

May 2011

# MILITARY TRAINING

## Actions Needed to Improve Planning and Coordination of Army and Marine Corps Language and Culture Training



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## Why GAO Did This Study

Today, and in the foreseeable future, military operations require U.S. personnel, in particular Army and Marine Corps ground forces, to communicate and interact with multinational partners and local populations. The committee report accompanying a proposed bill for the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2011 directed GAO to review several issues related to language and culture training for Army and Marine Corps general purpose forces. For this report, GAO evaluated (1) the extent to which the Army and Marine Corps had developed strategies with elements such as goals, funding priorities, and metrics to guide training approaches and investments that were aligned with Department of Defense (DOD) planning efforts and (2) DOD's approach for identifying training requirements for Army and Marine Corps forces that will deploy to the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility. To do so, GAO analyzed Army and Marine Corps strategies and training requirements and interviewed cognizant officials.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that the Army and Marine Corps assign responsibilities for program performance, and identify training investments and metrics; DOD establish a defined planning process with internal mechanisms, such as procedures and milestones, to align training efforts; and U.S. Central Command establish a process to identify and synchronize training requirements. DOD generally agreed with the recommendations.

View [GAO-11-456](#) or key components. For more information, contact Sharon Pickup at (202) 512-9619 or [pickups@gao.gov](mailto:pickups@gao.gov).

## MILITARY TRAINING

### Actions Needed to Improve Planning and Coordination of Army and Marine Corps Language and Culture Training

#### What GAO Found

The Army and Marine Corps developed service-specific language and culture strategies, but did not include some key elements to guide their training approaches and investments, and DOD-wide efforts to establish a planning process that could better align service training approaches are incomplete. The Army and Marine Corps developed broad goals and objectives within their strategies and identified some training programs and activities tied to these goals. However, the services did not always identify priorities and the investments needed to implement the training or a set of results-oriented performance metrics to assess the contributions that training programs have made collectively, which GAO and DOD have recognized can help ensure training investments are making progress toward achieving program goals and objectives. GAO found that the Army and Marine Corps did not complete underlying analyses and assign responsibilities for program performance prior to designing and implementing their strategies and associated training programs. DOD has taken steps to develop a strategic planning process to align service training approaches. For example, in February 2011, DOD published a strategic plan for language skills and cultural capabilities that outlines a broad departmentwide planning process. However, DOD has not yet set up internal mechanisms, such as procedures and milestones, by which it can reach consensus with the military services on priorities and investments. Without a clearly defined planning process, DOD does not have the tools it needs to set strategic direction for language and culture training efforts, fully align departmentwide efforts to develop plans and budget requests that reflect its priorities, and measure progress in implementing various initiatives.

DOD components identified varying language and culture training requirements for Army and Marine Corps general purpose forces that will deploy to the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility, but the Command did not use a comprehensive process to synchronize these requirements. GAO surveyed 15 documents issued since June 2008 and found several variances with respect to the language to be trained and the type and duration of training. For example, in July 2010 the Army required that all forces deploying to either Afghanistan or Iraq complete a 4- to 6-hour online training program for language and culture. In September 2010, a senior Marine Corps commander directed that ground units preparing for Afghanistan deployments complete a 2-day culture course. Army and Marine Corps officials noted that training requirements changed constantly and this led to some confusion in developing training programs as well as considerable time and resources that were spent adjusting training. GAO found that contrary to DOD guidance, U.S. Central Command had not yet established a comprehensive process to approve training requirements and coordinate them with key stakeholders to ensure alignment with DOD guidance and obtain feedback on service training approaches. Without a comprehensive process, U.S. Central Command will not have a mechanism to identify and synchronize training for current and future operations, which may result in deploying forces that receive training that is inconsistent and may not meet operational needs.

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## **Abbreviation**

DOD            Department of Defense

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United States Government Accountability Office  
Washington, DC 20548

May 26, 2011

### Congressional Committees

Today, and in the foreseeable future, military operations require U.S. personnel to communicate and interact with multinational partners and local populations. Referring both to the long-term efforts to prepare military forces for future conflicts and the near-term needs of current operations, the Department of Defense (DOD) emphasized in the 2010 Quadrennial Defense Review the importance of developing the language and culture skills of the military and civilian workforce. DOD concluded that U.S. forces would be able to perform their missions more effectively with more and better key enabling capabilities, including language expertise. On the basis of their operational experiences in Afghanistan and Iraq, ground commanders have expressed the importance of language and culture skills for general purpose forces in counterinsurgency and stability operations, stressing, for example, that language training is as important as marksmanship and other key training. Reinforcing the importance of language and culture skills, the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness issued guidance in December 2010 setting out DOD policy that training and personnel processes and programs should be aligned to prepare deploying units, leaders, and staffs with the language and cultural knowledge and skills, commensurate with their duties, needed for the successful conduct of counterinsurgency operations.<sup>1</sup> The Army and Marine Corps have taken a variety of steps to develop language and culture skills for general purpose forces, including the issuance of servicewide strategies, and implementing predeployment training programs to address the needs of current operations.

Since 2009, we have made recommendations to address a number of challenges the department faces in developing language and culture skills in the military. For example, in June 2009, we recommended that DOD develop a strategic plan that includes measurable performance goals and objectives and investment priorities and a validated methodology for identifying language and regional proficiency requirements, which

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<sup>1</sup>Department of Defense Directive Type Memorandum 11-002, *Counterinsurgency (COIN) Training and Reporting Guidance for Preparing U.S. Forces to Succeed in Afghanistan and Pakistan* (Dec. 9, 2010).

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includes cultural awareness.<sup>2</sup> In June 2010, we testified before the House Armed Services Committee, Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations to provide an update on DOD's progress in implementing recommendations from our June 2009 report.<sup>3</sup> At that time, we noted that DOD had not yet produced a comprehensive strategic plan to synchronize language and culture transformation efforts and that the department did not have complete language and culture requirements data needed to properly assess capability gaps and associated risks. In February 2011, DOD published the *Department of Defense Strategic Plan for Language Skills, Regional Expertise, and Cultural Capabilities (2011-2016)* noting that a more detailed implementation plan would be issued separately with elements such as action plans that detail specific tasks to be accomplished and performance measures.

The committee report accompanying a proposed bill for the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2011 (H.R. 5136) directed us to review a number of issues related to language and culture training for the Army's and Marine Corps' respective general purpose forces.<sup>4</sup> For this report, we evaluated (1) the extent to which the Army and Marine Corps had developed language and culture strategies with key elements, such as goals, funding priorities, and metrics to guide training approaches and investments that were aligned with departmentwide planning efforts; and (2) DOD's approach for identifying language and culture training requirements for Army and Marine Corps general purpose forces that will deploy to the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility. We will report separately at a later date on other issues related to the House report, including steps the Army and Marine Corps are taking to incorporate language and culture in training and personnel processes.

For the first objective, we focused on the Army's and Marine Corps' general purpose forces. Therefore, excluded from this review were training programs for language and regional experts (e.g., foreign area officers and intelligence specialists), special operations forces, and service

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<sup>2</sup>GAO, *Military Training: DOD Needs a Strategic Plan and Better Inventory and Requirements Data to Guide Development of Language Skills and Regional Proficiency*, [GAO-09-568](#) (Washington, D.C.: June 19, 2009).

<sup>3</sup>GAO, *Military Training: Continued Actions Needed to Guide DOD's Efforts to Improve Language Skills and Regional Proficiency*, [GAO-10-879T](#) (Washington, D.C.: June 29, 2010).

<sup>4</sup>H.R. Rep. No. 111-491 at 259 (2010).

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efforts (e.g., human terrain teams) to provide culture experts to deployed forces.<sup>5</sup> We examined the *Army Culture and Foreign Language Strategy* and the *Marine Corps Language, Regional and Culture Strategy: 2011-2015*<sup>6</sup> and training documents to determine training priorities and metrics that have been used to measure progress in meeting service and DOD capability needs. We reviewed these documents in the context of our prior work, DOD budget documents, and service guidance<sup>7</sup> to determine the extent to which the Army and Marine Corps developed strategies that identified key elements, such as goals and objectives, training programs and priorities, resource requirements, and approaches for measuring progress, including results-oriented performance metrics. We also reviewed Army and Marine Corps funding data associated with the implementation of the two services' respective language and culture strategies for fiscal years 2009 through 2012. To corroborate our understanding of the documents provided, we conducted interviews with officials responsible for developing the Army's and Marine Corps' respective language and culture strategies and related training programs, as well as with Office of the Secretary of Defense officials responsible for providing strategic direction and programmatic oversight of the department's language and culture programs. We also discussed the content and status of ongoing departmental efforts that are intended to further align language and culture training approaches with officials representing the Office of the Secretary of Defense and the Joint Staff.

For the second objective, we focused on training requirements for the Army's and Marine Corps' respective general purpose forces that are preparing for deployments in the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility. We reviewed statutory provisions, including certain

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<sup>5</sup>According to DOD, "foreign area officers" are commissioned officers who, in addition to their primary military specialty, also possess a combination of strategic focus, regional expertise, cultural awareness, and foreign language skills. "Human terrain teams" are comprised of sociocultural experts that are deployed to Afghanistan and Iraq to help improve Army and Marine Corps commanders' and staffs' understanding of local populations.

<sup>6</sup>See *Army Culture and Foreign Language Strategy* (Dec. 2009) and *Marine Corps Language, Regional and Culture Strategy: 2011-2015* (Jan. 2011).

<sup>7</sup>See, for example, GAO, *Human Capital: A Guide for Assessing Strategic Training and Development Efforts in the Federal Government*, [GAO-04-546G](#) (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 2004); Department of Defense, *Fiscal Year 2012 Budget Request* (Feb. 4, 2011); Army Regulation 350-1, *Army Training and Leader Development* (Dec. 18, 2009); and Marine Corps Order P3500.72A, *Marine Corps Ground Training and Readiness Program* (Apr. 18, 2005).

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sections of Title 10 of the U.S. Code and related DOD guidance that characterize the training roles and responsibilities of combatant commanders and the military services.<sup>8</sup> We examined Office of the Secretary of Defense, U.S. Central Command, U.S. Forces Afghanistan, and Army and Marine Corps documents published from 2008 to 2011 and identified specific language and culture training requirements. To corroborate our understanding of the documents provided, we conducted interviews with officials representing the Office of the Secretary of Defense, U.S. Central Command, U.S. Forces Afghanistan, and Army and Marine Corps force provider and training commands to discuss the processes they use to identify language and culture requirements for Army and Marine Corps general purpose forces that will deploy to the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility and steps taken to synchronize service predeployment training so that it addresses operational needs. We assessed these efforts in light of a DOD strategic plan that describes the importance of establishing a robust training requirements identification process and synchronizing service training programs with combatant commander requirements.<sup>9</sup>

We conducted this performance audit from June 2010 to May 2011 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. A more detailed discussion of our scope and methodology can be found in appendix I.

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## Background

DOD, the Army, and the Marine Corps have emphasized the need for improved language and culture skills in strategic guidance and are implementing training and education programs to begin to address these needs.

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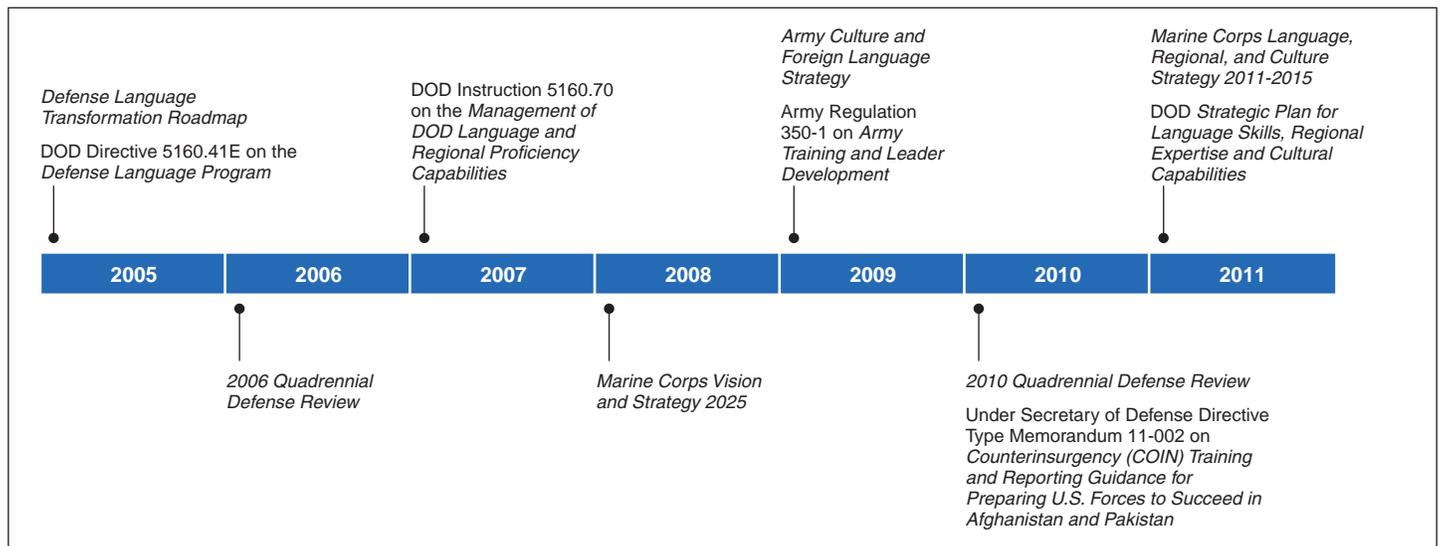
<sup>8</sup>See, for example, 10 U.S.C. §164 for responsibilities of commanders of combatant commands and 10 U.S.C. §§3013, 5013, and 8013 for the responsibilities of the service secretaries; and Department of Defense Directive 5100.01, *Functions of the Department of Defense and Its Major Components* (Dec. 21, 2010).

<sup>9</sup>Department of Defense, *Strategic Plan for the Next Generation of Training for the Department of Defense* (Sept. 23, 2010).

## DOD and Service-Level Guidance on Building Language and Culture Skills

Before September 11, 2001, DOD generally focused efforts to build language and culture capabilities on its professional communities.<sup>10</sup> As military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq have continued, DOD has broadened this focus to the general purpose forces. In figure 1, we show that in departmentwide and service-level documents issued since 2005, DOD and the Army and Marine Corps addressed the need for improved language and culture skills.

**Figure 1: Selected DOD, Army, and Marine Corps Documents that Addressed the Need for Improved Language and Culture Skills**



Source: GAO analysis of DOD documents.

## Roles and Responsibilities for Language and Culture Training

The responsibilities within DOD for identifying, developing, and maintaining language and culture capabilities are shared among several components, including the Office of the Secretary of Defense, the combatant commanders, and the military services. The Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness provides overall policy guidance for the defense language program and is also responsible for

<sup>10</sup>DOD's professional communities of linguists and regional experts generally include personnel—such as foreign area officers, human intelligence collectors, and signal intelligence analysts—who require language and culture skills to perform their primary functions.

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reviewing the policies, plans, and programs of the DOD components to ensure that foreign language and regional proficiency needs are adequately addressed.

DOD has designated Senior Language Authorities within the Office of the Secretary of Defense, the military services, and other DOD components, and established a governance structure for DOD's language and culture programs, which consists of a number of entities, including the following:

- **Defense Language Office:** provides strategic direction and programmatic oversight to the DOD components, including the services and combatant commands, on present and future requirements related to language as well as regional and cultural proficiency. The Director of the Defense Language Office, within the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, has been designated as the DOD Senior Language Authority.
- **Defense Language Steering Committee:** comprised of Senior Language Authorities from the military services and other DOD organizations and chaired by the DOD Senior Language Authority, the committee provides senior-level guidance regarding the development of DOD's language capabilities.<sup>11</sup>
- **Defense Language Action Panel:** comprised of less-senior representatives from the same entities represented on the Defense Language Steering Committee, the panel supports the activities, functions, and responsibilities of the Defense Language Steering Committee.

Combatant commanders, such as the Commander of U.S. Central Command, are responsible for identifying foreign language and culture requirements in support of operations in their geographic areas of responsibility. In some cases, battlefield commanders, such as the Commander of U.S. Forces in Afghanistan, may publish guidance and other documents that specify training tasks that should be completed

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<sup>11</sup>The Defense Language Steering Committee includes representatives from the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy; the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Intelligence; the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller); the Office of the Under Secretary for Acquisition, Technology, and Logistics; the Office of the Director, Program Analysis and Evaluation; the combatant commands; the Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff; the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, and Air Force; the Defense Intelligence Agency; the Defense Security Cooperation Agency; the Defense Threat Reduction Agency; the National Security Agency; and the National Geospatial Intelligence Agency.

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before military forces deploy to an area where combat operations are being conducted.

Each military service is responsible for training forces with the language and culture capabilities necessary to support departmentwide and service-specific requirements and the needs of combatant commanders. Army and Marine Corps headquarters staff and service commands develop guidance and training programs to prepare forces with required skills, such as language and culture. The Army and Marine Corps have published language and culture strategies to guide servicewide efforts. Within the Army, the Training and Doctrine Command has been designated as the lead agency for implementing the *Army Culture and Foreign Language Strategy* and has also established the Training and Doctrine Command Culture Center. The Marine Corps has established a culture center—the Center for Advanced Operational Culture Learning—which is responsible for developing and implementing the aspects of the *Marine Corps Language, Regional and Culture Strategy: 2011-2015* that apply to general purpose forces.

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## Overview of Language and Culture-Related Training Programs for Army and Marine Corps General Purpose Forces

The Army and Marine Corps provide language and culture training at various points of a service member's career through formal service institutions, such as professional military education schools, and within operational units. The following are examples:

- *Training offered during enrollment in formal service institutions.* The Army offers new recruits courses to build basic cultural competence and is in the process of adjusting training programs at each of its schools to expand the amount of cultural content in training. The Army has also provided some soldiers with an opportunity to study a foreign language in professional military education courses and develop foreign language skills through self-directed, computer-based training. The Marine Corps has begun implementing a career development program for all marines that begins when marines enter military service and continues throughout their career.<sup>12</sup> During the initial part of the program, marines receive training and education on general cultural skills that that can be applied to any operational environment and an assignment to 1 of 17 regions around the world for future instruction. Each sequential part of the program is designed to deepen

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<sup>12</sup>The Marine Corps refers to this concept as the Regional, Culture, and Language Familiarization program.

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understanding of general culture skills and build specific regional knowledge, including some computer-based foreign language study. As of December 2010, the Marine Corps had provided more than 7,000 officers with a regional assignment.

- *Predeployment training.* The Army and Marine Corps offer predeployment training programs to provide additional language and culture instruction focused on the particular area to which a unit will deploy. The Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center and Army and Marine Corps culture centers provide deploying forces with language survival kits, briefings on culture issues, and mobile training teams that present more in-depth language and culture training.<sup>13</sup>

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## DOD and Service-Level Funding for Language and Culture Training Programs

Funding for language and culture training programs is provided at the department and service level in base and Overseas Contingency Operations portions of the annual budget. In fiscal year 2010, DOD received about \$550 million for major language and culture programs identified by the Defense Language Office. In addition, the Army and Marine Corps have received funding to implement their respective language and culture strategies. For example, in fiscal year 2010, the Army's Training and Doctrine Command received about \$13 million for activities related to implementing the *Army Culture and Foreign Language Strategy* and the Marine Corps' Center for Advanced Operational Culture Learning received about \$10 million to develop language and culture-related programs for general purpose forces.

Regarding funding for predeployment training, the Office of the Secretary of Defense directed the Army to include a total of about \$160 million in its budget submissions for fiscal years 2011 through 2015 for language training sites on selected military installations to teach foreign languages to military and civilian personnel, including Army and Marine Corps operational units that are preparing for deployments to Afghanistan. This training includes self-directed learning, classroom instruction, and role playing (see figure 2). According to DOD, ultimately approximately 3,500 service members will learn basic Afghan language skills each year at its language training sites.

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<sup>13</sup>The Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center provides culturally based foreign language education, training, evaluation, research and sustainment for DOD personnel.

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**Figure 2: Soldiers Participating in Training at Fort Carson Language Training Site**



Source: U.S. Army.

For Afghanistan deployments, the focus of language training has varied because of the multiple languages in that country. Among the country's many ethnic groups (which are known collectively as Afghans), Dari and Pashto are the dominant and official languages of Afghanistan. Pashto speakers are found in large numbers in Afghanistan and northern Pakistan, and the use of the language is generally limited to these regions. Dari, by contrast, can be understood by anyone proficient in Persian-Farsi. Although Pashto is the language of the largest ethnic group in Afghanistan, Dari is the working language for the majority of Afghans.

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## Army and Marine Corps Developed Language and Culture Strategies, but Did Not Include Some Key Elements and Departmentwide Efforts to Establish a Planning Process Are Incomplete

Our prior work shows that establishing priorities and results-oriented performance metrics can help federal agencies target training investments and assess the contributions that training programs make toward achieving strategic program goals and objectives.<sup>14</sup> The Army and Marine Corps have developed service-specific strategies with elements such as broad goals and objectives for building language and culture capabilities, but the strategies did not fully address other key elements, such as the identification of training priorities and investments and results-oriented performance metrics. We found that the Army and Marine Corps had not conducted comprehensive analyses to prioritize language and culture training investments and assign responsibilities for program performance and departmentwide efforts to establish a planning process for language and culture capabilities were not yet complete.

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## The Army and Marine Corps Developed Broad Goals and Objectives within Language and Culture Strategies and Identified Some Training Programs and Activities

The Army and Marine Corps developed broad service-specific goals and objectives for language and culture training within their respective language and culture strategies and identified some key training programs and activities. In the strategy it issued in December 2009, the Army states that the service's goal is to develop a baseline of foreign language and culture capabilities for all leaders and soldiers to support the accomplishment of unit missions.<sup>15</sup> The Army strategy establishes language and culture subject areas and learning objectives for officers and enlisted soldiers for various stages of a military career for both career development and predeployment training.<sup>16</sup> According to the Army strategy, the learning objectives are intended to provide a vision of the desired end state for soldiers at each career stage. For example, the strategy identifies three components of cross-cultural competence, which include culture fundamentals, culture self-awareness, and culture skills, and a number of learning objectives for each subject area that are tied to rank and level of responsibility. The Army's strategy notes that its primary focus is establishing the framework and content of training, and that

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<sup>14</sup>GAO-04-546G.

<sup>15</sup>*Army Culture and Foreign Language Strategy* (Dec. 2009).

<sup>16</sup>The Army strategy defines these stages as: stage 1: new recruit through the end of initial military training; stage 2: the end of initial military training through the 7th year of a career; stage 3: the 8th year of a career through the 16th year; and stage 4: the 17th year of a career and beyond.

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additional steps are needed to determine the methods that are the most appropriate for delivering the education and training necessary to support the Army's requirements.

In the strategy it issued in January 2011, the Marine Corps established a broad strategic goal to provide all marines in the general purpose forces with a baseline in cross-cultural competence while simultaneously enhancing regional proficiency and functional language/communication skills throughout the force.<sup>17</sup> The strategy outlines a number of language and culture training areas that are designed to enhance marines' ability to communicate and interact with local populations on a basic level and perform core missions in a culturally complex environment. For example, to support its cross-cultural competence goal, the strategy discusses the need for marines to be able to conduct a cultural analysis, incorporate operational culture into planning, influence a foreign population, apply operational culture, and interact with a foreign population. In addition, the strategy identifies specific programs and the training activities that are available to achieve the Marine Corps' strategic goal. Additionally, according to the strategy, the service's operational culture training manual identifies the specific learning outcomes and objectives across the entire training and education continuum in the areas of cross-cultural competence, regional proficiency, and communication skills.<sup>18</sup>

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## The Army's and Marine Corps' Strategies Did Not Fully Identify Training Priorities and Required Investments or Results-Oriented Performance Metrics to Assess Language and Culture Training

The Army's and Marine Corps' respective strategies did not address some key elements that could guide their training efforts and investments. Our prior work has found that effective planning includes a clear identification of training priorities and the investments required to implement and sustain training programs and activities.<sup>19</sup> These elements provide a framework for decision makers to assess the extent to which annual budget requests are coordinated with training priorities and strategic goals and objectives. Additionally, our work has found that it is important for agencies to incorporate performance metrics that can be used to assess the contributions training programs make collectively toward achieving strategic program goals and objectives. DOD noted in its fiscal year 2012

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<sup>17</sup> *Marine Corps Language, Regional and Culture Strategy: 2011-2015* (Jan. 2011).

<sup>18</sup> Navy Marine Corps Directive 3500.65, *Operational Culture and Language Training and Readiness Manual* (Apr. 8, 2009).

<sup>19</sup> [GAO-04-546G](#).

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budget request that every level of the department is accountable for measuring performance and delivering results that support departmentwide strategic goals and objectives.<sup>20</sup> With regard to training programs, both the Army and Marine Corps have included requirements to perform evaluations in their respective training-related guidance.<sup>21</sup>

We found that the Army and Marine Corps did not always identify training priorities with the proposed investments that are required for implementing and sustaining the training within their respective language and culture strategies. Within its strategy, the Army identifies a number of career development and predeployment training objectives, for example that all individuals have a basic understanding of the language used in their potential area of deployment appropriate to their mission, but the strategy does not identify training priorities to achieve these objectives. Furthermore, the Army's strategy does not identify the investments that are needed to implement and sustain training programs and activities that will build the Army's desired language and culture capability. The Marine Corps' strategy identifies two language and culture training priorities for its general purpose forces—the Regional, Culture, and Language Familiarization and predeployment training programs and provides information on training activities, such as language learning software and language learning centers, that support these training programs. However, the Marine Corps' strategy did not identify the total investment required to develop and sustain these training programs and activities.

In some instances, the Army and Marine Corps have identified language and culture funding requirements, for example within their annual budget requests, but this information is not linked with the services' respective language and culture strategies. Officials with Army and Marine Corps headquarters and training commands told us that there is not a cohesive picture of language and culture training investments and that multiple commands and units have separately developed and funded language and culture training programs. For example, the Marine Corps' Center for Advanced Operational Culture Learning has funded language and culture training for all marines in the general purpose forces, while operational units have also funded predeployment language training for these marines

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<sup>20</sup>Department of Defense, *Fiscal Year 2012 Budget Request* (Feb. 4, 2011).

<sup>21</sup>See, for example, Army Regulation 350-1, *Army Training and Leader Development* (Dec. 18, 2009); and Marine Corps Order P3500.72A, *Marine Corps Ground Training and Readiness Program* (Apr. 18, 2005).

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to attend classes at a local community college and university. In addition, other DOD organizations, such as the Defense Language Office, have funded language and culture training for Army and Marine Corps general purpose forces. For example, the Defense Language Office has funded some language and culture predeployment training for Army and Marine Corps general purpose forces and also the development of interactive training tools to enhance the cultural proficiency skills of service members. Because the Army and Marine Corps have not linked their budget requests with their respective strategies and multiple DOD and service organizations have funded language and culture training programs, the department does not have full visibility over the potential total costs associated with implementing the Army's and Marine Corps' respective language and culture training strategies.

We also found that the Army and Marine Corps had not yet established a systematic approach with results-oriented performance metrics to assess the contributions that training programs have made collectively in achieving their strategic goals and objectives. Within its strategy, the Army notes that performance metrics are necessary to determine the effectiveness of training programs, but the strategy does not establish any specific metrics or other indicators to evaluate progress toward the service's strategic goals or an approach to assess them. Similarly, the Marine Corps' strategy does not discuss any metrics that the service will utilize to assess language and culture training programs that are intended to achieve the service's strategic goals and objectives.

While the Army and Marine Corps had not established comprehensive metrics within their strategies to assess progress towards achieving their overall strategic goals and objectives, the services have established limited metrics to inform the development of specific language and culture training programs. For example, in July 2010, the Army set out a requirement for at least one leader per platoon deploying to Afghanistan and Iraq that will have regular contact with a local population to have more advanced language training and set standards for the leader's language capability using DOD's agreed upon method of measuring proficiency.<sup>22</sup> Army officials reported that, based on their testing, nearly

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<sup>22</sup>Soldiers who complete language training may be given an Interagency Language Roundtable score for listening, reading, and speaking proficiency in foreign languages as measured on a scale from 0 (no proficiency) to 5 (functionally native proficiency). The Army standard is for at least one leader per platoon to achieve a level 0+ in speaking and listening, described as memorized proficiency, with a goal of a level 1, described as elementary proficiency.

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100 percent of soldiers who have completed the language training program intended to support this requirement are meeting or exceeding the performance metric. The Marine Corps published an operational culture training manual in April 2009 with language and culture-related training tasks and the Center for Advanced Operational Culture Learning has developed training programs to assist Marine Corps units in accomplishing the tasks called for in the manual.<sup>23</sup> These training programs include individual and unit-level performance metrics, such as student exams and training evaluation scorecards. However, the Army and Marine Corps have not yet established a comprehensive set of metrics for their respective language and culture training programs. For example, the Army had not established performance metrics for its culture training programs and the Marine Corps had not established metrics for predeployment language training.

We found that the Army and Marine Corps did not include these key planning elements within their respective strategies because they did not fully analyze their training efforts to identify a clear prioritization of training investments and formalize responsibilities for ensuring the accountability for program performance prior to the design and implementation of their language and culture strategies and related training programs. Both the Army and the Marine Corps note that their respective language and culture strategies will be updated as needed. The Army is taking steps to further define the investments it requires to implement the service's language and culture strategy and develop performance metrics to determine language and culture proficiency gaps that would inform the development of training and education programs. Once these analyses are completed, the Army plans to revise its servicewide strategy. An official from the Marine Corps' Center for Advanced Operational Culture Learning told us that the Marine Corps had not formally assigned it or any other service organization with the responsibility and accountability for language and culture program performance. For example, the center is responsible for developing training programs of instruction and other materials, but not for ensuring that operational units complete the training programs in total or assessing training programs in meeting strategic goals and objectives. The Marine Corps plans to develop a concept of operations document that will formalize stakeholder roles and responsibilities for implementing its

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<sup>23</sup>Navy Marine Corps Directive 3500.65, *Operational Culture and Language Training and Readiness Manual* (Apr. 8, 2009).

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strategy and conduct additional analyses to identify language and culture capability needs that are not currently being addressed by current training programs. However, at the time of our review, these efforts were in the planning stage and are not yet complete. Without a complete understanding of the actions and investments that are necessary to achieve their strategic goals and objectives, the Army and the Marine Corps cannot provide DOD and the Congress with a reasonable assurance that their approaches and funding requests are building a capability that meets service and DOD long-term needs.

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**Departmentwide Efforts to Establish a Planning Process to Further Align Service Language and Culture Training Approaches Are Not Yet Complete**

In June 2009, we reported that DOD did not have a comprehensive strategic plan to transform language and culture capabilities with measures to assess the effectiveness of its transformation efforts. At that time, we recommended that DOD develop a strategic plan or set of linked plans that contain measurable performance goals and objectives and investment priorities that are linked to these goals to guide the military services' efforts to transform language and culture capabilities.<sup>24</sup> In February 2011, DOD published the *Department of Defense Strategic Plan for Language Skills, Regional Expertise, and Cultural Capabilities (2011-2016)*. The strategy outlines a broad planning process that includes a vision, goals, and objectives and notes that the department will review the strategy annually and modify it when needed to ensure alignment with overarching DOD guidance. While the strategy broadly describes a strategic planning process, the department has not yet set up internal mechanisms, such as procedures and milestones, which our prior work has found can assist the department reach consensus with the military departments and others on priorities, synchronize the development of department- and servicewide plans with each other and the budget process, and guide efforts to monitor progress and take corrective action.<sup>25</sup> DOD officials told us that a more detailed implementation plan will be issued separately and the plan would likely include action plans that define responsibilities and time frames for completing specific tasks, as well as performance measures to assess progress and guide the allocation of resources, but it is unclear if this plan will provide the department with the clearly defined planning process needed to achieve its goals. During the

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<sup>24</sup>GAO-09-568.

<sup>25</sup>GAO, *Defense Business Transformation: DOD Needs to Take Additional Actions to Further Define Key Management Roles, Develop Measurable Goals, and Align Planning Efforts*, GAO-11-181R (Washington, D.C.: Jan. 26, 2011).

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course of our review, officials with the Army and Marine Corps told us that there has been a lack of strategic direction and coherent departmentwide policy on language and culture capability needs, which has limited the services' ability to train service personnel in the general purpose forces with the right mix of skills to meet combatant commander requirements and develop service-specific strategies that align with departmentwide goals.

In June 2009, we also reported that DOD did not have the information it needs to identify gaps and make informed investment decisions about language and culture capability needs, in part because DOD did not have a standardized methodology to determine language and regional proficiency requirements. We recommended that DOD develop a validated methodology for identifying language and regional proficiency requirements, which includes cultural awareness.<sup>26</sup> Citing our June 2009 recommendation, DOD has taken steps to develop a new, standardized methodology to define geographic combatant commander language and culture capability requirements and plans to implement the methodology by March 2012.<sup>27</sup> However, since these requirements are still incomplete, the Army's and Marine Corps' strategies do not yet address the specific actions that the services will be required to take to address DOD-wide language and culture capability requirements.

Without a clearly defined planning process that includes internal mechanisms, such as procedures and milestones, and a validated set of language and culture capability requirements, the department does not have the tools it needs to set strategic direction for language and culture training efforts, fully align departmentwide efforts to develop plans and budget requests that reflect its priorities, and measure progress in implementing various initiatives.

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<sup>26</sup>[GAO-09-568](#).

<sup>27</sup>At the time of our work, DOD was training the geographic combatant commands to implement the new requirements methodology. Once implemented, DOD intends to update the geographic combatant command requirements on an annual basis and also apply the methodology to other DOD components, such as the functional combatant commands and combat support agencies.

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## U.S. Central Command Did Not Synchronize Varying Language and Culture Training Requirements for Army and Marine Corps General Purpose Forces

DOD components identified language and culture training requirements for Army and Marine Corps general purpose forces that will deploy to the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility, but these requirements varied among and within DOD components. Within recent planning guidance, DOD describes the importance of establishing a robust training requirements identification process and synchronizing training among DOD components. However, we found that U.S. Central Command did not clearly identify and approve predeployment language and culture training requirements and synchronize them among and within DOD components, because the command has not yet developed a comprehensive, analytically based process for identifying and synchronizing training requirements.

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## Language and Culture Training Requirements Intended to Guide Service Predeployment Training Programs for General Purpose Forces Varied in Documents Published by DOD Components

Given the dynamic security environment presented by current operations in the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility, DOD components have been required to rapidly respond to changing capability needs for language and culture. This has resulted in multiple DOD components promulgating language and culture predeployment training requirements that are intended to prepare forces for operations in the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility. Since 2008, the Office of the Secretary of Defense, U.S. Central Command, U.S. Forces Afghanistan, and the Army and the Marine Corps have utilized various means to articulate joint force and service-specific language and culture predeployment training requirements, including combatant commander orders, battlefield commander guidance, departmentwide memorandums, and service-level orders and administrative messages.

We surveyed 15 documents issued since June 2008 that address language and culture predeployment training requirements. In table 1, we list the documents we reviewed and include descriptions of language and culture training requirements, which are not intended to be comprehensive descriptions of the documents. Within these documents, we found several examples of variances in language and culture training requirements among and within DOD components. In particular, we identified examples of language and culture predeployment training requirements that varied even at similar points in time with respect to the specific language to be trained—whether Dari, Pashto, or both languages, as well as variances in the type and duration of training. For example, the language designated as the focus of training varied amongst multiple pieces of guidance issued since 2009. In November 2009, U.S. Forces Afghanistan issued guidance

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recommending that all forces deploying to Afghanistan focus their predeployment language training on Dari. In that same month, the Marine Corps issued an administrative message directing that certain commanders deploying to Afghanistan develop a basic language capability in Pashto. From November 2009 to March 2011, the Office of the Secretary of Defense, U.S. Central Command, U.S. Forces Afghanistan, and the Army and the Marine Corps issued additional guidance addressing language training, and the language focus has continued to vary among the different pieces of guidance. For example, in October 2010, U.S. Forces Afghanistan published an order that required all forces to complete training with a focus on Dari, and included an option for commanders to specify training with a focus on Pashto in certain cases. In November 2010, the Secretary of Defense approved Afghanistan counterinsurgency training standards that include a requirement that U.S. forces understand basic phrases in both Dari and Pashto. Additionally, just as the focus of training has varied, the type and duration of training has varied as well. For example, in July 2010, the Army required that all forces deploying to either Afghanistan or Iraq complete a 4- to 6-hour online training program for language and culture. In September 2010, the Marine Corps directed that all ground units assigned to the I Marine Expeditionary Force preparing for Afghanistan deployment complete a 2-day culture course and receive an introduction to software used for self-paced study. During the course of our review, Army and Marine Corps officials noted that language and culture predeployment training requirements changed constantly, which led to some confusion over the training that was needed to meet operational needs and that considerable time and resources were spent adjusting training programs.

**Table 1: Examples of Language and Culture Predeployment Training Requirements for General Purpose Forces Deploying to the U.S. Central Command Area of Responsibility**

<b>Date</b>	<b>DOD component</b>	<b>Description of requirements<sup>a</sup></b>
June 2008	U.S. Central Command	Requires that all forces deploying to the area of responsibility complete training on cultural aspects of host countries.
Nov. 2009	U.S. Forces Afghanistan	Recommends that all forces learn basic language and that each platoon with regular contact with the population have at least one leader with a measurable language capability. Focus language is Dari.
Nov. 2009	U.S. Marine Corps	Requires that battalion and regimental commanders deploying to Afghanistan develop a basic language capability through 40 hours of language training. Focus language is Pashto.
Dec. 2009	U.S. Army	Establishes language training sites on Ft. Campbell, Ft. Carson, and Ft. Drum for select soldiers deploying to Afghanistan. Training at these sites began in February 2010. Focus languages are "Afghan languages."
Jan. 2010	U.S. Forces Afghanistan	Re-emphasizes prior recommendation that all forces learn basic language and each platoon with regular contact with the population have at least one leader with a measurable language capability. Focus language remains Dari.
Feb. 2010	U.S. Marine Corps	Requires that all marines receive predeployment culture training and selected marines receive basic language training for all deployments with the amount determined by a mission analysis.
July 2010	U.S. Army	Requires that all soldiers deploying to Afghanistan and Iraq complete a 4- to 6-hour online language and culture training program and at least one leader per platoon develop a measurable language capability through 16 weeks (at least 480 hours) of on-site language training or 100 hours of online training. For Afghanistan deployments, focus language is Dari.
Sept. 2010	U.S. Central Command	Endorses counterinsurgency training standards for Afghanistan that include, for example, a requirement that all forces understand basic Dari and Pashto phrases.
Sept. 2010	U.S. Marine Corps	Directs that marines assigned to the I Marine Expeditionary Force preparing for Afghanistan deployment take a 2-day culture course and that selected marines take basic language training.
Oct. 2010	U.S. Forces Afghanistan	Requires that all deploying forces complete a 4- to 6-hour online training program for language and culture. Focus language is Dari, with a focus on another language to be decided on a case-by-case basis.
Nov. 2010	Office of the Secretary of Defense	Directs implementation of Afghanistan counterinsurgency training standards—e.g., that U.S. forces understand basic Dari and Pashto phrases.
Dec. 2010	Office of the Secretary of Defense	Requires that the military services ensure that forces are trained to Afghanistan counterinsurgency standards and that at least one leader per platoon that will have regular contact with the population will have a measurable language capability in the language of the region to which they will be assigned.
Dec. 2010	U.S. Army	Reinforces and incorporates training guidance provided in July 2010 that requires all soldiers complete training in the basics of the culture of the country to which the unit is planning to deploy and that at least one leader per platoon develop a measurable language capability through about 16 weeks of on-site language training or 100 hours of online training. For Afghanistan deployments, focus language is Dari, with a focus on another language to be decided on a case-by-case basis.

Date	DOD component	Description of requirements <sup>a</sup>
Mar. 2011	U.S. Central Command	Requires that all nonstandard forces <sup>b</sup> deploying to the area of responsibility complete cultural training that includes a general overview of the political and religious conditions of the country and that all forces deploying to Afghanistan complete a 4- to 6-hour online training program for language and culture. Focus language is Dari or Pashto.
Mar. 2011	U.S. Central Command	Requires that all standard forces deploying to the area of responsibility complete cultural training that includes a general overview of the political and religious conditions of the country and that all forces deploying to Afghanistan complete a 4- to 6-hour online training program for language and culture. Focus language is Dari or Pashto.

Source: GAO analysis of DOD documents.

Note: Several squads form a platoon, and several platoons form a company. Several companies with a headquarters form a battalion.

<sup>a</sup>The descriptions of language and culture training requirements included in this table are not intended to be comprehensive descriptions of the documents.

<sup>b</sup>Nonstandard forces are defined as joint sourced, in lieu of, and ad hoc forces as well as individual augmentees. These forces support ground-based operations in the areas of policing, detainee operations, and customs and border patrol, among others.

## U.S. Central Command Did Not Clearly Identify and Approve Predeployment Training Requirements and Synchronize Them among and within DOD Components

According to DOD guidance, the Commander of U.S. Central Command is to coordinate and approve training necessary to carry out missions assigned to the command.<sup>28</sup> DOD's 2010 strategic plan calls for the establishment of a robust, relevant requirements process that includes investing in front-end analysis and supporting requirements identification activities and synchronizing service training programs with combatant commander requirements.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, in 2011 guidance, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff stated that DOD will convert requirements into deployable capabilities more quickly and effectively, synchronizing force-providers with force-commander needs.<sup>30</sup>

At the time of our review, we found that U.S. Central Command had not yet developed a comprehensive, analytically based process for identifying and synchronizing predeployment training requirements among DOD components. In the absence of a comprehensive process, we identified instances in which U.S. Central Command did not clearly identify and approve training requirements and coordinate them with key stakeholders,

<sup>28</sup>Department of Defense Directive 5100.01, *Functions of the Department of Defense and Its Major Components* (Dec. 21, 2010).

<sup>29</sup>Department of Defense, *Strategic Plan for the Next Generation of Training for the Department of Defense* (Sept. 23, 2010).

<sup>30</sup>Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Guidance for 2011* (Jan. 5, 2011).

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such as the military services and subordinate commands, to ensure that requirements are synchronized among and within DOD components and with departmentwide guidance. We also observed instances in which U.S. Central Command did not obtain feedback to determine the extent to which predeployment training approaches met battlefield commander needs. For example:

- U.S. Central Command did not formally approve U.S. Forces Afghanistan's January 2010 language training guidance requiring language training.<sup>31</sup> For example, the command did not conduct front-end analyses of feasibility or cost of the training requirements or release a message validating U.S. Forces Afghanistan's language predeployment training requirements.
- U.S. Central Command, as the combatant commander responsible for coordinating training requirements for the geographic area of responsibility, had not coordinated U.S. Forces Afghanistan's October 2010 order mandating online language and culture training for all U.S. forces and DOD civilians currently deployed and deploying to Afghanistan with the Army and Marine Corps prior to its release.<sup>32</sup> U.S. Forces Afghanistan officials told us that coordination with the services on the requirements would have provided better insight as to potential issues associated with its implementation. During the course of our review, U.S. Forces Afghanistan reissued the October 2010 order once to clarify confusion over the training requirements and was considering another revision to the order to further clarify its requirements.
- U.S. Central Command had not synchronized language and culture predeployment training requirements with departmentwide guidance. For example, in December 2010, the Office of the Secretary of Defense released a directive type memorandum on counterinsurgency training and reporting guidance that requires the services to ensure that at least one leader per platoon that will have regular contact with the population will have a measurable language capability in the language of the region to which they will be assigned.<sup>33</sup> According to senior officials within the Office of the Secretary of Defense, this guidance is based on their understanding of U.S. Forces Afghanistan's

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<sup>31</sup>Commander International Security Assistance Force/U.S. Forces Afghanistan Memorandum, *Training Guidance for Language Training* (Jan. 24, 2010).

<sup>32</sup>U.S. Forces Afghanistan Fragmentary Order 10-371 (Oct. 29, 2010).

<sup>33</sup>Department of Defense Directive Type Memorandum 11-002, *Counterinsurgency (COIN) Training and Reporting Guidance for Preparing U.S. Forces to Succeed in Afghanistan and Pakistan* (Dec. 9, 2010).

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requirements, a subordinate command of U.S. Central Command, and is the authoritative department policy on training requirements for ongoing operations and is considered mandatory training. However, U.S. Central Command did not explicitly include the requirement established by the Office of the Secretary of Defense within either of its March 2011 orders on training requirements for standard and nonstandard forces.

- U.S. Central Command had not coordinated with the Army and Marine Corps to obtain feedback on the services' language and culture predeployment training approaches in meeting operational needs prior to issuing new training requirements. For example, until December 2010, neither U.S. Central Command nor U.S. Forces Afghanistan had obtained feedback from the Marine Corps on language and culture training approaches that were developed by the Marine Corps to address service-specific requirements. We were told that informal efforts exist among DOD components to receive feedback on service training approaches, such as training forums and action officer-level communication, but U.S. Forces Afghanistan training officials told us that these informal processes had not provided them with full visibility over the services' training programs.

In its March 2011 order establishing theater predeployment training requirements for standard forces, U.S. Central Command consolidated predeployment training requirements that have been published in various documents in a single source.<sup>34</sup> Refinements to training requirements occur over time due to changing operational conditions, and one aspect of this new order calls for an annual review and validation of U.S. Central Command's consolidated training requirements followed by the publication of an order announcing updates. In addition, the order assigns responsibilities within U.S. Central Command for approving new requirements, describes how organizations can request modifications to existing requirements, and identifies how decisions on training requirements will be communicated within the command through official messages. While this appears to be a positive step in identifying predeployment training requirements, including those for language and culture, the order does not provide details on the analysis that is required to support these decisions, a coordination process with key stakeholders, such as the military services and subordinate commands, to ensure that requirements are synchronized among and within DOD components and

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<sup>34</sup>U.S. Central Command Fragmentary Order 09-1700, *USCENTCOM Theater Training Requirements* (Mar. 28, 2011).

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with departmentwide guidance and to solicit feedback on service training approaches in meeting operational needs. Without a comprehensive process, U.S. Central Command will not have a mechanism to identify and synchronize training for current and future operations, which may result in deploying forces that receive training that is inconsistent and may not meet operational needs.

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## Conclusions

DOD continues to emphasize the importance of language and culture training and, along with the military services, is investing millions of dollars to provide it to general purpose forces. However, the Army and Marine Corps have not established investment priorities, assigned responsibilities for training program performance, or developed comprehensive metrics to gauge progress in achieving their strategic goals and objectives and therefore cannot provide DOD and the Congress with a reasonable assurance that their approaches and funding requests are building a capability that meets service and DOD long-term needs. Further, without a clearly defined planning process, the department does not have the tools it needs to set strategic direction for language and culture training efforts, fully align departmentwide efforts to develop plans and budget requests that reflect its priorities, and measure progress in implementing various initiatives. Regarding predeployment language and culture training, over the last several years multiple DOD components have issued requirements for deploying forces, resulting in the Army and Marine Corps expending considerable time and resources adjusting service training programs. U.S. Central Command has taken some steps to consolidate training requirements, but the command has not yet established a comprehensive, analytically based process for identifying and synchronizing predeployment training requirements. Without a comprehensive process, U.S. Central Command will not have a mechanism to identify and synchronize training for current and future operations, which may result in deploying forces that receive training that is inconsistent and may not meet operational needs.

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## Recommendations for Executive Action

We recommend the Secretary of Defense take the following three actions.

To help ensure that the Army's and Marine Corps' strategies address key planning elements and are aligned with departmentwide efforts, we recommend that the Secretary of Defense direct the Secretary of the Army and the Secretary of the Navy to assign responsibilities for training program performance and include in subsequent updates of the Army's and Marine Corps' respective language and culture strategies:

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- training priorities and investments that are necessary to achieve strategic goals and objectives
  - results-oriented performance metrics to measure progress in achieving the strategic goals and objectives

To enhance DOD's ability to set strategic direction for its language and culture training efforts, and better align its efforts to develop and implement plans and measure progress against established goals, we recommend that the Secretary of Defense direct the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness to:

- issue guidance to establish within the implementation plan for the *Department of Defense Strategic Plan for Language Skills, Regional Expertise, and Cultural Capabilities (2011-2016)* a clearly defined planning process with mechanisms, such as procedures and milestones, by which it can reach consensus with the military departments, coordinate and review approval of updates to plans, synchronize the development of plans with the budget process, monitor the implementation of initiatives, and report progress, on a periodic basis, towards achieving established goals

To provide a consistent approach for identifying predeployment language and culture training requirements for the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility, we recommend that the Secretary of Defense direct the Commander of U.S. Central Command to establish a comprehensive, analytically based process to:

- identify and approve predeployment training requirements and include in this documentation a description of the analysis to be conducted prior to approving the requirements
- coordinate with key stakeholders, such as the military services and subordinate commands to ensure that requirements are synchronized among and within DOD components and with departmentwide guidance, and solicit feedback on service training approaches in meeting operational needs

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## Agency Comments and Our Evaluation

In written comments on a draft of this report, DOD concurred with two recommendations and partially concurred with one recommendation. DOD's comments are reprinted in their entirety in appendix II. DOD also provided technical comments, which we incorporated into the report as appropriate.

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DOD partially concurred with our recommendation that the Secretary of Defense direct the Secretary of the Army and the Secretary of the Navy to assign responsibilities for training program performance and include in subsequent updates of the Army's and Marine Corps' respective language and culture strategies training priorities and investments that are necessary to achieve strategic goals and objectives and results-oriented performance metrics to measure progress in achieving their strategic goals and objectives. In its comments, DOD separately addressed the two elements in our recommendation—training priorities and investments, and results-oriented performance metrics. With regard to identifying training priorities and investments, DOD stated that linking strategy development with training and resource prioritization would better identify the resources that are necessary to address goals, objectives, and programs outlined in the language, regional, and culture strategy. DOD noted that this would allow senior leaders to obtain a better understanding of the time and resources necessary to implement the strategy and may prompt modifications early in the process when viewed against time and fiscal realities. DOD also stated, however, that the department develops strategy and capabilities separately from the resource allocation process to capture the required operational capability and determine the gaps, independent of the fiscal environment. It noted that capability requirements are then prioritized and compete for resources. DOD stated that before definitive measures are implemented to more closely integrate requirements development and resource allocation at a much earlier stage, it is necessary to assess potential negative consequences and then weigh costs versus benefits. Our report did not address the timing of the requirements development and resource allocation processes, but rather emphasized the importance of a clearly defined planning process that produces outcomes that clearly link strategy development with training prioritization and resource allocation. As noted in our report, the Army and Marine Corps had not yet fully defined the language and culture capabilities needs of their general purpose forces; prioritized the investments required to implement their respective language and culture strategies; or clearly linked their funding requests with their respective strategies. We therefore continue to believe that as the Army and Marine Corps update their strategies, the services should fully identify the language and culture capabilities and the training priorities and needed investments in order to provide DOD and the Congress with a reasonable assurance that their approaches and funding requests are building a capability that meets service and DOD long-term needs.

With regard to results-oriented performance metrics, DOD stated that several efforts are being pursued to enhance and fully implement metrics

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that accurately capture programmatic performance and utility, to include initiatives to more closely link training and readiness standards with operational readiness through the Defense Readiness Reporting System and other reporting mechanisms. DOD noted that any effort to start measuring and tracking individual performance with “hard” metrics such as cultural proficiency should be thoroughly reviewed before implementation and that such metrics may not provide an accurate assessment tied to operational effectiveness. Lastly, DOD stated that the actual administrative and logistical costs associated with the effort may far outweigh any benefits that are potentially gained. We agree that it is important for the Army and Marine Corps to establish metrics that accurately capture programmatic performance and utility in a manner that provides an accurate assessment of operational effectiveness. As stated in our report, the Army and Marine Corps have established limited metrics focused on individual and unit-level assessments, but had not established comprehensive metrics that would enable them to assess the contributions that training programs are making collectively toward achieving their overall strategic goals and objectives. We also noted that the Army and Marine Corps are planning to make additional investments to build the language and culture capabilities of their general purpose forces. We recognize that there is a cost associated with the time and effort required to establish metrics and implement efforts to measure progress against any metrics. However, developing comprehensive metrics is a key element needed to provide DOD and the Congress with the assurance that the services’ training approaches and funding requests are building a capability that meets service and DOD long-term needs. Therefore, we continue to believe the development of such metrics would better inform the services’ investment decisions and enhance their ability to maximize available resources.

DOD concurred with our recommendation that the Secretary of Defense direct the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness to issue guidance to establish within the implementation plan for the *Department of Defense Strategic Plan of Language Skills, Regional Expertise, and Cultural Capabilities (2011-2016)* a clearly defined planning process with mechanisms, such as procedures and milestones, by which it can reach consensus with the military departments, coordinate and review approval of updates to plans, synchronize the development of plans with the budget process, monitor the implementation of initiatives, and report progress, on a periodic basis, towards achieving established goals. DOD stated that the DOD Implementation Plan for Language Skills, Regional Expertise, and Cultural Capabilities for FY 2011-2016 will include a clearly defined planning process for working with the military departments to

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coordinate plans, synchronize plans with resources, and evaluate and report performance as the department works toward its strategic goals. DOD stated that it planned to complete the implementation plan by June 2011.

DOD concurred with our recommendation that the Secretary of Defense direct the Commander of U.S. Central Command to establish a comprehensive, analytically based process to (1) identify and approve predeployment training requirements that includes a description of the analysis to be conducted prior to approving the requirements and (2) coordinate with key stakeholders, such as the military services and subordinate commands to ensure that requirements are synchronized among and within DOD components and with departmentwide guidance, and solicit feedback on service training approaches in meeting operational needs. In its comments, DOD separately addressed our recommendation on conducting analysis as part of the requirements identification process and coordinating with key stakeholders to ensure that requirements are synchronized. DOD stated that U.S. Central Command agreed that such a process was necessary at the time of our review and noted that U.S. Central Command has established and instituted a process to coordinate and synchronize requirements among the service components and subordinate commands, to include cross directorate coordination within U.S. Central Command headquarters, to ensure all training requirements are meeting operational needs. Specifically, DOD stated that U.S. Central Command utilized this process in the development of U.S. Central Command Fragmentary Order 09-1700, *USCENTCOM Theater Training Requirements*, dated March 28, 2011. DOD also stated that U.S. Central Command assessed it is a service responsibility to determine the training approach they utilize to meet training requirements for the U.S. Central Command's area of responsibility. As stated in our report, we recognize that DOD has taken positive steps in developing the fragmentary order, but continue to believe that additional actions are needed to ensure that U.S. Central Command has a comprehensive, analytically based process to coordinate and synchronize predeployment training requirements. For example, in its current form, U.S. Central Command Fragmentary Order 09-1700 order does not provide details on the analysis that is required to support decisions on the identification of training requirements, despite the fact that DOD's September 2010 *Strategic Plan for the Next Generation of Training for the Department of Defense* calls for the establishment of a robust, relevant requirements process that includes investing in front-end analysis and supporting requirements identification activities. Moreover, in developing its March 2011 order, U.S. Central Command did not fully synchronize language and culture predeployment training requirements

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with departmentwide guidance. Specifically, U.S. Central Command did not explicitly include the language training requirement established by the Office of the Secretary of Defense in December 2010 counterinsurgency training and reporting guidance that requires the services to ensure that at least one leader per platoon that will have regular contact with the population will have a measurable language capability in the language of the region to which they will be assigned. We therefore continue to believe that additional actions are necessary for U.S. Central Command to establish a comprehensive, analytically based process to identify training requirements and coordinate with key stakeholders to ensure that requirements are synchronized among and within DOD components and with departmentwide guidance.

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We are sending copies of this report to the Secretary of Defense, the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, the Secretary of Army, the Secretary of the Navy, the Commandant of the Marine Corps, and the Commander of U.S. Central Command. This report also is available at no charge on the GAO Web site at <http://www.gao.gov>. If you or your staff have any questions about this report, please contact me at (202) 512-9619 or [pickups@gao.gov](mailto:pickups@gao.gov). Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this report. Key contributors to this report are listed in appendix III.



Sharon L. Pickup  
Director  
Defense Capabilities and Management

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*List of Committees*

The Honorable Carl Levin  
Chairman  
The Honorable John McCain  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Armed Services  
United States Senate

The Honorable Howard P. "Buck" McKeon  
Chairman  
The Honorable Adam Smith  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Armed Services  
House of Representatives

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# Appendix I: Scope and Methodology

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To address our objectives, we met with officials from the Office of the Secretary of Defense; the Joint Staff; U.S. Central Command; U.S. Forces Afghanistan; U.S. Joint Forces Command; and the Army and the Marine Corps. To evaluate the extent to which the Army and Marine Corps had developed language and culture strategies with key elements, such as goals, funding priorities, and metrics to guide training approaches and investments that were aligned with departmentwide planning efforts, we focused on the Army's and Marine Corps' general purpose forces. Therefore, excluded from this review were training programs for language and regional experts, such as foreign area officers, intelligence specialists, special operations forces, and other service efforts to provide culture experts to deployed forces, such as "human terrain teams."<sup>1</sup> We examined the *Army Culture and Foreign Language Strategy* and the *Marine Corps Language, Regional and Culture Strategy: 2011-2015* and training documents to determine training priorities and metrics that have been used to measure progress in meeting service and departmentwide capability needs.<sup>2</sup> We reviewed these documents in the context of our prior work, Department of Defense (DOD) budget documents, and service guidance to determine the extent to which the Army and Marine Corps were developing strategies that identified goals and objectives, training programs and priorities, resource requirements, and approaches for measuring progress, including results-oriented performance metrics.<sup>3</sup> We also reviewed funding data for fiscal years 2009 through 2012 provided by the Army's Training and Doctrine Command and the Marine Corps' Center for the Advanced Operational Culture Learning that are associated with the implementation of the Army's and Marine Corps' respective language and culture strategies. To corroborate our understanding of the documents provided, we conducted interviews with officials responsible

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<sup>1</sup>According to the Department of Defense, "foreign area officers" are commissioned officers who, in addition to their primary military specialty, also possess a combination of strategic focus, regional expertise, cultural awareness, and foreign language skills. "Human terrain teams" are comprised of socio-cultural experts that are deployed to Afghanistan and Iraq to help improve Army and Marine Corps commanders' and staffs' understanding of local populations.

<sup>2</sup>See *Army Culture and Foreign Language Strategy* (Dec. 2009) and *Marine Corps Language, Regional and Culture Strategy: 2011-2015* (Jan. 2011).

<sup>3</sup>See, for example, GAO, *Human Capital: A Guide for Assessing Strategic Training and Development Efforts in the Federal Government*, GAO-04-546G (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 2004); Department of Defense, *Fiscal Year 2012 Budget Request* (Feb. 4, 2011); Army Regulation 350-1, *Army Training and Leader Development* (Dec. 18, 2009); and Marine Corps Order P3500.72A, *Marine Corps Ground Training and Readiness Program* (Apr. 18, 2005).

for developing the Army's and Marine Corps' language and culture strategies and related training programs, as well as Office of the Secretary of Defense officials that are responsible for providing strategic direction and programmatic oversight of the department's language and culture programs. We also discussed the content and status of ongoing departmental efforts that are intended to further align Army and Marine Corps language and culture training approaches with officials representing the Office of the Secretary of Defense and the Joint Staff. These efforts include the implementation of a new, departmentwide methodology for determining geographic combatant commander language and regional proficiency requirements, which includes culture, and the development of DOD's strategic plan for language skills and cultural capabilities.<sup>4</sup>

To evaluate DOD's approach for identifying language and culture predeployment training requirements for Army and Marine Corps general purpose forces that will deploy to the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility, we reviewed relevant provisions of Title 10 of the U.S. Code<sup>5</sup> and related DOD guidance that characterize the training roles and responsibilities of combatant commanders and the military services.<sup>6</sup> We examined Office of the Secretary of Defense, U.S. Central Command, U.S. Forces Afghanistan, and Army and Marine Corps documents published from 2008 to 2011 and identified specific language and culture training requirements. To corroborate our understanding of the documents provided, we conducted interviews with officials representing the Office of the Secretary of Defense, U.S. Central Command, U.S. Forces Afghanistan, and Army and Marine Corps force provider and training commands to discuss the processes they use to identify language and culture training requirements for ongoing operations in the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility, including any analyses that were conducted to identify the feasibility of implementing the training and associated costs. We also discussed the processes used by DOD components to synchronize battlefield commander operational needs with training conducted by the services to prepare forces to conduct military

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<sup>4</sup>Department of Defense, *Department of Defense Strategic Plan for Language Skills, Regional Expertise, and Cultural Capabilities, 2011-2016* (Feb. 2011).

<sup>5</sup>See 10 U.S.C. §164 for responsibilities of commanders of combatant commands; and 10 U.S.C. §§3013, 5013, and 8013 for the responsibilities of the service secretaries.

<sup>6</sup>See, for example, Department of Defense Directive 5100.01, *Functions of the Department of Defense and Its Major Components* (Dec. 21, 2010) and Department of Defense Directive 1322.18, *Military Training* (Jan. 13, 2009).

operations. We analyzed these processes to determine the level of coordination among DOD components with respect to joint and service-specific predeployment training requirements for language and culture. We assessed these efforts in light of DOD guidance that describes the importance of establishing a robust training requirements identification process and synchronizing service training programs with combatant commander requirements.<sup>7</sup>

We conducted this performance audit from June 2010 to May 2011 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

We interviewed officials, and where appropriate obtained documentation, at the following locations:

Office of the Secretary of Defense

- Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness
  - Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Readiness
  - Defense Language Office
- Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy

Department of the Army

- Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff, G1
- Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff, G2
- Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff, G3/5/7
- Army Central Command
- Army Forces Command
- Army Reserve Command
- Army Training and Doctrine Command
  - Center for Army Lessons Learned
  - Combined Arms Center
  - Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center
  - Training and Doctrine Command Culture Center

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<sup>7</sup>Department of Defense, *Strategic Plan for the Next Generation of Training for the Department of Defense* (Sept. 23, 2010).

- First United States Army

Department of the Navy

- Marine Corps Training and Education Command
  - Center for Advanced Operational Culture Learning
  - Marine Corps Air-Ground Task Force Training Command
- Marine Corps Center for Lessons Learned
- Marine Corps Forces Central Command
- Marine Corps Forces Command
- Marine Corps Forces, Pacific
- I Marine Expeditionary Force
- II Marine Expeditionary Force
- III Marine Expeditionary Force

Other DOD Components

- Joint Center for International Security Force Assistance
- Joint Chiefs of Staff Manpower and Personnel, J1
- Joint Chiefs of Staff Operational Plans and Joint Force Development, J7
- U.S. Central Command
  - U.S. Forces Afghanistan
- U.S. Joint Forces Command

# Appendix II: Comments from the Department of Defense



OFFICE OF THE UNDER SECRETARY OF DEFENSE  
4000 DEFENSE PENTAGON  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20301-4000

MAY 09 2011

Ms. Sharon L. Pickup  
Director, Defense Capabilities and Management  
U.S. Government Accountability Office  
441 G Street, N.W.  
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Ms. Pickup,

This is the Department of Defense (DoD) response to the GAO draft report, GAO-11-456, "MILITARY TRAINING: Actions Needed to Improve Planning and Coordination of Army and Marine Corps Language and Culture Training," dated April 8, 2011 (GAO Code 351586).

DoD concurs with most of the recommendations made in the draft report. Detailed responses to those recommendations are contained in the enclosure.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this draft report. We look forward to receiving the final report, when available.

Sincerely,



Samuel D. Kleinman  
Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense  
(Readiness)

Enclosure:  
As stated

**GAO DRAFT REPORT DATED APRIL 8, 2011  
GAO-11-456 (GAO CODE 351586)**

**“MILITARY TRAINING: ACTIONS NEEDED TO IMPROVE PLANNING  
AND COORDINATION OF ARMY AND MARINE CORPS  
LANGUAGE AND CULTURE TRAINING”**

**DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE COMMENTS  
TO THE GAO RECOMMENDATIONS**

**RECOMMENDATION 1:** The GAO recommends that the Secretary of Defense direct the Secretary of Army and the Commandant of the Marine Corps to assign responsibilities for training program performance and include in subsequent updates of their respective service-specific language and culture strategies training priorities and investments that are necessary to achieve strategic goals and objectives.

**DoD RESPONSE:** Partially concur. Linking strategy development with training and resource prioritization across the enterprise would better identify, up front, what resources are necessary to address goals, objectives, and programs outlined in the language, regional, and culture strategy. This would allow senior leadership to obtain a better understanding of the rough order of magnitude in time and resources necessary to implement the strategy being presented, and may prompt modifications early in the process when viewed against time and fiscal realities. Currently, strategy and capability requirements within the Department and Services are developed separately from the resource allocation/Program Objective Memorandum process. The purpose is to accurately capture the required operational capability and determine the gaps, independent of the fiscal environment. From there, those capability requirements are then prioritized and compete for resources. This approach has some advantages that could be negated if the two processes were more closely linked early on. Consequently, before definitive measures are implemented to more closely integrate requirements development and resource allocation at a much earlier stage, assessing potential negative consequences and then weighing costs versus benefits will need to be conducted.

**RECOMMENDATION 2:** The GAO recommends that the Secretary of Defense direct the Secretary of Army and the Commandant of the Marine Corps to assign responsibilities for training program performance and include in subsequent updates of their respective service-specific language and culture strategies results-oriented performance metrics to measure progress in achieving their strategic goals and objectives.

**DoD Response:** Partially concur. Enhancing and fully implementing metrics that accurately capture programmatic performance and utility remains a consistent focus for the Army and Marine Corps. Several efforts are being pursued to achieve this objective, to include current initiatives to more closely link training and readiness standards outlined in training and readiness manuals with operational readiness through the Defense Readiness Reporting System and other reporting mechanisms. However, any effort to start measuring and tracking individual performance with “hard” metrics such as cultural proficiency scale/rating should be thoroughly studied and reviewed before implementation. There is significant data to suggest this is far from an exact science, and may not be able to provide an accurate assessment tied to operational effectiveness. Furthermore, even if it is achievable, the actual administrative and logistical costs associated with the effort may far outweigh any benefits that are potentially gained.

**RECOMMENDATION 3:** The GAO recommends that the Secretary of Defense direct the Undersecretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness to issue guidance to establish within the implementation plan for the *Department of Defense Strategic Plan of Language Skills, Regional Expertise, and Cultural Capabilities (2011-2016)* a clearly defined planning process with mechanisms, such as procedures and milestones, by which it can reach consensus with the military departments, coordinate and review approval of updates to plans, synchronize the development of plans with the budget process, monitor the implementation of initiatives, and report progress, on a periodic basis, towards achieving established goals.

**DoD Response:** Concur. The DoD Implementation Plan for Language Skills, Regional Expertise, and Cultural Capabilities for FY 2011-2016 will include a clearly defined planning process for working with the Military Departments to coordinate plans, synchronize plans with resources, and evaluate and report performance as the Department works toward its strategic goals. The target date for its completion is June 2011.

**RECOMMENDATION 4:** The GAO recommends that the Secretary of Defense direct the Commander of the U.S. Central Command to establish a comprehensive, analytically-based process to identify and approve predeployment training requirements and include in this documentation a description of the analysis to be conducted prior to approving the requirements.

**DoD Response:** Concur. US Central Command (USCENTCOM) concurs that an analytically-based process by which to identify and approve predeployment training requirements was necessary at the time of this study. USCENTCOM Commander approved USCENTCOM FRAGO 09-1700, USCENTCOM Theater Training Requirements, dated March 28, 2011, which establishes the process for Service Components and Sub-Unified Commands to nominate training requirements for approval, modification, or deletion for approval by the Director of Operations, USCENTCOM. This document will be reviewed annually to ensure requirements

are updated and promulgated to USCENTCOM Service Components, Sub-Unified Commands, Service Force Providers, and the Joint Staff.

**RECOMMENDATION 5:** The GAO recommends that the Secretary of Defense direct the Commander of the U.S. Central Command to establish a comprehensive, analytically-based process to coordinate with key stakeholders, such as the military services and subordinate commands to ensure that requirements are synchronized among and within DOD components and with department wide guidance, and solicit feedback on service training approaches in meeting operational needs.

**DoD Response:** Concur. USCENTCOM concurs that a process to ensure that requirements are synchronized among the Service Components and Subordinate commands was necessary at the time of this study. USCENTCOM has established and instituted a process that synchronizes requirements among the Service Components and Subordinate Commands. USCENTCOM coordinates with all Service Components and Sub-Unified Commands, to include cross-directorate coordination within Headquarters USCENTCOM, to ensure all training requirements are meeting operational needs. USCENTCOM utilized this process in the development of USCENTCOM FRAGO 09-1700, USCENTCOM Theater Training Requirements. USCENTCOM assesses it is a Service responsibility to determine the training approach they utilize to meet the training requirements for the USCENTCOM area of responsibility.

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# Appendix III: GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgments

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## GAO Contact

Sharon Pickup, 202-512-9619 or [pickups@gao.gov](mailto:pickups@gao.gov)

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## Staff Acknowledgments

In addition to the contact named above, Patricia Lentini, Assistant Director; Nicole Harms; Mae Jones; Susan Langley; Michael Silver; Matthew Ullengren; and Chris Watson made significant contributions to this report.

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