard members and options for oral testing. The Department of Defense agreed with all but one recommendation, stating that it could not adopt a strategy until it was properly reviewed and approved.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-03-1026.

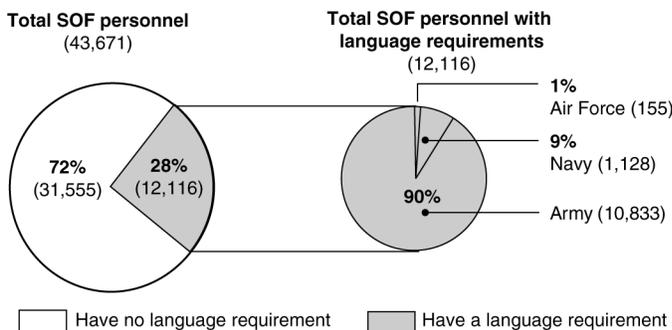
To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Neal Curtin at (757) 552-8100 or curtinn@gao.gov.

What GAO Found

Recent actions taken by the U.S. Special Operations Command are starting to address some long-standing problems with the management of the SOF foreign language program and the delivery of language training. In September 2002, the command consolidated all training under a single contractor to provide a universal, standardized curriculum and a range of delivery mechanisms for Army, Navy, and Air Force SOF components. Initial assessments suggest that the contractor's offerings are meeting contract expectations. In other actions, the program is completing an overdue assessment of SOF language requirements, developing a database of language proficiencies and training, and finding ways to take advantage of other national language-training assets. While promising, these ongoing actions are taking place without the benefit of a cohesive management framework incorporating a strategy and strategic planning to guide, integrate, and monitor its activities. Without such a framework, the program risks losing its current momentum and failing to meet new language-training needs that SOF personnel are likely to acquire as they take on expanded roles in combating terrorism and other military operations.

The SOF foreign language program continues to face challenges, such as more frequent and longer deployments, that limit personnel's access to language training. Army Reserve and National Guard SOF members face additional difficulties in gaining access to centrally located training because of geographical dispersion and part-time status; they also have lower monetary incentives to acquire language proficiencies and fewer training opportunities. As a result, most SOF personnel have been unable to take needed training or required tests to qualify in their respective language(s). To address these challenges, program officials are looking into distance/distributive-learning approaches, which offer "anytime, anywhere" training that would be highly adaptable to SOF personnel needs, but they are still at an early stage in their evaluations.

Number of SOF Personnel Requiring Language Skills



Source: Special Operations Forces Language Office.

Contents

Letter		1
	Results in Brief	2
	Background	4
	Program Addresses Some Long-Standing Problems but Lacks a Strategic Planning Approach	9
	Approach Needed to Improve Access to Language-Training Resources	16
	Conclusions	24
	Recommendations for Executive Action	26
	Agency Comments and Our Evaluation	26
Appendix I	Scope and Methodology	28
Appendix II	Language Proficiency Levels and Requirements	32
Appendix III	Status of the Language Services Contract between the U.S. Special Operations Command and B.I.B. Consultants	35
Appendix IV	Comments from the Department of Defense	41
Appendix V	GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgments	44
Tables		
	Table 1: Special Operations Forces Personnel Requiring Foreign Language Proficiency, by Service Component	7
	Table 2: Number of Special Operations Forces Personnel Needing Language Training for Quarter Ending March 31, 2003	19
	Table 3: Personnel Meeting Language Proficiency Requirement from Quarters Ending September 2002 through June 2003	20
	Table 4: Continuum of Learning Methods	23
	Table 5: Organizations and Offices Contacted during Our Review	28
	Table 6: Foreign Language Capabilities at Proficiency Levels	33

Table 7: U.S. Special Operations Command Proficiency Standards for Service Components	34
Table 8: Foreign Language Training Provided by B.I.B. Consultants Contract	35
Table 9: Student Evaluations Responses from Some Initial Acquisition SOF Language Classes at the U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School, Fort Bragg, North Carolina, during the First Quarter of 200338	
Table 10: Student Evaluations Responses from Initial Acquisition SOF Language Classes at Naval Special Warfare Command, Group I, Coronado, California, during the Second Quarter of 2003	40

Figure

Figure 1: Student Proficiency Score Results for Listening and Reading for Initial Acquisition Language Courses at the Army's John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School for the First Quarter of Fiscal Year 2003	37
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Abbreviations

DOD	Department of Defense
SCOLA	Satellite Communications for Learning
SOF	special operations forces
SOFLO	Special Operations Forces Language Office

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United States General Accounting Office
Washington, DC 20548

September 30, 2003

The Honorable John W. Warner
Chairman
The Honorable Carl Levin
Ranking Minority Member
Committee on Armed Services
United States Senate

The Honorable Duncan Hunter
Chairman
The Honorable Ike Skelton
Ranking Minority Member
Committee on Armed Services
House of Representatives

As they have recently demonstrated in Afghanistan and Iraq, special operations forces (SOF) are playing an increasingly significant role in U.S. military operations by performing extremely difficult, complex, and politically sensitive missions on short notice anytime and anywhere in the world. To successfully conduct these missions, SOF personnel must undergo extensive training—often years in duration—to acquire a wide variety of military skills, among them a proficiency in a foreign language. More than one-fourth of all SOF military personnel, or about 12,000 out of 44,000, have a foreign language requirement in order to enable them to operate effectively in countries where languages other than English are spoken.

To meet its specific language training needs, the U.S. Special Operations Command¹ (the command) established a separate foreign language

¹The U.S. Special Operations Command, located at MacDill Air Force Base, Fla., is one of nine unified commands in the U.S. military's combatant command structure and is responsible for all special operations forces. The command's organization includes three service component commands: the U.S. Army Special Operations Command, Fort Bragg, N.C.; the U.S. Naval Special Warfare Command, Coronado, Calif.; and the U.S. Air Force Special Operations Command, Hurlburt Field, Fla.

program within the Department of Defense (DOD) in the early 1990s.² The command delegated the U.S. Army Special Operations Command as its proponent for foreign language matters and, in turn, the Army command set up the Special Operations Forces Language Office (SOFLO) to oversee and manage the SOF foreign language program. The program prescribes the policies for all aspects of the program, including its funding; reporting; and delivery of initial acquisition, sustainment, and enhancement training for SOF forces in the Army, Navy, and Air Force.

The Senate Report on the Fiscal Year 2003 National Defense Authorization Act³ mandated that we review the foreign language requirements and training for SOF personnel. In December 2002 and April 2003, we briefed your offices on the initial results of our review. In this report, we (1) assess recent actions taken by the U.S. Special Operations Command to improve the management and delivery of its foreign language training to special operations forces personnel and (2) identify ways for the command to deal with challenges that limit accessibility to its foreign language-training resources.

We conducted our review from October 2002 through July 2003 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Our scope and methodology are described in appendix I.

Results in Brief

Recent actions taken by the U.S. Special Operations Command are beginning to address some long-standing problems that have affected the management of the foreign language program and the delivery of its training. However, these actions are being taken without the benefit of a cohesive management framework that could foster continued program improvements. In September 2002, the command consolidated all of its language training under a single contractor to reduce problems with multiple contractors and inconsistencies in the type, quality, and

²Most DOD personnel acquire their foreign language training through the Defense Foreign Language Program. The Department of the Army, the program's executive agent, manages and oversees the program. The Defense Language Institute is the primary educational facility for DOD's language training. While the SOF foreign language program provides most of its training separately from the Defense Foreign Language Program, the SOF program can use DOD and other government-language-training resources to fulfill its needs.

³U.S. Senate, Committee on Armed Services, *National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2003 Report*, Senate Report 107-151 (Washington, D.C.: 2002).

acquisition of training. The new contract is expected to offer the program a universal, standardized training curriculum; a range of delivery mechanisms; and the consistent monitoring of student and teacher performance. An initial quarterly review by the command in March 2003 and our analysis of student performance data suggest that the contractor's offerings are meeting the expectations set out in the contract, such as students' achievement of proficiency goals. In other actions, the program is (1) completing a long overdue assessment of language requirements; (2) expanding its communication and coordination between the Army, Navy, and Air Force SOF offices that use its training and with other language resource stakeholders; (3) developing a database to track foreign language proficiencies and training across the services; and (4) examining ways to take better advantage of other national language-training resources (e.g., the Defense Language Institute). While promising, these actions are being taken without the advantage of a cohesive management framework that incorporates strategic planning (a strategy and a strategic plan with an associated performance plan and reports) that could guide the program, integrate its activities, and monitor its performance. The command has drafted a strategy for meeting its foreign language requirements—a first step in developing this framework—but it has not yet approved it. Without such a framework, the program risks losing its current momentum, and it may be unable to meet the new language-training needs that SOF personnel are likely to have as they take on expanded roles and responsibilities in counterterrorism and other military operations.

The SOF foreign language program continues to face ongoing challenges that limit the access that special operations forces have to language-training opportunities, but it is beginning to seek ways to resolve these. More frequent and longer deployments and competing priority training needs have reduced the time that both active-duty and reserve/guard units have for language training. SOF personnel in Army Reserve and National Guard units face further difficulties in gaining access to centrally located language training because of their geographical dispersion and part-time status. These part-time personnel also receive lower monetary incentives for meeting language proficiency standards than their active-duty counterparts, and their units do not have the pay and allowance funds to send all of them to language training. As a result, most SOF personnel have been unable to get the training or take the proficiency tests they need to qualify in their respective language(s). Furthermore, language proficiency testing by oral interview, which program officials consider as more germane to SOF requirements, is not always available or used to measure language proficiency for qualification. Moreover, as their

roles and responsibilities expand, SOF personnel may face further limitations on their access to training, although the precise impacts of these changes are still not clear. Although the command's new contract offers some new and more flexible training options, it does not cover nontraditional training methods, such as distance/distributive learning, which can provide "anytime, anywhere" options that would be highly adaptable to SOF personnel training needs. Program officials are looking into some of these new options (e.g., regular and broadband Internet-based language resources and video tele-training) and the resources that would be needed to incorporate them into the program, but they are still at an early stage in their evaluations.

We are making recommendations to improve the management and delivery of the SOF foreign language-training program by adopting a strategy and developing strategic planning tools; increase SOF personnel's access to foreign language training by incorporating distance/distributive-learning tools into the SOF program; provide Army Reserve and National Guard personnel with greater monetary incentives and training advantages to acquire and maintain language proficiency; and provide additional opportunities for SOF personnel to test and qualify in their respective language(s) by increasing the use and availability of oral proficiency interview testing. In its comments on a draft of this report, DOD agreed with all but one recommendation. DOD did not agree with our recommendation to adopt a strategy and develop strategic-planning tools, stating that it could not adopt a SOF language strategy until it was properly reviewed and approved within the department. We clarified this recommendation to make it clear that we did not intend to circumvent the department's review and approval process.

Background

Foreign language needs have significantly increased throughout DOD and the federal government with the presence of a wider range of security threats, the emergence of new nation states, and the globalization of the U.S. economy. The difficulties in maintaining sufficient foreign language capabilities among federal agencies and departments have been identified as a serious human capital problem for some time.⁴ The entire military has faced shortfalls in language capability in recent operations, such as

⁴See hearings before the Subcommittee on International Security, Proliferation, and Federal Services, Committee on Governmental Affairs, U.S. Senate, on *The State of Foreign Language Capabilities in National Security and the Federal Government* (Sept. 14 and 19, 2000).

difficulties in finding sufficient numbers of qualified language speakers during peacekeeping operations in the Balkans and combat actions in Afghanistan. In recent reports, we have stated that shortages of staff with foreign language skills have affected agency operations and have hindered U.S. military, law enforcement, intelligence, counterterrorism, and diplomatic efforts.⁵

The U.S. Special Operations Command faces similar challenges in managing its SOF language training to maintain sufficient language capability to support its missions. For example, (1) it is common for SOF personnel to have received language training in more than three languages during their career; (2) SOF units often operate in geographic regions where there are numerous languages, (3) high operational demands and force structure limitations often require SOF personnel to operate in areas where their specific foreign language(s) are not spoken, and (4) it is difficult to determine the right languages and personnel mix to address a wide variety of unknown and hard-to-forecast small-scale conflicts.

The U.S. Special Operations Command established its SOF Foreign Language Program in 1993 to provide combatant commanders with SOF individuals and units that have the required foreign language proficiency to meet current and future operational requirements.⁶ The command designated the U.S. Army Special Operations Command, at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, as the proponent in all matters related to training, policies, programs, and procedures for SOF language requirements and capabilities.

In 1998, the Army Command established the Special Operations Forces Language Office at Fort Bragg. Currently located in the command's training directorate, the office is responsible for providing technical oversight and developing, coordinating, and executing foreign-language-training strategies for active-duty, reserve, and National Guard SOF

⁵To address current and projected shortages in staff with foreign language skills, we recommended that the Secretary of the Army develop a comprehensive strategic approach to human capital management and workforce planning. See U.S. General Accounting Office, *Foreign Languages: Human Capital Approach Needed to Correct Staffing and Proficiency Shortfalls*, [GAO-02-375](#) (Washington, D.C.: Jan. 31, 2002) and *Foreign Languages: Workforce Planning Could Help to Address Staffing and Proficiency Shortfalls*, [GAO-02-514T](#) (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 12, 2002).

⁶DOD Directive 3305.6, *Special Operations Forces Foreign Language Policy* (Jan. 4, 1993), assigns responsibility to the Commander, U.S. Special Operations Command, for implementing special operations forces' foreign language training and reporting.

personnel within the three service components: the U.S. Army Special Operations Command, the U.S. Naval Special Warfare Command, and the U.S. Air Force Special Operations Command.⁷ The office is also responsible for running the Army's SOF foreign language program. The Navy and Air Force SOF components are responsible for managing their own language-training programs.

The foreign language program provides training for more than 12,000 SOF military personnel (about 28 percent of all 43,671 SOF personnel) who are required to acquire some level of proficiency in one or more foreign languages. Of these, about 90 percent (10,833) are in the U.S. Army Special Operations Command; more than half of them are in Army Reserve or National Guard units. (See table 1.) The remaining 10 percent of SOF personnel with language needs are in the U.S. Naval Special Warfare Command (1,128) and U.S. Air Force Special Operations Command (155).⁸ The training consists of initial acquisition (becoming proficient in a new language), sustainment (maintaining a proficiency), and enhancement (raising a proficiency). It also includes a basic orientation to the customs and cultures of world regions where their languages are used.

⁷The operational units of the SOF service components run over 100 command language programs to provide initial, sustainment, and enhancement foreign language training for their people.

⁸Personnel who have language requirements in active-duty U.S. Army Special Operations Command units serve in special forces; those in Army Reserve and National Guard units serve in civil affairs, psychological operations, and special forces; those in active-duty U.S. Naval Special Warfare Command units serve as SEALs and in special boat units; and those in active-duty U.S. Air Force Special Operations units function in foreign internal defense.

Table 1: Special Operations Forces Personnel Requiring Foreign Language Proficiency, by Service Component

Service component	Total number of SOF personnel ^a	Number of active-duty SOF personnel	Require foreign language proficiency		
			Number of reserve/guard SOF personnel	Total number of SOF personnel with language requirement	Percentage of total SOF personnel with language requirement
U.S. Army Special Operations Command	26,804	4,475	6,358	10,833	89.4
U.S. Naval Special Warfare Command	6,360	1,128	0	1,128	9.3
U.S. Air Force Special Operations Command	10,507	155	0	155	1.3
Total	43,671	5,758	6,358	12,116	100.0

Source: Special Operations Forces Language Office.

Note: As of September 2003.

^aThe total number of SOF personnel does not include civilians. Totals also do not include a Marine Corps detachment of 81 personnel assigned to the command. Seven of the 81 Marines have a language requirement, but their language training does not fall under the SOF language program.

SOF personnel require foreign language skills in most of the special operations forces' core tasks, such as unconventional warfare, counterterrorism, counter proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, civil affairs, psychological operations, information operations, and foreign internal defense. The command, in coordination with the organizations for which it provides forces, determines the languages, levels of proficiencies, and number of language-qualified personnel needed in its units through an assessment of the operational needs of the geographic unified commands.⁹ Currently, SOF has requirements in more than 30 foreign languages, such as Chinese Mandarin, Modern Arabic, Indonesian, Korean, Persian-Farsi, Russian, and Spanish.

In contrast with other intelligence or diplomatic foreign language training, SOF training places greater emphasis on oral communication skills (speaking and listening) than on nonverbal skills (reading and writing) in order to give SOF personnel the ability to communicate during operations in the field. The level of proficiency that needs to be achieved varies by

⁹Geographic unified commanders of the U.S. Central Command, U.S. European Command, U.S. Northern Command, U.S. Pacific Command, and U.S. Southern Command are responsible for the conduct of military operations in their respective world regions.

unit and mission and can range from limited skills necessary to understand and utter certain memorized phrases for immediate survival to more intermediate skills (e.g., the ability to deal with concrete topics in past, present, and future tenses) necessary to meet routine social demands and limited job requirements. For example, the Army's Special Forces units (active-duty and National Guard), which account for about half of the Army personnel with a language requirement, generally need only a limited command of the language for immediate survival needs. Personnel who conduct psychological operations, foreign internal defense, and civil affairs missions generally need higher proficiency skills because of their greater contact and interaction with local civilians and military personnel. Although higher proficiency levels are desired, language is only one, and often not the highest, priority of the many skills that SOF personnel must acquire and maintain to effectively conduct their missions. Appendix II provides information on language proficiency levels and requirements.

The special operations forces foreign language program is funded directly through the command's annual budget.¹⁰ Funding for the program amounted to \$9.5 million and \$10.2 million in fiscal years 2002 and 2003, respectively, and it is projected to be \$11.1 million in fiscal year 2004. The command provides portions of the program's funding to each service component command to pay for its own respective foreign language training activities and to SOFLO to manage the program. The program's funding constitutes a very small portion of the command's annual budget, which is projected to be about \$6.7 billion in fiscal year 2004.

¹⁰The Nunn-Cohen Amendment to the DOD Authorization Act of 1986, Pub. L. No. 99-661, which created the U.S. Special Operations Command, gave the command direct control over many of the fiscal resources necessary to pay, train, equip, and deploy special operations forces through the establishment of a separate major force program (a major budget category in DOD's budget).

Program Addresses Some Long-Standing Problems but Lacks a Strategic Planning Approach

The command and SOFLO have taken several recent actions to begin addressing a number of long-standing problems in delivering and managing foreign language training to special operations forces. However, these actions are being taken without the benefit of a cohesive management framework, which incorporates strategic planning (a strategy and strategic plan with associated performance plans and reports), that would guide the program, integrate its activities, and monitor its performance. Such an approach would help the program maintain its present momentum, better manage its human capital challenges, and meet the language-training needs of SOF personnel as they take on new roles and responsibilities.

Recent Actions Should Begin to Strengthen SOF Foreign Language Program

The command and SOFLO are taking several actions that begin to strengthen the foreign-language-training program for SOF forces. These actions include consolidating all language training under a single contractor, completing a long overdue assessment of language requirements, improving communication and coordination with all program stakeholders, developing a database to monitor language proficiencies and training, and looking for ways to make use of other foreign-language-training assets. According to a SOFLO official, these actions have been initiated in part by the command's increased attention since September 11, 2001, to issues involving SOF language capabilities necessary to carry out core missions.

New B.I.B. Contract Consolidates Language Training

For many years, the SOF foreign-language-training program's service components and their units acquired language training through multiple contractors, encompassing a variety of private companies and universities. According to command officials, this practice led to inconsistencies in the type and quality of training, the response to meeting new or changing language requirements, and the way language training was acquired by individual service components. Various contractors used different instruction methods, and their training materials varied in quality.

In September 2002, the command awarded all of its commercial language training to a single contractor, B.I.B. Consultants. Command officials told us that the new 5-year contract provides for greater standardization and a more consistent approach to language training and improves the way language training services are acquired throughout the command. Specifically, the new contract offers a universal, standardized training curriculum, an ability to customize instruction to meet specific needs; a way to attain language proficiencies faster; and a consistent monitoring of instruction and individual performance. The contractor, a business

franchise of Berlitz International,¹¹ plans to use its parent's worldwide resources to provide SOF personnel with a variety of instruction services (such as classroom instruction, tutoring, and total immersion training in a live or virtual environment). Command officials also believe that the instruction method used by the contractor offers a way for SOF personnel to attain proficiency faster. To fully realize the benefits of the new contract, the command has required each of its service components and their units to use the contract to meet all their language-training needs, except when they take advantage of other government language resources, such as the Defense Language Institute.

Some of the B.I.B. contract costs are higher than those in previous contracts because the command awarded the new contract on the basis of "best value" and gave management and technical factors higher consideration than price. A SOFLO official estimated that the annual contract cost is currently about \$5.5 million to \$6 million. If this figure remains the same each year, the total cost of the 5-year contract is projected to be about \$30 million. A SOFLO official said that the total amount could be higher if SOF service components utilize more of the contract's language services. This could happen as the service components and their units become more familiar with the contract services and as more SOF personnel return from current deployments and are able to access language training.¹² The official also said that some costs are higher than those in prior contracts for such language-training services as total immersion, in which students practice a language while living in another country or in a language-controlled isolated environment. Command officials believe the improved quality and delivery of language training outweigh any increased cost.

B.I.B. Consultants appears to be meeting the expectations, including having its beginning language students meet their proficiency goals, set

¹¹B.I.B. Consultants is a small business franchise of Berlitz International established in 1998. Its daily operations are located at the Berlitz Language Center, Orlando, Fla. Berlitz International is a worldwide provider of language training and cross-cultural services to government, private-sector industries, and nonprofit organizations. Founded in 1878, the company has more than 450 language centers in over 60 countries and is accredited by the American Council on Education and the Accrediting Council for Continued Education and Training. Because of the size and complexity of its contract with the command and the need for worldwide language training, B.I.B. has awarded a subcontract to Berlitz International to utilize its language services.

¹²The contract has a maximum ceiling of \$50 million over its 5-year life.

out in its contract with the command. At the command's initial quarterly contract review in March 2003, which covered the first 5 months of implementation, command and contractor officials focused on provisions in the contract and on procedural aspects, such as scheduling training, providing materials, and developing contacts. Command officials brought up several issues largely related to the cost and implementation of immersion training, classroom requirements for instructors and materials, and the delivery of tactical language training.¹³ On the basis of discussions among attendees and our observations at the review, none of the issues discussed appeared irresolvable, and most of them could be addressed by improved communications and more experience in understanding and executing the contract. For example, B.I.B. officials agreed to work with the service components to find ways to reduce some immersion training costs. A second contract review was held in August 2003.

According to SOFLO, each of the command's service components is using the language services provided under the B.I.B. contract, and the results from some initial acquisition classes indicate that students are achieving most of the proficiency goals. A B.I.B. contract manager told us that the company believes it is successfully implementing the provisions of its contract. The official said that B.I.B. Consultants and Berlitz International had formed a joint team in October 2002 to manage all contract operations necessary to provide the full range of training services requested by the government. The official said that B.I.B. had successfully delivered the services requested through July 2003 and had promptly addressed the few issues (e.g., higher costs for immersion training and the quality of some materials) that arose. Appendix III provides additional information on the status of the contract's implementation at the command's service components and our analysis of the preliminary results of the students' performance under the new contract.

Language Requirement Assessment Nears Completion

In another action, the command is nearing the completion of a long-overdue assessment of its SOF foreign language requirements. The assessment is based on the operational requirements identified by the command in conjunction with the geographic unified commanders. It validates the languages, proficiency levels, and number of positions in each SOF unit that are needed to conduct special operations missions.

¹³Tactical language training covers instruction in foreign language translations of specific military and technical words/terms used by SOF personnel in conducting missions. Such training is not a requirement of the B.I.B. contract.

Communications and
Coordination with Other
Stakeholders Is Increasing

The assessment is used by the SOF service components and SOFLO to determine future language-training requirements. Although such assessments are supposed to be conducted at least every 2 years, this is the first commandwide assessment since 1997. Command officials expect the assessment to be approved by the fall of 2003.

SOFLO is in the process of expanding its communications and coordination with all of the stakeholders that are involved in delivering language training to SOF personnel. According to officials at the Navy and Air Force SOF components, the Defense Language Institute, and DOD headquarters, SOFLO officials have recently increased their contacts and visits with them to discuss language issues and ways to improve coordination.

In addition, in December 2002, SOFLO reinstated an annual language conference, which had not been held since 1997, that is designed to serve as a forum where SOF language issues can be discussed and resolved. Conference attendees included command representatives from headquarters and the service components and guests from the intelligence, academic, and other language-using communities who were invited to gain an appreciation of the differences between SOF requirements and other DOD language organizations and obtain their perspectives. SOFLO held another conference in August 2003.

SOFLO also has recently developed an Internet-based Web site to provide information on SOF language training, including schedules of courses and other training opportunities; links to the latest directives, policies, and procedures; training help-aids; points of contacts; upcoming events; and information about the B.I.B. contract and other language resources. Although some difficulties remain with providing all SOF personnel with full access to the Web site, a SOFLO official told us that the Web site should help increase the program's visibility and provide information about the command's language training.

Several Navy, Air Force, and command officials we talked with said that, over the years, SOFLO's attention has focused largely on Army SOF language issues and has paid less attention to the Navy and Air Force language programs. These officials said that SOFLO's recent efforts to increase its visits and contacts, hold an annual conference, and develop other communication tools should help to bring more balance and an increased "joint" focus to the program. Also, Defense Language Institute officials stated that the increased contacts between their organization and

SOFLO would allow the institute to better understand SOF language needs and determine how it could best support the program.

New Database Is Being Developed to Improve Tracking of Language Training and Readiness

SOFLO is developing a central, standardized database to capture information on the language training and proficiency status of SOF personnel and to assess language capabilities across the services. A SOFLO official said that full implementation of the database is critical because there is currently no centralized commandwide system to track or access information related to language readiness or training. Service components and their units will be responsible for updating their portion of the data each quarter. In the future, SOFLO plans to develop a Web-based, data-entry capability to make updating easier and more user friendly.

Program Explores Use of Other National Language Assets

While most language-training needs are met by the new B.I.B. contract, SOFLO is exploring ways to expand its use of other national language resources to complement and provide additional support for its program. Such language assets can offer training and technology capabilities that are not available in the SOF program, include the following:

- The Defense Language Institute, which is DOD's primary source of language instruction, has developed tactical language help-aids (e.g., pocket cards with key phrases and words) that can be used to support language needs during military operations. The institute also provides real-time video language instruction for many military facilities around the world and is developing other distance/distributive-learning capabilities. Several SOF unit personnel told us that they value the institute's resident training and would attend if their time allowed it.
- The Satellite Communications for Learning (SCOLA) broadcast network's¹⁴ programming provides access to most world languages, including less common languages that are not often taught in the United States. By watching and listening, students are able to actually experience the foreign culture and develop their language skills in a native real-life environment. The broadcasts also provide significant insight into the internal events of the various countries. The SOF unit personnel we spoke with said that the network helps students sustain language skills, learn dialects, and improve cross-cultural understanding. SCOLA officials told us that over the next 5 years, they plan to increase the programming, provide Internet delivery

¹⁴SCOLA is a nonprofit broadcast network based in McClelland, Iowa, that provides real-time transmission of copyright-free foreign news and cultural programming in over 40 languages from about 60 countries via satellite.

of services, improve their infrastructure to better respond to special program requests, and develop on-demand digital video archiving of past programs.

- The Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency is developing new technologies to improve language translation capabilities. These include hand-held devices that provide limited real-time, face-to-face speech translation in the field. These devices initially were developed for users involved in medical first-response, force-protection, and refugee-reunification missions. SOF personnel used some of these devices during the recent Afghanistan operations. While not a substitute for individual language skills, these new technologies help bridge some language gaps in the field.

SOF Language Program Lacks Cohesive Strategic Planning

While these ongoing actions begin to improve and strengthen the foreign language program, SOFLO is implementing them without the benefit of a cohesive management framework that incorporates strategic planning (a strategy and strategic plan with associated performance plan and reports). According to a command directive, SOFLO is responsible for developing a long-range SOF language acquisition strategy.¹⁵ Although SOFLO has drafted a document outlining a strategy, this has not yet been approved. A SOFLO official told us that the strategy is expected to be issued by the end of 2003.

Strategic planning is essential for this type of program because it provides the tools for applying good management practices. Such tools include a statement of the program's results-oriented goals and objectives, the strategy it will use to achieve those goals and objectives, including key milestones and priorities, and the measurements (both quantitative and qualitative) that it will use to monitor and report on its progress, identify necessary corrective actions, and better manage risk. These tools also provide a mechanism to better align, establish clear linkages, and assign roles and responsibilities in the organizational structure and determine the program resources needed. Such planning requires top leadership support and, if done well, is continuous, involves all program stakeholders, and provides the basis for everything an organization does each day to support the achievement of its goals and objectives.

¹⁵U.S. Special Operations Command Directive 350-10, *Special Operations Forces Foreign Language Program* (Nov. 14, 2001). This directive superseded the directive dated April 7, 1998, which also called for development of a long range SOF language strategy.

Using strategic planning for SOF's foreign language program would also be consistent with the general management principles set forth in the Government Performance and Results Act of 1993,¹⁶ which is the primary legislative framework for strategic planning in the federal government. In our prior reports and guidance, we have also emphasized the importance of integrating human capital considerations into strategic planning to more effectively plan and manage people's needs and to address future workforce challenges, such as investments in training and developing people.¹⁷ We recently released an exposure draft that outlines a framework consisting of a set of principles and key questions that federal agencies can use to ensure that their training and development investments are targeted strategically.¹⁸ Additionally, the Office of the Secretary of Defense, in recognition of the need for a more strategic approach to human capital planning, published the *Military Personnel Human Resources Strategic Plan* in April 2002 to establish military personnel priorities for the next several years.

Strategic planning—a strategy and strategic plan with an associated performance plan and reports—would ensure that good management principles are being used to manage the program and achieve the results-oriented goals and objectives established for the program. Aligning this planning with DOD's overall human capital strategy would further ensure that the pervasive human capital challenges facing the SOF foreign language program are considered in the broader context of overall DOD military personnel priorities. Without such a cohesive management framework, the program may lose its current momentum, and it may be unable to meet the new language-training needs that SOF personnel are likely to have as they take on expanded roles and responsibilities in counterterrorism and other military operations.

¹⁶Pub. L. No. 103-62, Aug. 3, 1993.

¹⁷We have issued several reports and guidance on strategic human capital management: U.S. General Accounting Office, *High Risk Series: An Update*, [GAO-01-263](#) (Washington, D.C.: January 2001); *Human Capital: Major Human Capital Challenges at the Departments of Defense and State*, [GAO-01-565T](#) (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 29, 2001); *Human Capital: A Self-Assessment Checklist for Agency Leaders*, [GAO/OGC-00-14G](#) (Washington, D.C.: September 2000) and *Military Personnel: Oversight Process Needed to Help Maintain Momentum of DOD's Strategic Human Capital Planning*, [GAO-03-237](#) (Washington, D.C.: Dec. 5, 2002).

¹⁸See U.S. General Accounting Office, *Human Capital: A Guide for Assessing Strategic Training and Development Efforts in the Federal Government* (exposure draft), [GAO-03-893G](#) (Washington, D.C.: July 2003).

Approach Needed to Improve Access to Language-Training Resources

The SOF foreign-language-training program continues to face ongoing challenges that limit the access that special operations forces have to take advantage of language-training opportunities. These challenges include more frequent and longer deployments for active-duty, reserve, and guard units. In addition, Army Reserve and National Guard members face further hurdles in getting access to training because of their geographic dispersion and part-time status. These members also receive lower monetary incentives for achieving required proficiencies and fewer training opportunities than active-duty members. Greater reliance on SOF personnel in combating terrorism may increase these challenges. Recognizing the underlying problems of access, SOFLO has begun looking into nontraditional training methods, such as distance/distributive-learning tools, including tools that provide on-demand “anytime anywhere” language training. But program officials are still at an early stage in their evaluations.

Ongoing Challenges Affect Access to Language Training

Acquiring and maintaining a proficiency in a foreign language takes continuous practice and, because it is a highly perishable skill, it can deteriorate rapidly without such practice. As a result, SOF personnel need to have a wide range of options to gain access to language-training resources at anytime and anywhere they are stationed or deployed.

However, the SOF language program is facing several challenges that affect accessibility to language training. In recent years, both active-duty and reserve/guard SOF personnel have had less time for overall training because they have been deployed more frequently and for longer periods of time. In addition, when they have had time to train, their language training has often competed with other higher-priority training needs, such as marksmanship or nuclear-biological-chemical training. As a result, they have often been unable to complete the necessary language training to reach required proficiencies and to take the necessary tests to qualify in their respective language(s).

Furthermore, Army Reserve and National Guard soldiers, who make up more than half of the total number of SOF personnel requiring language proficiency,¹⁹ face additional hurdles in finding time and gaining access to

¹⁹Most of these soldiers are assigned to psychological operations and civil affairs units where language proficiencies are critical because of their close and frequent interaction with the local populace.

language training. These soldiers are spread across 28 states and are often located at long distances from their unit's facilities, making it difficult to get to centrally located training resources. In addition, they have fewer days available for training because of their part-time status.

Moreover, because of their part-time status, Army Reserve and National Guard soldiers have lower monetary incentives to undertake language training than do active-duty personnel. According to SOFLO, active-duty Army SOF personnel receive foreign language proficiency pay, for example, of \$100 each month if they attain a language proficiency level of 2.²⁰ By contrast, Army Reserve and National Guard personnel get \$13.33 each month if they attain the same proficiency because their proficiency pay is prorated according to the number of days they train.²¹ Many of the more than 50 Army Reserve and National Guard soldiers we spoke with said that, despite the hurdles, they often undertake language training on their own time because of the value they place on foreign language skills in conducting their missions. They added that higher proficiency pay allowances would give them more incentive to study language and improve their proficiencies. In its May 2002 report, DOD's *Ninth Quadrennial Review of Military Compensation* recommended that the services be authorized to pay their reserve and guard members the same monthly amount as active-duty members for maintaining proficiency in designated critical languages in order to provide consistency in the application of special pay between reserve and active-duty members.²²

²⁰At a proficiency level of 2, an individual is capable of meeting routine social demands and limited job requirements and can deal with concrete topics in the past, present, and future tenses. Appendix II contains a description of the levels.

²¹Foreign Language Proficiency Pay is provided to military personnel under 37 U.S.C. 316. The law specifies that reserve personnel who are not on active duty be paid at one-thirtieth of the monthly proficiency pay multiplied by the number of drills during a month (usually four). Therefore, if active-duty personnel receive \$100 each month for language proficiency, reserve and guard personnel would receive \$3.33 per drill (\$100 divided by 30) or \$13.33 each month for four drills.

²²The Quadrennial Review of Military Compensation is conducted every 4 years to assess the effectiveness of military pay and benefits in recruiting and retaining a high-quality force. See Department of Defense, *Report of The Ninth Quadrennial Review of Military Compensation* (Washington, D.C.: May 17, 2002).

Additionally, a SOFLO official told us that current pay and allowance²³ funding levels for Army Reserve and National Guard units do not allow units to send more soldiers to language courses at the command's language schools and unit programs and Defense Language Institute. The official said that this issue may become more of a concern in fiscal year 2004, when the U.S. Army Recruiting Command will no longer fund the pay and allowance for initial-entry reserve soldiers going into civil affairs and psychological operations positions to attend the Defense Language Institute. The official said, however, that these proficiency pay and funding issues are not limited to foreign language training but are broader DOD issues that affect reserve and guard personnel throughout the military.

These access constraints have prevented large numbers of SOF personnel from getting the necessary training (both initial and sustainment training) and taking the annual tests that are necessary to qualify in their language(s).²⁴ As table 2 shows, for the quarter ending in March 2003, more than 11,200 SOF personnel, or 93 percent of the 12,116 of those who had a language requirement, needed to take either initial or sustainment training.²⁵ According to a SOFLO official, these statistics may be higher than usual because of recent deployments to the Middle East and because of some administrative underreporting. Earlier quarters in 2002 show that about 75 percent of SOF personnel required training. As table 2 also indicates, most of the training needs for Navy SOF personnel were for initial language acquisition (83 percent of 1,128), while for Army and Air Force SOF members, the training needs were primarily for sustainment (85 and 64 percent, respectively).

²³Pay and allowance is a person's basic pay, special pay, incentive pay, basic allowance for quarters, basic allowance for subsistence, and station per diem allowance for not more than 90 days.

²⁴These statistics are derived from SOFLO's newly created database, and the mechanisms for collecting the data and ensuring reliability are still being worked out.

²⁵Language training data for the quarter ending in June 2003 was similar to the prior quarter: 11,180 SOF personnel, or 92 percent of the 12,116 of those who had a language requirement, needed to take either initial or sustainment training.

Table 2: Number of Special Operations Forces Personnel Needing Language Training for Quarter Ending March 31, 2003

Service component	Total number of personnel requiring language skills	Personnel needing initial training		Personnel needing sustainment training ^a		Total personnel needing training	
		Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
U.S. Army Special Operations Command	10,833	806	7	9,240	85	10,046	93
U.S. Naval Special Warfare Command	1,128	935	83	86	8	1,021	91
U.S. Air Force Special Operations Command	155	42	27	99	64	141	91
Total	12,116	1,783	15	9,425	78	11,208	93

Sources: Special Operations Forces Language Office (data); GAO (analysis).

Notes: Percentage totals may not add because of rounding.

These statistics are derived from SOFLO's newly created database, and the mechanisms for collecting the data and ensuring reliability are still being worked out.

SOFLO also acknowledges that there may be some administrative underreporting of data.

^aIncludes personnel that have some language background but require additional training in a new language because of a change in assignment or language requirement.

In reflection of this trend, the number of SOF personnel who have taken a proficiency test and have qualified in their respective language(s) within the last 12 months is low.²⁶ As table 3 shows, in every subsequent quarter since the quarter ending September 2002, less than 25 percent of all Army, Navy, and Air Force SOF personnel with language requirements have been tested within the last 12 months and have met or exceeded the required proficiency to qualify in their respective language(s). This percentage decreased in the subsequent quarters. While acknowledging some administrative underreporting of data, a SOFLO official attributed the low qualification levels to the longer and more frequent deployments that hinder SOF personnel from getting the training they need to take and pass the language tests. The official said that the goal for proficiency varies by unit but that the units' goals—having the total percentage of personnel in the unit meet the language requirement—in the command's draft foreign language strategy for the largest groups of SOF personnel requiring language skills are 80 and 50 percent for U.S. Army Special Operations

²⁶SOF personnel are qualified after successfully passing the language proficiency test and remain qualified until the time of their next test 12 months later.

Command active-duty and reserve component units, respectively. The proficiency goal for U.S. Naval Special Warfare Command and U.S. Air Force Special Operations Command units is 50 percent.

Table 3: Personnel Meeting Language Proficiency Requirement from Quarters Ending September 2002 through June 2003

Service component	Total number requiring language skills	Personnel meeting language requirement ^a							
		Quarter ending							
		Sept. 2002		Dec. 2002		March 2003		June 2003	
		Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
U.S. Army Special Operations Command									
Special Forces									
Active	3,756	1,720	46	1,524	41	387	10	540	14
National Guard	1,731	486	28	602	35	0	0	0	0
Civil Affairs/ Psychological Operations									
Active	675	163	24	185	27	24	4	213	32
Reserve	4,627	243	5	296	6	94	2	105	2
Other	44	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	10,833	2,612	24	2,607	24	505	5	858	8
U.S. Naval Special Warfare Command									
Total	1,128	125	11	52	5	107	9	57	5
U.S. Air Force Special Operations Command									
Total	155	19	12	18	12	14	9	21	14
Grand total	12,116	2,756	23	2,677	22	626	5	936	8

Sources: Special Operations Forces Language Office (data); GAO (analysis).

Notes: Percentage totals may not add because of rounding.

These statistics are derived from SOFLO's newly created database, and the mechanisms for collecting the data and ensuring reliability are still being worked out.

SOFLO also acknowledges that there may be some administrative underreporting of data.

^aLanguage requirement is satisfied if personnel have met or exceeded the required proficiency level in the required language(s) within the last 12 months. There is no distinction between personnel tested and failed and personnel not tested.

According to a SOFLO official, the number of SOF personnel annually tested in their respective language(s) could be increased if more certified oral testers were available to administer the Oral Proficiency Interview,²⁷ the scheduling of these tests was more flexible, and the services allowed greater use of these tests for language(s) qualification. While most SOF personnel qualify in their languages by taking the Defense Language Proficiency Test, an Oral Proficiency Interview can also be used when the Defense Language Proficiency Test is not available in a given language. The SOFLO official stated that SOF prefers the oral test when it can be used because of the importance placed on verbal skills in conducting SOF missions. However, the certified oral testers,²⁸ who are normally members of the Defense Language Institute's teaching staff, are sometimes unavailable because they are teaching or doing other primary duties. Coordinating the schedules of the institute's staff and the SOF members to conduct the tests is also difficult. For example, while reserve and guard members are primarily available to take the tests on weekends during their unit's drill time, it is not always possible for the institute to schedule the two testers that are required to administer the test in a given language during that same time. Additionally, the SOFLO official stated that a draft Department of the Army language regulation would allow use of the oral test even if a Defense Language Proficiency Test exists for a given language.²⁹ The official said that SOFLO is working with the Navy and the Air Force to make similar changes to their language regulations.

As DOD places greater emphasis on the capabilities of special operations forces, especially those related to counterterrorism, command officials told us that these forces are unlikely to experience any change in the frequency or length of their deployments. Although command officials said they are still unsure about the impact of these changes on SOF language needs, the problems of access are likely to continue.

²⁷DOD uses the Defense Language Proficiency Test and the Oral Proficiency Interview to measure an individual's language skills. Both tests are administered through the Defense Language Institute.

²⁸Oral testers have native fluency in a language and are trained and certified by the Defense Language Institute to administer the Oral Proficiency Interview.

²⁹The Department of the Army is consolidating Army Regulations 611-6, *Army Linguist Management*, and 350-16, *Total Army Language Program*, into a single new Army language regulation.

Distance/Distributive Learning Could Provide Better Access to Language Training

According to SOFLO officials, some of accessibility challenges may be addressed by the development or expanded use of distance/distributive-training tools, such as Internet-based training, multimedia technologies, and SCOLA foreign language broadcasts. While the new B.I.B. contract provides additional flexibility and training options, it focuses primarily on traditional methods of delivering language training, such as classroom training, one-on-one tutoring, and total-immersion training. This type of live, person-to-person instruction is the preferred method for most language learning. However, distance/distributive-learning tools, particularly those tools that deliver on-demand “anytime, anywhere” training, offer options that can be effectively adapted to the training needs of SOF personnel.

Distance/distributive learning encompasses a wide range of delivery methods, including video tele-training, computer conferencing, and correspondence courses. In recent years, DOD has sought to develop the next generation of distance/distributive learning—advanced distributed learning³⁰—which expands the range of options for providing DOD personnel with access to high-quality education and training, tailored to individual needs and delivered cost-effectively, whenever and wherever it is required. Advanced distributed learning includes Internet-based instruction, simulation, integrated networked systems, and digital knowledge repositories. DOD’s March 2002 Training Transformation Strategy³¹ emphasizes the use of such learning methodologies to ensure that training is readily available to both active and reserve military personnel, regardless of time and place. Table 4 shows the continuum of learning delivery methods from classroom to advanced distributed learning.³²

³⁰Advanced distributive learning is instruction that does not require an instructor’s presence; can use more than one medium; and emphasizes the use of reusable content, networks, and learning management systems.

³¹See Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, Department of Defense, *Strategic Plan for Transforming DOD Training* (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 1, 2002).

³²For further information on the status of DOD’s advanced distributed learning programs, see U.S. General Accounting Office, *Military Transformation: Progress and Challenges for DOD’s Advanced Distributed Learning Programs*, [GAO-03-393](#) (Washington, D.C.: Feb. 28, 2003).

Table 4: Continuum of Learning Methods

	Right time, right place	Anytime, anywhere
Classroom delivery method	Distance/distributive-learning delivery methods	Advanced distributed learning delivery methods
Instructor-led training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Video tele-training • Embedded training • Computer conferencing • Interactive television • Electronic classrooms • Interactive multimedia • Computer-based training • Audio-graphics • Audiotapes/videotapes • Correspondence courses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integrated networked systems • Integrated platforms • Reusable learning objects • Widespread collaboration • Global knowledge databases • Intelligent tutoring systems • Performance aiding • Digital knowledge repositories • Internet-based instruction • Virtual libraries • Simulation • Virtual classrooms

Source: Defense Acquisition University.

Note: The data displayed in the table are based on data provided in the Defense Acquisition University's *Strategic Plan 2002-2009 Training Transformation (T2)*, *The Defense Acquisition University Road Map for e-Learning and On-Line Performance Support*.

SOFLO officials have begun evaluating some of the distance/distributive-learning options for language training that DOD has been developing for its own language-training programs. They told us that some of these efforts might be adaptable to the SOF program, as shown in the following:

- The Defense Language Institute, in collaboration with the National Cryptologic School, Foreign Service Institute, and the National Foreign Language Center, are developing an Internet-based learning support system, called LangNet, which provides language learners and teachers with access to on-line language materials. The Defense Language Institute is also expanding its video tele-training capabilities to provide students located throughout the world with real-time language instruction.
- The U.S. Army Intelligence Center at Fort Huachuca, Arizona, is leading an initiative called Broadband Intelligence Training System, or BITS, to use commercial broadband technology as a way to provide individuals with

Internet-based tele-training at the unit or at home. SOFLO officials believe that this distance-learning tool shows the promise of delivering on-demand courseware in various languages with minimal technology requirements and being effective for initial acquisition training.

- The Defense Advance Research Projects Agency is developing a language-training simulation, which may be useful when speech recognition software hurdles are resolved.

SOFLO also wants to expand the availability of individual multimedia tools, e.g., CD-ROM and DVD media and players, so that SOF personnel could use such tools at any location. Additionally, the Army's John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, is developing computer-based language courses that can be accessed through an Army learning site or through correspondence. Distributive learning was the principal theme of the command's annual SOF language conference in August 2003, and SOFLO provided attendees with information on various language-oriented initiatives.

A SOFLO official told us that distance/distributive-learning approaches are most beneficial for providing individuals who already have some language proficiency with sustainment training or enhancement training. While useful, these approaches are often not considered the best options for those individuals who need initial acquisition language training where person-to-person interaction is most desired. The official said that SOFLO is still in the early stages of evaluating and determining which distance/distributive-learning options are best suited to its program and the resources it will need to incorporate them into its program.

Conclusions

While the U.S. Special Operations Command has taken several recent actions to begin improving the delivery of language training and the management of its foreign language program, these actions have been taken without the benefit of a cohesive management framework combined with strategic planning tools. At the forefront of the recent actions is a major shift in the way that the program provides language training for active-duty, reserve, and guard SOF personnel in the Army, Navy, and Air Force. Rather than using multiple contractors, the command has consolidated all of the training under a single contractor to provide a standardized curriculum and standardized training materials, more flexible delivery mechanisms, and consistent monitoring of student and teacher performance. These ongoing management actions address a wide range of issues, including the need for more coordination and communication within the program, the creation of a database to track language

proficiencies and training requirements, and better utilization of other national language assets. However, because the program has not yet issued a strategy and developed the necessary strategic-planning tools (a strategic plan with an associated performance plan and reports) to carry it out, the value and impact of these disparate actions on the program as a whole is difficult to evaluate. As a first step, the command could issue a strategy for meeting SOF language requirements to establish its vision for language training across the command. As a second step, the command could use the strategic vision to develop necessary strategic planning tools to guide the program in the future. Such strategic planning with the support of top leadership would allow the program to determine what actions are needed to meet its overall goals and objectives; ensure that these actions are well integrated with each other; identify key target dates, priorities, and the resources needed to undertake them; develop performance measures to assess their progress and effectiveness; identify corrective actions; and better manage risk. It also should be aligned with DOD's overall human capital efforts to more effectively address its personnel challenges. Without a cohesive management framework based on strategic planning, the program risks losing the momentum it has achieved so far and risk failing to meet the growing needs of special operations forces for increasingly critical foreign language skills.

Despite continuing challenges in accessing training, the development of distance/distributive learning promises to offer SOF personnel greater access to language resources. While SOF personnel are often unable to take advantage of traditional, instructor-based language training because of long deployments and geographical dispersion, they could benefit from distance/distributive-training approaches that offer more flexibility and accessibility to language training, including on-demand, "anytime, anywhere" options. The use of distance/distributive learning would also provide a good complement to the training services offered by the command's new contract. The command has an opportunity to support several promising DOD distance/distributive-learning initiatives under way with participation and resources. Also, DOD could consider expanding the use and availability of oral proficiency interview testing to provide additional opportunities for SOF personnel to test and qualify each year in their respective language(s). DOD could also consider changing the amount paid to Army Reserve and National Guard soldiers for foreign language proficiency to provide additional incentive for them to maintain and improve their language skills and provide more pay and allowance funds for these soldiers to allow more to attend language schools and pursue other venues for language training. Such changes might be a way to provide greater assurance that Army Reserve and National Guard soldiers

take advantage of current language training and training that becomes available through the use of distance/distributive learning.

Recommendations for Executive Action

To strengthen the management and delivery of foreign language training for special operations forces, we recommend that the Secretary of Defense direct the Commander of the U.S. Special Operations Command to

- adopt a strategy for meeting special operations forces' foreign language requirements and develop the necessary strategic-planning tools (a strategic plan with associated performance plan and reports) to use in managing and assessing the progress of its foreign language program and to better address future human capital challenges and
- incorporate distance/distributive-learning approaches into the program to improve the special operations forces' access to language training, and if additional resources are required, to request them.

In addition, the Secretary of Defense should evaluate current (1) foreign language proficiency pay rates and (2) pay and allowance funding levels for Army Reserve and National Guard personnel to determine if changes are needed to provide them with a greater incentive to undertake language study and allow for more personnel to attend language schools and other training venues. Furthermore, the Secretary of Defense should examine options for increasing the use and availability of oral proficiency foreign language testing to provide additional opportunities for SOF personnel to test and qualify in their respective languages.

Agency Comments and Our Evaluation

In written comments on a draft of this report, DOD concurred with all but one of our recommendations. DOD's comments are reprinted in appendix IV.

DOD did not agree with our recommendation that the U.S. Special Operations Command adopt a strategy and develop strategic-planning tools to strengthen the management and delivery of foreign language training for special operations forces. DOD stated in its comments that the command's current draft of a SOF language strategy is in its infancy and needs to be properly reviewed through various DOD organizations before the Secretary of Defense could direct its adoption. Although nothing in our draft report was meant to suggest that the draft language strategy should be implemented without proper review, we clarified this recommendation to state that the command adopt "a strategy," rather than any particular draft of a strategy. While we recognize that it may take some time for the

command to prepare and approve such a document, we would note that the command has a longstanding internal requirement, which dates to 1998, for the program to have such a strategy. In its comments, DOD did not address the second part of the recommendation, which called for the development, in tandem with a strategy, of strategic planning tools to use in managing and assessing the program's progress and address future human capital challenges. We continue to believe that the timely adoption of both a strategy and planning tools is an essential step for ensuring the effective management of the SOF foreign language program.

DOD concurred with our other recommendations, specifically that the command incorporate distributed learning approaches into its SOF foreign language training; that the Secretary of Defense evaluate the current foreign language proficiency pay rates and pay and allowance funding levels for Army Reserve and National Guard personnel; and that the Secretary examine options to increase the use and availability of oral proficiency testing.

We are sending copies of this report to interested congressional committees; the Secretary of Defense; the Commander of the U.S. Special Operations Command; and the Director, Office of Management and Budget. We will make copies available to others upon request. In addition, the report will be available at no charge on the GAO Web site at <http://www.gao.gov>.

If you or your staff have any questions, please call me on (757) 552-8100. An additional GAO contact and other staff members who made key contributions to this report are listed in appendix V.



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Appendix I: Scope and Methodology

In conducting our review, we focused on the foreign language training that the U.S. Special Operations Command (the command) and its service component commands in the Army, Navy, and Air Force provide for special operations forces (SOF) personnel. This training is offered to active-duty, reserve, and National Guard SOF personnel who have foreign language proficiency requirements. We discussed SOF language issues with a variety of officials at the Department of Defense (DOD), service headquarters offices, the command’s headquarters offices, Special Operations Forces Language Office (SOFLO) and service component commands, the Defense Language Institute, and other stakeholders that provide or use the command’s language training. The organizations and offices that we contacted during our review are listed in table 5.

Table 5: Organizations and Offices Contacted during Our Review

Location	Organization/Office contacted
Washington, D.C., area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Department of Defense <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for C3I • Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations, Low-Intensity Conflict, and Counter-terrorism • Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency • Departments of the Army and Air Force National Guard Bureau Department of the Army <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Army Foreign Language Proponency Office • DOD Foreign Language Program Office • Defense Language Institute–Washington Department of the Navy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, Navy Foreign Language Office • Marine Corps Foreign Language Program Office Department of the Air Force <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intelligence, Surveillance, Reconnaissance and Information Operations Readiness Branch Department of State <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foreign Service Institute
Fayetteville, N.C., area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> U.S. Army Special Operations Command, Fort Bragg, N.C. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Special Operations Forces Language Office • U.S. Special Forces Command • U.S. John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School • U.S. Civil Affairs and Psychological Operations Command • 3rd Special Forces Group • Elements of the 351st Civil Affairs Command

Location	Organization/Office contacted
Fort Walton Beach, Fla., area	U.S. Air Force Special Operations Command, Hurlburt Field, Fla. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> U.S. Air Force Special Operations School 6th Special Operations Squadron
Monterey, Calif., area	Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center Defense Manpower Data Center
Norfolk, Va., area	Naval Special Warfare Group 2 Naval Special Warfare Group 4
Omaha, Nebr., area	Satellite Communications for Learning, McClelland, Iowa
Orlando, Fla., area	B.I.B. Consultants, Inc.
San Diego, Calif., area	U.S. Naval Special Warfare Command, Coronado, Calif. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Naval Special Warfare Group 1
Tampa, Fla., area	U.S. Special Operations Command, MacDill Air Force Base, Fla. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Training, Doctrine, and Education Division

Source: GAO.

To assess the command’s recent actions to improve the management and delivery of its SOF foreign language training, we obtained documents and spoke with various stakeholders who use or support the training. In particular, we talked with officials at SOFLO about their responsibilities and the recent actions they have undertaken for the SOF language program. We reviewed DOD and command guidance, policies, speeches, reports, and other documents to increase our understanding of the program’s history and issues. We spoke with individuals in active-duty, reserve, and National Guard SOF units to learn their perspectives on obtaining language training and on achieving and retaining language proficiencies. Specifically, we did the following:

- We discussed the command’s new language services contract with command contracting officials and officials at each of the service components. We visited the contractor, B.I.B. Consultants, to discuss its use of teaching methodologies and management strategies to implement the contract. To obtain information about the first 11 months of language training (October 2002-August 2003) under the new contract, we (1) attended the command’s first quarterly contract reviews in March and August 2003; (2) discussed classes and other training activities with command and service components officials, B.I.B. Consultants and Berlitz International representatives, and language instructors and SOF students; and (3) conducted analyses of student end-of-course evaluations and proficiency results.

- We talked with command headquarters and SOFLO officials about the command's progress in assessing the SOF language requirements and in changing the way it communicates and coordinates (e.g., via annual conference, Internet-based Web site, etc.) with its various stakeholders. We attended the command's 2003 language conference. Although we reviewed the process for determining SOF language requirements, we did not examine the specific criteria and rationale for decisions made for those requirements (e.g., languages, number of personnel needed, and proficiency levels required for units) in its recent assessment.
- To determine the extent to which the SOF language program uses other national language training assets, we obtained information from and met with officials at the Defense Language Institute, Satellite Communications for Learning (SCOLA), Defense Applied Research Projects Agency, and Foreign Service Institute. We also attended a SCOLA language conference that focused on the use of its broadcasts to support government language programs.
- To understand the use and merits of strategic planning and how it could benefit the SOF language program, we reviewed our prior work on strategic planning and strategic human capital management and the general management principles laid out in the Government Performance and Results Act of 1993.

In conducting our review of student end-of-course evaluations to determine the satisfaction of students with classes taught by B.I.B. under the new contract, we requested student evaluations from the Army's John F. Kennedy Center and School for the first quarter of fiscal year 2003 and from the Naval Special Warfare Command's Group 1 for the second quarter of fiscal year 2003. The Army's school and the Navy's Group 1 provided evaluations from 11 (out of 22) classes and 3 (out of 3) classes, respectively. An Army school official told us that the contractor could not provide the evaluations for the other 11 classes we requested because the evaluations had been misplaced. As a result, our evaluation results may not be fully representative of the views of all students in all classes because the missing evaluations may have different responses from those that did respond and were provided to GAO. In conducting our analysis, we selected three questions from the student end-of course evaluations that, in our judgment, provided an indication of the overall effectiveness of the course, the instructor's performance, and the usefulness of course materials. We also reviewed individual student proficiency scores from 22 initial acquisition classes conducted at the Army's school at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, to determine the performance of students in reaching end-of-course proficiency goals.

In identifying ways for the command to deal with challenges that limit accessibility to its foreign language training resources, we interviewed officials at SOFLO and the service component commands to understand the training requirements and resources and determine the challenges faced by SOF personnel in gaining accessing language training. We examined information from SOFLO's language database¹ to assess the extent to which more frequent and longer deployments may affect SOF personnel's access to the training they need to pass exams and qualify in their particular languages. We also talked with more than 50 members of Army Reserve and National Guard units to better understand their particular difficulties and limitations in getting training. We spoke with officials at the Defense Language Institute and visited their facilities to obtain information about their ongoing efforts to develop distance/distributed learning and advanced distributed-learning methods. We also met with Defense Applied Research Projects Agency officials to discuss how their new technologies could support SOF language-training needs.

We performed our review from October 2002 through July 2003 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

¹SOFLO's language database has been operational for only a short time, and the mechanisms for collecting the data and ensuring reliability are still being worked out. SOFLO also acknowledges that there may be some administrative underreporting of data. However, from our discussions with SOFLO officials about their current data collection and verification procedures, we believe the data to be sufficiently reliable.

Appendix II: Language Proficiency Levels and Requirements

The special operations forces foreign language-training program uses the foreign language proficiency scale established by the federal Interagency Language Roundtable.¹ The scale ranks individuals' language skills in terms of their ability to listen, read, speak, and write in a foreign language. The scale has six basic proficiency levels, ranging from zero to 5; level zero indicates no language capability, and level 5 indicates proficiency in the language. A plus (+) designation is added if the proficiency substantially exceeds one skill level but does not fully meet the criteria for the next level. Table 6 shows the language capabilities required for each proficiency level.

¹The Interagency Language Roundtable is an unfunded federal interagency organization established for the coordination and sharing of information about language-related activities at the federal level. It serves as the premier way for departments and agencies of the federal government to keep abreast of the progress and implementation of techniques and technology for language learning, language use, language testing, and other language-related activities.

Appendix II: Language Proficiency Levels and Requirements

Table 6: Foreign Language Capabilities at Proficiency Levels

Proficiency level ^b	Language capabilities ^a		
	Listening	Reading	Speaking
0+ ^b	Understands certain memorized utterances in areas of immediate needs with extra-linguistic cues.	Reads alphabet or high-frequency characters; recognizes some numbers and isolated words.	Produces telegraphic utterances for immediate survival needs.
1	Understands basic survival utterances, simple questions and answers on familiar topics, and main ideas.	Reads simple, predictable material in print or type, identifies general topics.	Maintains very simple conversations on familiar topics; cannot produce continuous discourse unless rehearsed.
2	Understands routine conversations and discourse about familiar topics; gleans all the facts.	Reads simple, authentic, straightforward material on familiar topics; uses contextual cues.	Handles routine, high-frequency, limited interactions and conversations about current events, family, and common topics.
3	Understands essentials of all speech; grasps opinion and inferences.	Reads a variety of prose on unfamiliar subjects that may include opinions, hypothesis, and analysis.	Participates effectively in most formal and informal conversations about practical, social, and professional topics within a shared context.
4	Understands all forms and styles of speech, even some nonstandard dialects; develops and analyzes argumentation.	Reads fluently and accurately all styles and forms; grasps full ramifications of texts within wider context.	Uses the language fluently and accurately for all purposes.
5	Understands extremely difficult and abstract speech and how natives think as they create discourse.	Reads very difficult and abstract prose.	Commands language with complete flexibility and intuition; pronunciation consistent with that of an educated native speaker.

Source: Federal Interagency Language Roundtable.

^aLanguage proficiency levels and capabilities are based on the Interagency Language Roundtable standards. The table does not include a description of the capabilities for writing.

^bThe 0+ exceeds the basic 0 proficiency level. Zero-level proficiency indicates no capabilities in a foreign language.

Language proficiency levels are established for SOF personnel during the U.S. Special Operations Command’s biennial assessment of language requirements, which is done in conjunction with geographic unified commanders. The assessment identifies the languages, the proficiency levels, and the number of individuals needed with these skills in the commanders’ geographic regions. Table 7 shows the required (minimum) and the desired proficiency levels for each service component and specialty. For example, Army SOF members who work in civil affairs and psychological operations where they frequently interact with local populations require a proficiency level of 2 for listening, reading, and speaking. Army Special Forces, on the other hand, require only a level 0+ to perform their missions, although a higher standard is desired.

Appendix II: Language Proficiency Levels and Requirements

Table 7: U.S. Special Operations Command Proficiency Standards for Service Components

Service component and specialty	Proficiency level	
	Required ^a	Desired
	Listen/Read/Speak	Listen/Read/Speak
All/Intelligence	2/2/2	3/3/3
U.S. Air Force Special Operations Command	2/2/2	2/2/2
U.S. Naval Special Warfare Command	2/2/2	2/2/2
U.S. Army Special Operations Command (Civil Affairs)	2/2/2	2/2/2
U.S. Army Special Operations Command (Special Forces)	0+/0+/0+	1/2/2
U.S. Army Special Operations Command (Psychological Operations)	2/2/2	2/2/2

Source: Special Operations Forces Language Office.

Note: Required and desired proficiency levels were established by the command's current assessment of SOF language requirements.

^aPersonnel can meet the required proficiency by taking the Defense Language Proficiency Test (listen/read), or an Oral Proficiency Interview (speak) when the Defense Language Proficiency Test is not available in a given language.

Appendix III: Status of the Language Services Contract between the U.S. Special Operations Command and B.I.B. Consultants

In accordance with its language services contract with the U.S. Special Operations Command, B.I.B. Consultants is providing various types of training for special operations forces personnel at each of the command's service components. As shown in table 8, this training ranges from language instruction, to beginning students with no foreign language proficiency, to those students who have acquired some proficiency. It consists of language study conducted in a traditional classroom setting; one-on-one instructor/student training; and total immersion training, where students practice their language(s) in a live or virtual environment.¹ The training also includes an orientation of the customs, culture, and common phrases for the area where the student's language is used.

Table 8: Foreign Language Training Provided by B.I.B. Consultants Contract

Training type	Purpose/Audience	Environment
Initial acquisition	Beginning training for students that have no measurable proficiency level in a particular foreign language.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Traditional classroom setting. • Home-based, one-on-one instruction.
Sustainment	Training for students that already have acquired a specified proficiency level and need only to maintain that level.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Traditional classroom setting. • Home-based, one-on-one instruction. • Live or virtual immersion training.
Enhancement	Training to raise a student's proficiency level.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Traditional classroom setting. • Home-based, one-on-one instruction. • Live or virtual immersion training.
Survival/Cultural orientation	Training to provide a basic understanding of customs, culture, and common phrases for a world region. Conducted when course duration is highly constrained by the training time available.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Traditional classroom setting. • Home-based, one-on-one instruction. • Live or virtual immersion training.

Source: Special Operations Forces Language Office.

During the first 9 months (October 2002 to July 2003) of the contract, B.I.B. training varied at each of the SOF service components. For example, from October 2002 to July 2003, B.I.B. conducted over 40 initial acquisition language classes for more than 500 students in 13 different languages at the Army's John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School at

¹Total immersion in a live environment involves students' going to the country where the language to be learned is spoken. Total immersion in a virtual environment involves training in an isolated environment in the United States, and only the language to be learned is spoken.

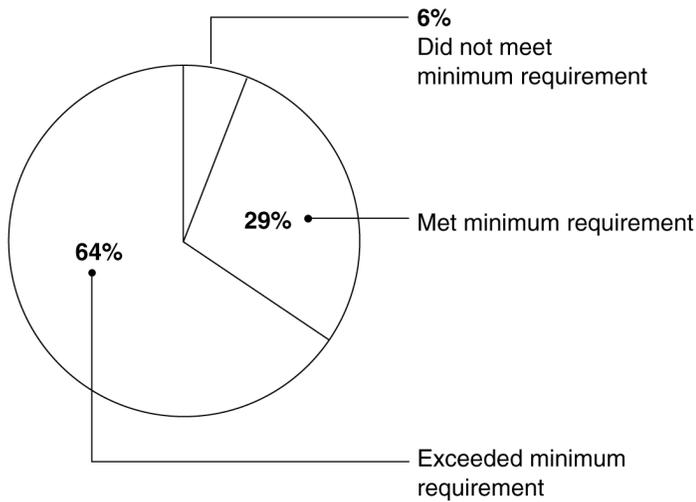
Fort Bragg, North Carolina. From January through February 2003, B.I.B. also provided initial acquisition language training for 10 students in three languages (3 classes) at the Navy's Special Warfare Command's Group 1 at Coronado, California. According to the Air Force command language program manager, B.I.B. is expected to start providing initial acquisition language training for Air Force SOF personnel at Hurlburt Field, Florida, where the Air Force recently established a language-training lab. According to a B.I.B. contract manager, B.I.B. has also provided 16 immersion sessions in various languages for students in each of the service components as of the end-of-July 2003 (9, 6, and 1, respectively, for the Navy, Army, and Air Force).

According to a Special Operations Forces Language Office official, students' proficiency scores after completing B.I.B.-taught classes at the Army's school are about the same as those achieved under prior contracts. Additionally, six students in an accelerated pilot class achieved scores that met or exceeded the minimum proficiency level.² Our review of students' proficiency scores from all the initial acquisition classes (a total of 22), including the Spanish pilot course that began at the Army school during the first quarter of fiscal year 2003, showed that 6 percent (11 students) of the 171 students did not meet the 0+ requirement for listening and 2 percent (4 students) did not meet the 0+ requirement for reading. (See fig. 1.) However, all of those students did meet the alternate goal, which is to attain at least a 0+ on an Oral Proficiency Interview. Although only a small number of Navy SOF personnel have received training under the B.I.B. contract, a Naval Special Warfare Command Group 1 official said that students' proficiency scores from the first three B.I.B. initial acquisition language classes (a total of 10 students) conducted from January through February 2003 exceeded the results of classes conducted under previous contracts.

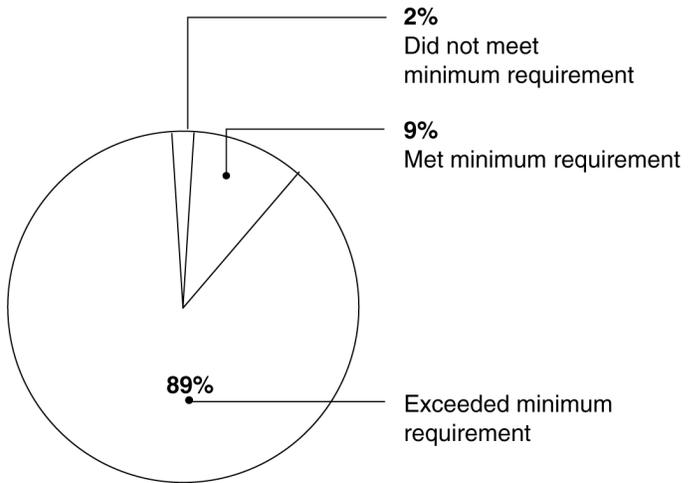
²The accelerated pilot class in Spanish was conducted for 10 weeks instead of the regular 18 weeks with the goal of having students achieve language proficiency faster. B.I.B. Consultants, the U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School, and SOFLO plan to conduct additional accelerated pilot classes in other languages.

Figure 1: Student Proficiency Score Results for Listening and Reading for Initial Acquisition Language Courses at the Army's John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School for the First Quarter of Fiscal Year 2003

Listening



Reading



Source: U.S. Army's John F Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School, Fort Bragg, N.C.

Note: Percentages may not total 100 percent because of rounding.

We analyzed student end-of-course evaluations for about half of the initial acquisition classes offered at the Army's school during the first quarter of 2003.³ The evaluations were designed and administered by B.I.B. Students were asked to rate their satisfaction with (1) their progress, (2) the instructor, and (3) the usefulness of the materials. As table 9 shows, most students said they were extremely or very satisfied with their instructor's performance. Most students also expressed some satisfaction with their progress and the usefulness of course materials. However, it should be noted that 13 out of 77 evaluations indicated dissatisfaction with their progress, and 17 out of 77 evaluations also

³We requested end-of-course evaluations from all SOF language classes conducted by B.I.B. Consultants during the first quarter of fiscal year 2003 at the U.S. Army Special Warfare Center and School, but the Army's school provided only 77 student end-of-course evaluations for 11 (of a total of 22) classes for 7 (of a total of 11) languages. Because we were not able to obtain all student end-of-course evaluations, the missing evaluations may have different responses from those that did respond and were provided to GAO.

**Appendix III: Status of the Language Services
Contract between the U.S. Special Operations
Command and B.I.B. Consultants**

indicated dissatisfaction with the usefulness of the course materials. At the Army school, the Army, as required under the B.I.B. contract, provides course materials.

Table 9: Student Evaluations Responses from Some Initial Acquisition SOF Language Classes at the U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School, Fort Bragg, North Carolina, during the First Quarter of 2003

	Initial acquisition language classes												
	A	B	C	D	E ^a	F	G	H ^b	I	J	K	L	M
Total number of classes	22	3	1	2	1	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	5
Total number of students	180	20	7	16	7	6	16	6	24	8	21	8	41
Number of classes with evaluations obtained	11	3	1	2	1	1	2	1	0	0	0	0	0
Number of evaluations obtained	77	20	7	16	7	6	15	6	0	0	0	0	0
Student evaluation responses ^c													
Student progress													
Extremely/Very satisfied	30	7	0	5	0	5	8	5					
Somewhat satisfied	34	6	5	10	5	1	6	1					
Not very/not at all satisfied	13	7	2	1	2	0	1	0					
Instructor's performance													
Extremely/Very satisfied	64	18	2	13	6	6	13	6					
Somewhat satisfied	8	1	3	3	0	0	1	0					
Not very/not at all satisfied	4	1	2	0	0	0	1	0					
Usefulness of materials													
Extremely/Very useful	24	2	1	6	2	3	6	4					
Somewhat useful	35	3	6	10	5	3	6	2					
Not very/not at all useful	18	15	0	0	0	0	3	0					

Sources: U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School, U.S. Army Special Operations Command (data); GAO (analysis).

Legend: A = All languages, B = Arabic, C = Korean, D = Russian, E = Serbian, F = Turkish, G = Thai, H = Spanish pilot, I = French, J = German, K = Indonesian, L = Pashtu, M = Spanish.

Note: We were not able to obtain student end-of-course evaluations for 11 classes in French, German, Indonesian, Spanish (other than the Spanish pilot class), and Pashtu, and have therefore excluded these classes from our analysis.

^aOne student (in a Serbian class) did not respond to "instructor satisfaction" question.

^bSpanish pilot class was taught using an accelerated class schedule.

^cStudent evaluations have been aggregated for languages where more than one section of the same class was taught.

We also analyzed student end-of-course evaluations for three classes taught by B.I.B. at the Naval Special Warfare Command's Group 1, Coronado, California, during the second quarter 2003.⁴ Unlike the Army, which used B.I.B.'s evaluation, the Navy designed and administered its own evaluation. In these evaluations, students were also asked to evaluate their courses in three areas: sufficient instruction time; instructor's ability to effectively teach, and the quality of instructional material. As table 10 indicates, all responses rated the three areas as "excellent or good," with the exception of the Indonesian class where two out of three students rated the "quality of materials" as "average." Although only one of the three classes used B.I.B. course materials as required by the contract, classes that started in July 2003 are using the B.I.B.-provided materials.

⁴We requested student end-of-course evaluations for all classes conducted at the Naval Special Warfare Command's Group 1 by B.I.B. in the second quarter of fiscal year 2003. We received evaluations for 9 students (of a total of 10) from three classes across three languages.

**Appendix III: Status of the Language Services
Contract between the U.S. Special Operations
Command and B.I.B. Consultants**

Table 10: Student Evaluations Responses from Initial Acquisition SOF Language Classes at Naval Special Warfare Command, Group I, Coronado, California, during the Second Quarter of 2003

	Initial acquisition language classes			
	All languages	French ^a	Indonesian	Tagalog
Number of classes	3	1	1	1
Number of students	10	4	4	2
Number of classes with evaluations obtained	3	1	1	1
Number of evaluations obtained	9	4	3	2
Student evaluation responses				
Sufficient instruction time				
Excellent/good	8	3	3	2
Average	0	0	0	0
Fair/poor	0	0	0	0
Instructor's performance				
Excellent/good	9	4	3	2
Average	0	0	0	0
Fair/poor	0	0	0	0
Quality of materials				
Excellent/good	7	4	1	2
Average	2	0	2	0
Fair/poor	0	0	0	0

Sources: Naval Special Warfare Command, Group I, Coronado, Calif., (data); GAO (analysis).

^aOne student did not respond to the question, "sufficient instruction time."

We did not review student evaluations at the U.S. Air Force Special Operations Command because no classes were completed during the time we conducted our work.

Appendix IV: Comments from the Department of Defense

Note: Comments were received from the Department of Defense on September 26, 2003.



SPECIAL OPERATIONS/
LOW-INTENSITY CONFLICT

OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20301-2500

Mr. Neal P. Curtin
Director United States General Accounting Office
Washington, D.C. 20548

Dear Mr. Curtin:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the General Accounting Office's draft report on Special Operations Forces Foreign Language Program (GAO-03-1026). Enclosed are our comments which we request to have included in the final report to Congress.

Encl.


Michael A. Westphal
DASD SO&CT

GAO DRAFT REPORT – DATED AUGUST 19, 2003
GAO CODE 350276/GAO-03-1026

“MILITARY TRAINING: Strategic Planning and Distributive Learning Could Benefit
Special Operations Forces Foreign Language Program”

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE COMMENTS
TO THE RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATION 1: The GAO recommended that the Secretary of Defense direct the Commander of the U.S. Special Operations Command to adopt the strategy it has drafted for meeting special operations forces’ foreign language requirements and develop the necessary strategic-planning tools (a strategic plan with associated performance plan and reports) to use in managing and assessing the progress of its foreign language program and to better address future human capital challenges. (Page 26/GAO Draft Report)

DoD RESPONSE: Non-concur. USSOCOM’s strategy for meeting special operations forces’ foreign language requirements is still in its infancy. Their strategy still needs to be properly staffed through the Joint Staff, OSD and the services before the SecDef would direct COMUSSOCOM to adopt it.

RECOMMENDATION 2: The GAO recommended that the Secretary of Defense direct the Commander of the U.S. Special Operations Command to incorporate distant-/ and distributive-learning approaches into the program to improve the special operations forces’ access to language training, and if additional resources are required, to request them. (Page 26/GAO Draft Report)

DoD RESPONSE: Concur. Due to the unique working environment of Special Operations Forces, distant-/distributive-learning should be included as part of their language training program. Computer-delivered language training programs will provide an accessible and portable method of on-demand language learning and language maintenance tools while deployed.

RECOMMENDATION 3: The GAO recommended that the Secretary of Defense should evaluate current (1) foreign language proficiency pay rates and (2) pay and allowance funding levels for Army Reserve and National Guard personnel to determine if changes are needed to provide them with a greater incentive to undertake language study and allow for more personnel to attend language schools and other training venues. (Page 26/GAO Draft Report)

DoD RESPONSE: Concur.

RECOMMENDATION 4: The GAO recommended that the Secretary of Defense should examine options for increasing the use and availability of oral proficiency foreign language

Note: Page numbers in the draft report may differ from those in this report.

testing to provide additional opportunities for SOF personnel to test and qualify in their respective languages. (Page 26/GAO Draft Report)

DoD RESPONSE: Concur.

Appendix V: GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgments

Contact

Clifton E. Spruill (202) 512-4531

Acknowledgments

In addition to the individual named above, Mark J. Wielgoszynski, Marie A. Mak, Corinna A. Wengryn, Nancy L. Benco, and Deborah Long made key contributions to this report.

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