



Highlights of [GAO-10-879T](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, Committee on Armed Services, House of Representatives

## Why GAO Did This Study

Today, and in the foreseeable future, military operations require U.S. personnel to work alongside multinational partners and among local populations. The Department of Defense (DOD) has placed a greater emphasis on transforming language and regional proficiency capabilities, which includes cultural awareness. GAO's prior work has found that integrated strategic plans with measurable goals and funding priorities linked to goals can help guide organizational transformations. Decision makers also require complete information to identify capability gaps and assess risk.

This testimony summarizes GAO's prior work and recommendations on DOD's efforts to develop language skills and regional proficiency and the steps DOD has taken to implement our prior recommendations. Specifically, it addresses the extent to which DOD has (1) developed a strategic plan to guide its language and regional proficiency transformation efforts and (2) obtained the information it needs to identify capability gaps and assess risk. GAO's statement is based on a June 2009 report and work conducted during May 2010 through June 2010 to update the status of GAO's recommendations.

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## MILITARY TRAINING

### Continued Actions Needed to Guide DOD's Efforts to Improve Language Skills and Regional Proficiency

#### What GAO Found

DOD has taken steps to transform its language and regional proficiency capabilities, but it has not yet developed a comprehensive strategic plan to guide its transformation efforts. DOD established Senior Language Authorities within the Office of the Secretary of Defense, the military services, and other components, developed a governance structure to provide internal oversight over transformation efforts, updated policies, and published a Defense Language Transformation Roadmap with broad goals and objectives. Each military service has also developed or is currently developing strategies using the roadmap as guidance or as a complementary document. However, GAO reported in June 2009 that not all objectives within the 2005 roadmap were measurable and that DOD had not identified the resources required to implement roadmap tasks or linked the roadmap to funding requests. In the absence of a comprehensive plan, GAO concluded it would be difficult for DOD to guide the military services as they develop their strategies and related training programs, and ensure these efforts were consistent with DOD-wide goals. Furthermore, DOD and Congress would lack information needed to assess progress toward a successful transformation and evaluate funding requests. GAO recommended that DOD develop a strategic plan that includes measurable performance goals and objectives and investment priorities. DOD agreed with this recommendation and estimated that a strategic plan would be completed by September 2009. In June 2010, DOD officials informed GAO that the plan is undergoing final review and approval.

DOD lacks the information needed to identify gaps in language and regional proficiency and to assess related risks. GAO reported in June 2009 that DOD had developed an inventory of its language capabilities for military personnel, but it did not yet have data on regional proficiency capabilities because DOD lacked an agreed-upon way to assess and validate these skills. GAO concluded that without complete information, DOD could not determine capability gaps and assess risk effectively and recommended that DOD establish a mechanism to assess and validate regional proficiency capabilities. DOD agreed with this recommendation. As of June 2010, DOD had not established such a mechanism. GAO also reported that DOD lacked a standardized methodology to aid DOD components in identifying language and regional proficiency requirements and, as a result, estimates of requirements varied widely. GAO concluded that without such a validated methodology, DOD would not have a reliable way to identify language and regional proficiency requirements. GAO recommended that DOD develop a validated methodology for identifying these requirements for all communities and all proficiency levels. DOD agreed, stating that it had two assessments underway intended to produce a standardized methodology. In June 2010, DOD officials told GAO that, based on the assessments, they had developed a methodology, which is being reviewed by senior DOD leaders.