

October 2011

# LANGUAGE AND CULTURE TRAINING

## Opportunities Exist to Improve Visibility and Sustainment of Knowledge and Skills in Army and Marine Corps General Purpose Forces

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## Why GAO Did This Study

The Department of Defense (DOD) has emphasized the importance of developing language skills and knowledge of foreign cultures to meet current and future needs and is investing millions of dollars to provide language and culture predeployment training to its general purpose forces. DOD has also noted that such training should be viewed as a long-term investment and that training and personnel systems should better account for the knowledge and skills of service members acquired through training to help manage its forces. The committee report accompanying a proposed bill for the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2011 (H.R. 5136) directed GAO to review language and culture training for Army and Marine Corps general purpose forces. For this report, GAO evaluated the extent to which these services (1) captured information in training and personnel systems on the completion of language and culture predeployment training and proficiency gained from training and (2) developed plans to sustain language skills acquired through predeployment training. GAO analyzed service documents and interviewed cognizant officials.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO made recommendations intended to improve the availability of information on training completion and proficiency and help DOD plan for sustainment training. DOD generally agreed with the recommendations, but stated that the definition of significant language training was not intended to describe training for initial skills. However, DOD noted that current guidance does not preclude language proficiency testing at this stage.

View [GAO-12-50](#). For more information, contact Sharon Pickup at (202) 512-9619 or [pickups@gao.gov](mailto:pickups@gao.gov).

## LANGUAGE AND CULTURE TRAINING

### Opportunities Exist to Improve Visibility and Sustainment of Knowledge and Skills in Army and Marine Corps General Purpose Forces

## What GAO Found

The Army and Marine Corps have documented some information at the unit level for service members who completed language and culture predeployment training, but the services have not fully captured information within service-level training and personnel systems on service members who completed training or their corresponding proficiency. DOD and service guidance require the services to document language and culture training completion and proficiency gained from training in service-level systems. However, GAO identified several factors that limited the services' ability to implement this guidance. For example, the Army's primary training system did not have data fields for all mandatory language and culture tasks and, as a result, units were unable to document the completion of this training. In addition, while the Army collects some language proficiency data within its primary personnel system, the Army considers these data unreliable because of weaknesses in its approach to collecting them. To improve the accuracy of information within this system, the Army established a task force in January 2011, which has identified a number of key tasks and is at varying stages of completing its work. The Marine Corps did not document language and culture predeployment training completion in any servicewide training or personnel system and a system has not been designated for this purpose. Further, the Marine Corps had not required marines who completed significant language training to take formal proficiency tests and, therefore, the service did not have language proficiency data for these marines. By not capturing information within service-level training and personnel systems on the training that general purpose forces have completed and the language proficiency gained from training, the Army and Marine Corps do not have the information they need to effectively leverage the language and culture knowledge and skills of these forces when making individual assignments and assessing future operational needs.

The Army and Marine Corps have not developed plans to sustain language skills already acquired through predeployment training. The services have made considerable investments to provide some service members with extensive predeployment language training. For example, as of July 2011, over 800 soldiers have completed about 16 weeks of Afghan language training since 2010 at a cost of about \$12 million. DOD and service guidance address the need to sustain language skills and the DOD strategic plan for language, regional, and culture skills calls for the services to build on existing language skills for future needs. However, we found that the services had not yet determined which service members require follow-on language training to sustain skills, the amount of training required, or appropriate mechanisms to deliver the training. Although informal follow-on training programs were available to sustain language skills, such as computer-based training, these programs were voluntary. In the absence of formal sustainment training programs to maintain and build upon service members' language skills, the Army and Marine Corps may miss opportunities to capitalize on the investments they have already made to provide predeployment language training for ongoing operations.

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## **Abbreviations**

DOD            Department of Defense

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G A O

Accountability \* Integrity \* Reliability

United States Government Accountability Office  
Washington, DC 20548

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October 31, 2011

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

Due to changes in the global security environment and operational experiences in Afghanistan and Iraq, the Department of Defense (DOD) has emphasized the importance of developing language skills and knowledge of foreign cultures to meet the needs of current and future military operations. It is DOD's policy that language and culture training be embedded in initial military training, professional military education, and predeployment training and integrated across the total force.<sup>1</sup> DOD has emphasized that it should better account for the language and culture knowledge and skills of service members within the department's personnel management systems. These systems, which include training and personnel systems, are used at the service level to manage individual assignments and also provide senior leaders at the service and department level with visibility over the capabilities of military personnel. DOD has also stated that language and culture training must be valued as a long-term investment and is investing millions of dollars to provide such training to general purpose forces for ongoing military operations and to prepare these forces for future missions. For example, in December 2009, 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 to establish and maintain language training detachments on selected military installations across the services to

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<sup>1</sup>DOD Directive 1322.18, *Military Training* (Jan. 13, 2009).

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teach foreign languages to military and civilian personnel including those who are preparing for deployments to Afghanistan.

In prior reports, we have identified various management challenges that DOD faces in developing language and culture capabilities, and made several related recommendations.<sup>2</sup> 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, including cultural awareness, and in May 2011, we recommended that DOD establish a defined planning process to align the services' language and culture training efforts. DOD has taken some steps to address our recommendations. For example, in February 2011, DOD published the *Department of Defense Strategic Plan for Language Skills, Regional Expertise, and Cultural Capabilities (2011-2016)*, but stated that a more detailed implementation plan would be issued separately. In particular, DOD noted that its implementation plan will include a clearly defined planning process for working with the military departments to coordinate and synchronize plans with the department's strategic goals and resources. As of September 2011, DOD is continuing to develop the implementation plan.

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 Army and Marine Corps general purpose forces.<sup>3</sup> As discussed above, our May 2011 report examined the Army's and Marine Corps' strategic planning efforts for language and culture capabilities and the department's approach for identifying language and culture training requirements for Army and Marine Corps general purpose forces deploying to the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility.<sup>4</sup> For this report, we evaluated the extent to which the Army and Marine Corps have

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<sup>2</sup>See 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) and *Military Training: Actions Needed to Improve Planning and Coordination of Army and Marine Corps Language and Culture Training*, [GAO-11-456](#) (Washington, D.C.: May 26, 2011).

<sup>3</sup>H.R. Rep. No. 111-491 at 259 (2010).

<sup>4</sup>[GAO-11-456](#).

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(1) captured information in service-level training and personnel systems on the completion of language and culture predeployment training and proficiency gained from this training and (2) developed plans to sustain language skills acquired through predeployment training.

For the first objective, we focused on Army and Marine Corps language and culture training programs administered since 2009 to prepare general purpose forces for ongoing operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. Therefore, for this review, we excluded training programs for language and regional experts (e.g., foreign area officers and intelligence specialists) and special operations forces. We reviewed information available in service-level training and personnel systems and department-level information systems on service members' completion of language and culture training and the corresponding acquisition of skills—specifically, the time frame when this training occurred and the proficiency service members gained from training. We defined “proficiency” using DOD’s agreed-upon method for measuring it.<sup>5</sup> We conducted interviews with Army and Marine Corps officials who are responsible for developing predeployment training programs and documenting information on training completion in service-level training and personnel systems. We also discussed the extent to which the services used these systems to record service members’ proficiency gained from this training, in particular the training that meets DOD’s definition of significant language training.<sup>6</sup> We also interviewed officials with Army and Marine Corps units that were participating in predeployment training and units that were deployed in Afghanistan at the time of our review to discuss the extent to which they used service-level training and personnel systems and other processes to document the completion of language and culture training and any proficiency gained

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<sup>5</sup>DOD measures an individual’s language proficiency using the Defense Language Proficiency Test system of tests. Service members who complete a test are given an Interagency Language Roundtable score for listening, reading, and speaking proficiency as measured on a scale from 0 (no proficiency) to 5 (functionally native proficiency). For culture, DOD has established broad guidelines for regional proficiency, which includes cultural awareness, but the department has not yet established a way to test or otherwise evaluate the culture knowledge and skills of service members in accordance with these guidelines.

<sup>6</sup>DOD Instruction 5160.71, *DOD Language Testing Program* (Jan. 26, 2009) defines significant language training as at least 150 hours of immersion training or 6 consecutive weeks of 5-hour-a-day classroom training. The instruction also includes an “other significant event as defined by the Secretaries of the Military Departments and the Heads of Defense Agencies and DOD Field Activities” in its definition of significant language training.

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from training. We assessed the Army's and Marine Corps' efforts in light of DOD guidance that requires that the services document all language and regional proficiency training, education, and experience in training and personnel systems and Army and Marine Corps documents that note that language and culture training completion and corresponding proficiency should be documented in service-level systems.<sup>7</sup>

For the second objective, we interviewed Army and Marine Corps training officials to discuss the extent to which the services had developed plans and specific training programs for general purpose forces to sustain language skills acquired through predeployment training. We interviewed officials with Army and Marine Corps units that were participating in predeployment training and units that were deployed in Afghanistan at the time of our review to discuss any formal programs used by service members to sustain skills acquired through language training. We also discussed other informal training programs that were available to service members to sustain language skills. To gain an understanding of the investments already made in predeployment language training, we collected information from service training officials on the number of soldiers and marines completing predeployment language training from January 2009 through July 2011, the amount of time spent in training, and the cost of these training programs. To ensure the reliability of our data, we interviewed knowledgeable officials about the data and internal controls on the systems that contain them. We determined that the data were sufficiently reliable for the purposes of this audit. We reviewed Army and Marine Corps training programs and plans in light of DOD and service guidance that address the need to sustain language skills and the DOD strategic plan for language, regional, and culture skills that calls for the services to build on existing language skills for future needs.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>See, for example, Department of Defense Instruction 5160.70, *Management of DOD Language and Regional Proficiency Capabilities* (June 12, 2007); Army Headquarters Execution Order 070-11, *Army Culture and Foreign Language Strategy* (Dec. 27, 2010); and Marine Corps Order 7220.52E, *Foreign Language Proficiency Pay (FLPP) Program* (June 6, 2006).

<sup>8</sup>See, for example, Department of Defense Instruction 5160.70, *Management of DOD Language and Regional Proficiency Capabilities* (June 12, 2007); Army Headquarters Execution Order 070-11, *Army Culture and Foreign Language Strategy* (Dec. 27, 2010); *Marine Corps Language, Regional and Culture Strategy: 2011-2015* (January 2011); and *Department of Defense Strategic Plan for Language Skills, Regional Expertise, and Cultural Capabilities (2011-2016)* (February 2011).



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We conducted this performance audit from June 2010 to October 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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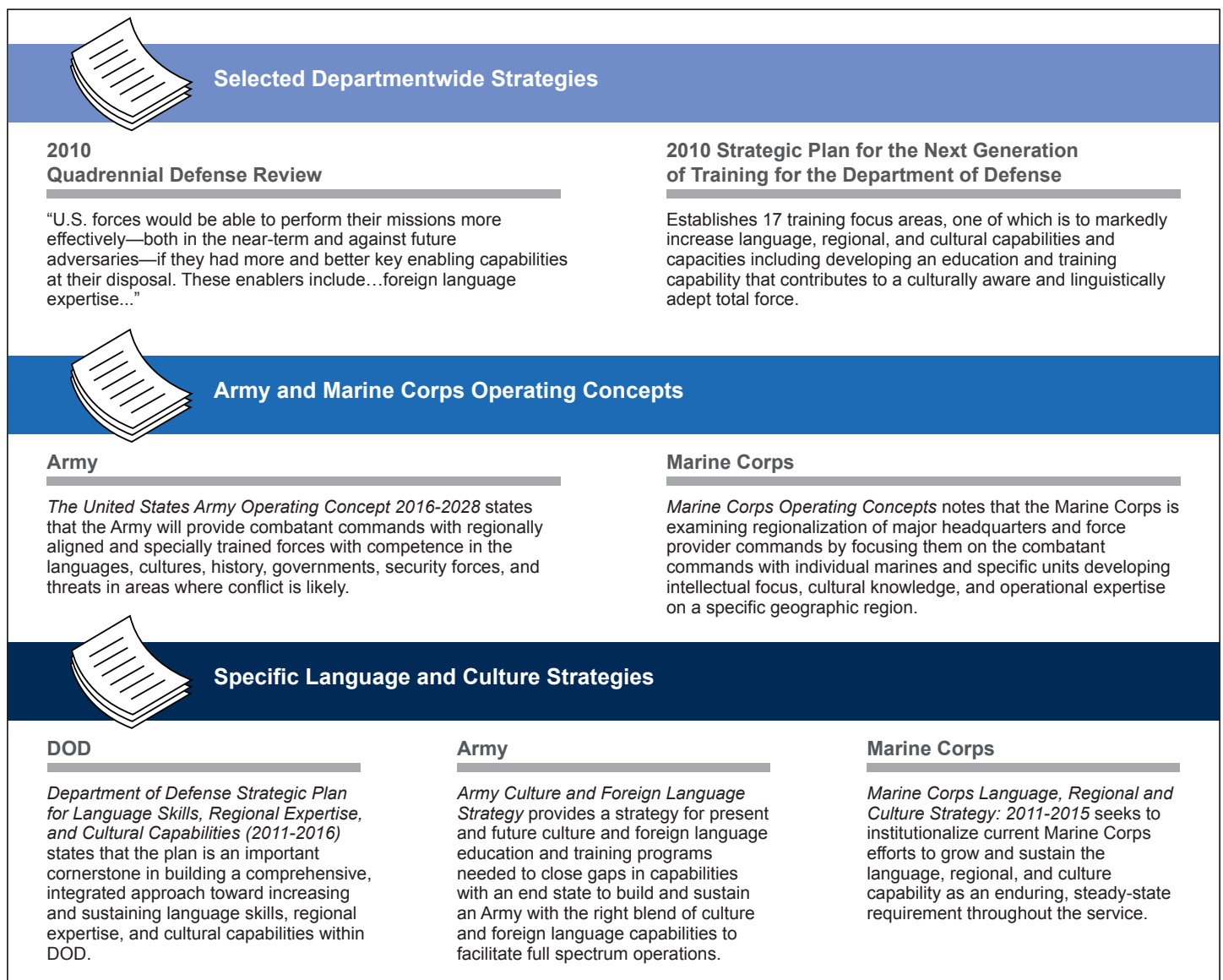
## Background

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. DOD, and the Army and Marine Corps, have emphasized the need to build and sustain language and culture knowledge and skills in the general purpose forces. The Army and Marine Corps are providing language and culture predeployment training in support of ongoing operations. DOD relies on formal tests to measure service members' proficiency in a foreign language. Various training and personnel systems exist within DOD at the service and department level.

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

Departmentwide and service-level strategic plans and operating concepts emphasize the need to build and sustain language and culture knowledge and skills in the general purpose forces (see fig. 1).

**Figure 1: Selected Strategic Documents that Emphasize the Need for Language and Culture Knowledge and Skills**



Source: GAO analysis of DOD data.

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In particular, referring both to the near-term needs of current operations and the long-term efforts to prepare military forces for future conflicts, DOD concluded in the 2010 Quadrennial Defense Review that U.S. forces would be able to perform their missions more effectively with more and better key enabling capabilities, including language expertise. The Army and Marine Corps have also developed concepts to align headquarters and forces with geographic commands around the world and plan to provide them with specialized language and culture training prior to deployment to conduct security force assistance and irregular warfare missions, among others. In addition, the services are implementing strategies to build and reinforce language and culture knowledge and skills through training at various points of a service member's career through formal service institutions, such as professional military education schools, and during predeployment training. For example:

- Beginning in 2009, the Army Command and General Staff College began offering language courses to soldiers in targeted languages, such as Arabic, Chinese, and French, which consist of resident instruction, self-study, and distance learning in a modified year-long program. In addition, the Army updated its Captains Career Course in 2010 to include 13 hours of training in the areas of cross-cultural skill building and negotiations.
- The Marine Corps has begun implementing the Regional, Culture, and Language Familiarization career development program for all marines that begins when marines enter military service and continues throughout their career. As part of the program, marines are assigned to 1 of 17 regions around the world and will be assigned an associated language. The program is organized into three broad areas of training (culture general, culture specific, and language familiarization) and functionally organized within a block structure that builds and reinforces knowledge and skills over a marine's career.

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## Language and Culture Predeployment Training and Proficiency Testing for General Purpose Forces Preparing for Ongoing Operations

As we have previously reported, the Army and the Marine Corps have established service-specific predeployment training requirements and are providing their respective general purpose forces with language and culture training that is focused on the particular area to which a unit will deploy.<sup>9</sup> Given that over the past 10 years Army and Marine Corps forces have experienced continual operational deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan with limited time to prepare between deployments, most language and culture training efforts have focused on predeployment training for ongoing operations.

For example, since July 2010, the Army has required that all soldiers deploying to Afghanistan and Iraq complete a 4- to 6-hour online training program that provides basic language and culture training.<sup>10</sup> In addition, commanders are required to designate at least one leader per platoon who will have regular contact with a local population to complete 16 weeks (at least 480 hours) of on-site training at one of five language training detachments on Army installations. If the designated leader does not have access to a language training detachment, that soldier is required to complete approximately 100 hours of computer-based training. Since February 2010, the Marine Corps has required that all deploying marines complete culture training which, for Afghanistan deployments, service officials reported typically consists of 1 day of training, and selected marines have been required to complete language training with the amount determined by a mission analysis.<sup>11</sup> Selected marines can complete this training at one of two language training detachments on Marine Corps installations or through programs at a local community college and university. Language training detachments on Army and Marine Corps installations provide predeployment training that includes role playing, classroom instruction, and self-directed learning (see fig. 2).

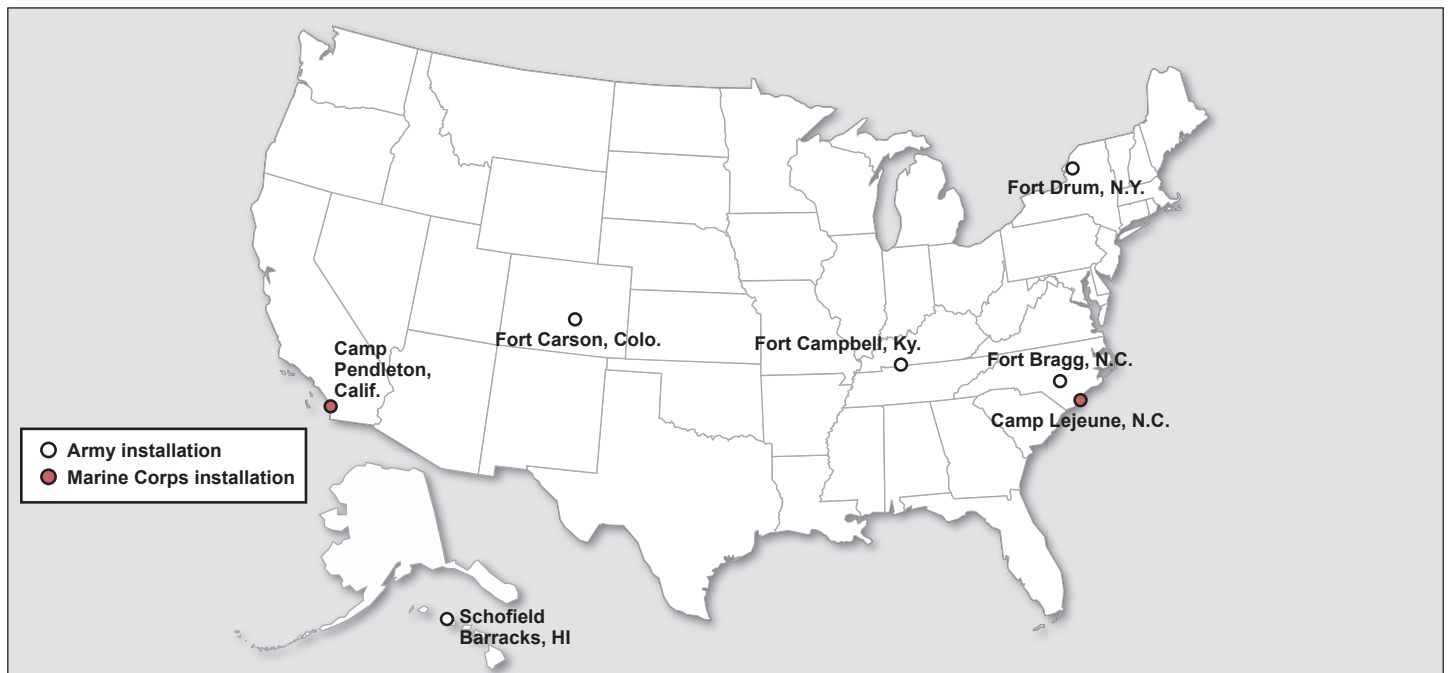
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<sup>9</sup>[GAO-11-456](#).

<sup>10</sup>Army Headquarters Execution Order 273-10, *For Culture and Language Pre-deployment Training Standards* (July 23, 2010).

<sup>11</sup>Commandant of the Marine Corps, *Culture and Language Pre-deployment Training Requirement* (Feb. 16, 2010).

**Figure 2: Language Training Detachments Intended for General Purpose Forces on Army and Marine Corps Installations**



**Types of language training**



*Role playing*



*Classroom instruction*



*Self-directed learning*

Source: GAO; U.S. Army (photos); Map Resources (map).

DOD relies on the Defense Language Proficiency Test system of tests to measure an individual's proficiency in a foreign language. The test is administered in a Web-based format to measure proficiency in the listening and/or reading modalities. The speaking modality is tested in person or by telephone. Test scores are reported as Interagency

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Language Roundtable skill levels measured on a scale from 0 (no proficiency) to 5 (functionally native proficiency). DOD guidance also establishes broad regional proficiency skill level guidelines.<sup>12</sup> These guidelines include culture knowledge and skills and are intended to provide DOD components with benchmarks for assessing regional proficiency needs, for developing initial and sustainment regional proficiency curricula at service and professional military education schools, and for assessing regional proficiency capabilities. Our prior work has found that DOD has not yet established a way to test or otherwise evaluate the culture knowledge and skills of service members in accordance with these guidelines.<sup>13</sup>

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**Various Service- and Department-Level Training and Personnel Systems Exist**

The Army and Marine Corps maintain a number of service-level training and personnel systems. At the department level, DOD maintains several additional information systems that draw upon or provide data to the services' training and personnel systems. Table 1 provides information on key Army and Marine Corps training and personnel systems and other DOD information systems.

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<sup>12</sup>Department of Defense Instruction 5160.70, *Management of DOD Language and Regional Proficiency Capabilities* (June 12, 2007).

<sup>13</sup>[GAO-09-568](#).

**Table 1: Selected Army and Marine Corps Training and Personnel Systems and Other DOD Information Systems**

Entity	System	Description
<b>Army</b>		
<b>Training systems</b>		
	Digital Training Management System	A customized training management system that facilitates an organization's ability to plan, schedule, resource, record, and report individual and collective training in units, brigade and below.
	Army Training Requirements and Resources System	The system of record for management of personnel input to training for the active component, Army National Guard, Army Reserve, and Army civilian and other government agencies and civilian users. It is the repository for training requirements, programs, personnel data, and training costs for use by training managers to schedule classes, fill seats, and train soldiers.
	Unit Tracking Tools	A number of spreadsheets, paper rosters, and other informal processes to capture training information at the unit level.
<b>Personnel systems</b>		
	Total Army Personnel Database	The official automated personnel records for all soldiers that include personal identifiers, awards, and training.
	Officer and Enlisted Record Briefs	Records stored within the Total Army Personnel Database primarily used by personnel managers and promotion selection boards that contain data from individual soldier personnel files.
<b>Marine Corps</b>		
<b>Training systems</b>		
	Marine Corps Training Information Management System	A system used to manage enrollment and completion of institutional training and professional military education.
	Unit Tracking Tools	A number of spreadsheets, paper rosters, and other informal processes to capture training information at the unit level.
<b>Personnel systems</b>		
	Marine Corps Total Force System	The single, integrated, personnel and pay system that includes data fields for individual marines such as personal identifiers, awards, and training.
	Service Record Books and Officer Qualification Records	Records stored within the Marine Corps Total Force System that provide a summary of basic events in a marine's career that includes a basic training record with test scores, weapons qualifications, and service school attendance.
<b>DOD</b>		
<b>Other information systems</b>		
	Defense Manpower Data Center	A central repository of personnel and manpower data.
	Language Readiness Index	A Web-based tool within the Defense Readiness Reporting System that is intended to provide senior decision makers with information from service personnel systems and DOD databases on the inventory of military and civilian personnel with language proficiency.

Source: GAO analysis of DOD data.

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## Army and Marine Corps Have Captured Limited Information on Language and Culture Predeployment Training for Ongoing Operations

The Army and Marine Corps have captured some information at the unit level for those service members who completed language and culture predeployment training for ongoing operations. DOD guidance requires that the services document all language and regional proficiency training, education, and experience, which includes culture, in service training and personnel systems and use this information in force management processes.<sup>14</sup> Service documents also note that language and culture training completion and corresponding proficiency should be documented in service-level systems.<sup>15</sup> However, we identified several factors that limited the Army's and Marine Corps' ability to capture information within service-level training and personnel systems on service members' completion of language and culture training and their corresponding proficiency gained from this training.

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## Army and Marine Corps Capture Information at the Unit Level on the Completion of Language and Culture Predeployment Training

Officials with Army and Marine Corps units we spoke with who were preparing for deployments or who were deployed in Afghanistan at the time of our review reported that they documented which service members completed language and culture predeployment training on spreadsheets and paper rosters that were stored at the unit level. For example:

- Officials with an Army brigade deployed in Afghanistan in December 2010 reported that its subordinate battalions recorded soldiers who completed mandatory language and culture training tasks on unit attendance rosters.
- Officials from an Army brigade preparing for deployment to Afghanistan in March 2011 stated that companies and battalions within the brigade documented an individual soldier's completion of required language and culture predeployment training on manually completed computer spreadsheets. During predeployment training, companies and battalions reported summaries of the status and

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<sup>14</sup>According to Department of Defense Instruction 5160.70, *Management of DOD Language and Regional Proficiency Capabilities* (June 12, 2007), regional proficiency skills encompass an awareness and understanding of the cultural and other factors, such as historical, political, sociological, economic, and geographic factors of a foreign country or specific global region.

<sup>15</sup>See, for example, Army Headquarters Execution Order 070-11, *Army Culture and Foreign Language Strategy* (Dec. 27, 2010) and Marine Corps Order 7220.52E, *Foreign Language Proficiency Pay (FLPP) Program* (June 6, 2006).



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completion of critical training tasks, including language and culture tasks, on a weekly basis to the brigade headquarters.

- Officials from Marine Corps battalions preparing for deployment to Afghanistan in November and December 2010 stated that units used manually completed computer spreadsheets to document the number of marines who completed language and culture predeployment training requirements and unit training completion percentages were routinely reported to the regiment headquarters.

Army and Marine Corps training officials reported that the approaches used to capture information on the completion of predeployment training provided unit commanders with some visibility over the number of soldiers and marines who completed language and culture predeployment training.

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### Army Training and Personnel Systems Do Not Contain Complete Information on Language and Culture Predeployment Training Completion and Corresponding Proficiency

The Army requires that all of its units use the Digital Training Management System to document soldiers' completion of individual soldier training and collective training conducted at the unit level.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, in July 2010, the Army released specific guidance that directed units to input language and culture predeployment training in the Digital Training Management System.<sup>17</sup> According to an Army regulation and a Digital Training Management System information paper, the intent of capturing training information in electronic soldier records is to enable decision makers at the service level to track and monitor soldiers, ensure that training records are automatically transferred with a soldier when he or she is reassigned to another unit, and provide visibility to senior leaders that can inform force management decisions.

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<sup>16</sup>Army Regulation 350-1, *Army Training and Leader Development* (Dec. 18, 2009). Although this policy requires that all units utilize the Digital Training Management System, we and the Army Audit Agency have previously reported that Army units have not consistently used the Digital Training Management System to track training completion. See GAO, *Military Training: Actions Needed to Further Improve the Consistency of Combat Skills Training Provided to Army and Marine Corps Support Forces*, [GAO-10-465](#) (Washington, D.C.: Apr. 16, 2010) and U.S. Army Audit Agency, *Digital Training Management System*, A-2011-0075-FFT (Mar. 10, 2011).

<sup>17</sup>Army Headquarters Execution Order 273-10, *For Culture and Language Pre-deployment Training Standards* (July 23, 2010).

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Units we interviewed reported, however, that they did not record the completion of all mandatory language and culture predeployment training tasks within the Digital Training Management System. Although the system provides a single data field for units to record information for basic language and culture training, the Army has multiple, mandatory language and culture predeployment training requirements. Because only one field exists, units we spoke with stated that inconsistent information was recorded in that field. In some cases, units recorded basic culture training in the field but did not record predeployment language training. For example, officials with battalions preparing to deploy to Afghanistan in March 2011 reported they did not record information in this field for soldiers who completed mandatory language training at an on-site language training detachment. At the time of our review, the Army had not yet established data fields within the Digital Training Management System that would allow training officials to document soldiers' completion of all mandatory language and culture training tasks. In bringing this fact to the attention of the Army, service headquarters officials stated that the Army has considered adding new data fields within the Digital Training Management System for all required language and culture predeployment training tasks, but as of July 2011, had not done so. Without data fields available that are clearly aligned with all mandatory training tasks, units have been unable to document which soldiers completed language and culture training.

We also found that the Army had not recorded language proficiency in its primary training systems, despite the fact that these systems have data fields to record this information. In December 2010, the Army reinforced its prior guidance that directed that units record training in the Digital Training Management System and also stated that units should record training within the Army Training Requirements and Resources System to enable tracking of cultural knowledge and foreign language proficiency.<sup>18</sup> Service officials reported that, as of July 2011, nearly 100 percent of the more than 800 soldiers who completed training at a language training detachment met the Army standard for language proficiency in the

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<sup>18</sup>Army Headquarters Execution Order 070-11, *Army Culture and Foreign Language Strategy* (Dec. 27, 2010).

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speaking and listening modalities.<sup>19</sup> However, information on the language proficiency of these soldiers was unavailable in either of these systems. Unit officials we spoke with reported that they did not record soldiers' language proficiency gained from training at a language training detachment within the Digital Training Management System, but rather tracked the number of soldiers who met the Army's language proficiency standard on unit spreadsheets. Training managers responsible for inputting data in the Army Training Requirements and Resources System also reported that they did not record language proficiency data for soldiers who completed this training. Officials stated that information on language proficiency is typically documented within the Army's personnel system.

The Army's primary personnel system (the Total Army Personnel Database) has the capability to capture language proficiency. While the Army collects some language proficiency data within this system, the Army considers these data unreliable because of weaknesses in its approach to collecting them. For all soldiers, including those who complete training at a language training detachment, the Army utilizes a paper form to document soldiers' language proficiency. Upon completing training at a language training detachment, the Army has provided soldiers with a test to determine proficiency in the listening and speaking modalities and a testing official records the corresponding proficiency on this form. The form should then be passed on to a soldier's local training manager and to the Army Human Resources Command.<sup>20</sup> The Army Human Resources Command is required to ensure that language proficiency data are current and accessible to the Department of the Army staff and personnel managers. According to Army officials, the command updates these data in soldiers' personnel records within the Total Army Personnel Database. However, Army officials described several weaknesses in this process that result in unreliable data. For example, the Army relies on hand-delivered hard copy forms, which introduce multiple opportunities for these forms to be lost or human error in data

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<sup>19</sup>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. According to Army data, more than 99 percent of soldiers achieved a level 0+ in the speaking modality, 34 percent of soldiers achieved a level 1, and 5 percent of soldiers achieved a level 1+ (elementary proficiency, plus).

<sup>20</sup>Army Regulation 11-6, *Army Foreign Language Program* (Aug. 31, 2009).

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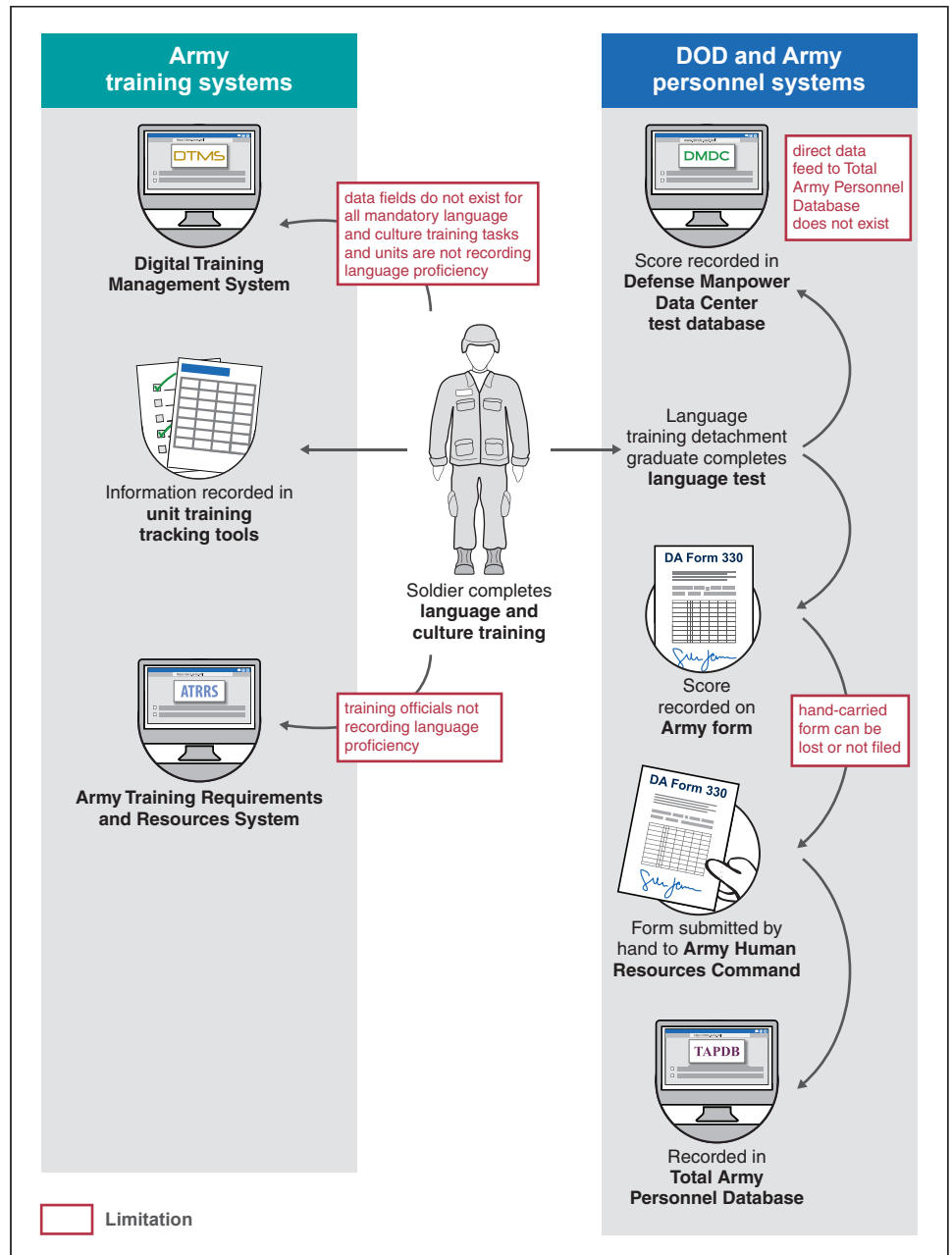
entry.<sup>21</sup> Depending on the type of language test, language proficiency data are also reported to the Defense Manpower Data Center, which maintains personnel and manpower data for all service members, including language test scores. For Web-based tests, test scores are automatically transferred to the Defense Manpower Data Center. For in-person or telephone tests, a testing official records the test score and sends the results to the Defense Manpower Data Center. Army officials explained that a data link does not currently exist to transfer data between the Defense Manpower Data Center and the Total Army Personnel Database and therefore language proficiency data have not been routinely documented in soldiers' personnel records. Because the Total Army Personnel Database is also intended to provide data on soldiers' language proficiency for the department's Language Readiness Index, officials responsible for managing the Language Readiness Index reported that departmentwide visibility over service members' language proficiency is limited by the lack of accurate and timely service data.

To better understand examples of limitations in the Army's ability to capture information within the Army's training and personnel systems on the completion of language and culture predeployment training and corresponding language proficiency, see figure 3.

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<sup>21</sup>An Army official cited one error in which she was listed within the Total Army Personnel Database as an Interagency Language Roundtable skill level 4 linguist whose knowledge is based on residency in a foreign country whereas she is a level 2 DOD-trained linguist.

**Figure 3: Examples of Limitations in the Army's Ability to Capture Information within Training and Personnel Systems on Completion of Language and Culture Predeployment Training and Corresponding Language Proficiency**



Source: GAO analysis of DOD data.

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In January 2011, the Army established a task force to improve the accuracy of information on service members' language proficiency available within the Total Army Personnel Database. At the time of our review, the Army Language Tracking Task Force had identified a number of key tasks and was at varying stages of completing its work. For example, the task force is working to establish a direct data link between the Defense Manpower Data Center where language test scores are recorded and the Total Army Personnel Database. According to a task force official, the Army plans to complete this link by early 2012.

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**Marine Corps Training and Personnel Systems Lack Information on Language and Culture Predeployment Training Completion and Corresponding Proficiency**

According to Marine Corps Order 3502.6, units are required to track and report information about the status of predeployment training in accordance with guidance provided by the unit's chain of command.<sup>22</sup> As discussed earlier in this report, Marine Corps units we spoke with reported that the completion of language and culture predeployment training for ongoing operations in Afghanistan was captured and tracked at the unit level using informal approaches, such as spreadsheets and paper rosters. Officials also explained that no Marine Corps service-level system is used to record the completion of predeployment training tasks. In its January 2011 strategy, the Marine Corps noted that no mechanism exists within the service to track regional and cultural skills obtained through operational experience on a servicewide basis, but that the timely identification of marines with these skills could assist the service in making force management decisions. The strategy also identifies the need for the service to develop a tracking mechanism to readily identify and leverage regional and cultural skills.<sup>23</sup> As presently structured, the Marine Corps Training Information Management System enables servicewide tracking of the completion of institutional training and professional military education.<sup>24</sup> During our review, Marine Corps officials stated that the service was in the process of developing a new

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<sup>22</sup>Marine Corps Order 3502.6, *Marine Corps Force Generation Process* (Apr. 29, 2010).

<sup>23</sup>*Marine Corps Language, Regional and Culture Strategy 2011-2015* (January 2011).

<sup>24</sup>Apart from predeployment training, the Marine Corps has begun documenting language and regional proficiency training, education, and experience information for its regional, culture, and language familiarization career development program within service-level systems. For example, the Marine Corps is recording marines' assignments to specific regions within the Marine Corps Total Force System, and is documenting marines' completion of the program's mandatory computer-based language and other region and culture training within the Marine Corps Training Information Management System.

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module within this system that, when fully implemented, would allow units to document individual and unit predeployment training. However, according to officials, the Marine Corps has not determined if this new module or another system would be used to track language or culture predeployment training tasks.

We also found that the Marine Corps had not provided formal language tests to marines who completed significant language training for ongoing operations in Afghanistan and, therefore, had not documented their language proficiency within its primary personnel system (the Marine Corps Total Force System) or any other system. According to officials, most marines selected for Afghan language training (about 30 marines per battalion) received approximately 40 hours of training that primarily focused on basic rapport building and memorization of survival phrases. Due to the limited number of hours of training, Marine Corps officials stated that these training programs were not designed to produce measurable language proficiency. In discussions with units preparing for deployments to Afghanistan and with training providers, we found that some marines completed more extensive language training. For example, Marine Corps officials estimated that about 15 percent of marines selected for language training completed an advanced language training program that consisted of 160 hours of live instruction at a language training detachment on Camp Lejeune or Camp Pendleton, which also included a minimum of an additional 72 hours of self-directed learning via computer-based language training. In addition, our analysis found that about 1,000 marines attended training programs at a local community college and university since 2009 that ranged from 160 to 320 hours of Afghan language training.

In cases where service members complete a significant language training event as defined by DOD and service guidance, the Marine Corps is responsible for administering the Defense Language Proficiency Test system of tests to measure language proficiency.<sup>25</sup> However, although several language training programs met the criteria established in DOD

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<sup>25</sup>DOD Instruction 5160.71, *DOD Language Testing Program* (Jan. 26, 2009), and Marine Corps Order 7220.52E, *Foreign Language Proficiency Pay (FLPP) Program* (June 6, 2006) define significant language training as at least 150 hours of immersion training or 6 weeks of 5 hours a day of classroom training. The definition also includes an “other significant event as defined by the Secretaries of the Military Departments and the Heads of Defense Agencies and DOD Field Activities” in the definition.

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and service guidance, we found that the Marine Corps had not required marines who completed significant language training to take a Defense Language Proficiency Test system of tests to measure their language proficiency. Therefore, the Marine Corps does not have language proficiency data for these marines. Marine Corps officials told us that they are reviewing the potential applicability of using a new Defense Language Proficiency Test that has been specifically designed to assess lower levels of language proficiency, but formal decisions on whether to use this test for general purpose force marines who completed significant Afghan language training have not yet been made.<sup>26</sup>

By not capturing information within service-level training and personnel systems on the training that general purpose forces have completed and the proficiency they gained from training, the Army and Marine Corps do not have the information they need to effectively leverage the language and culture knowledge and skills of these forces when making individual assignments and assessing future operational needs.

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## Army and Marine Corps Have Not Developed Plans to Sustain Language Skills Already Acquired through Predeployment Training

DOD and service guidance address the need to sustain language skills and the DOD strategic plan for language, regional, and culture skills calls for the services to build on existing language skills for future needs. The Army and Marine Corps have made considerable investments in time and resources to provide some service members with extensive predeployment language training, but have not developed plans to sustain language skills already acquired through this training. We found that the Army and Marine Corps had not yet determined which service members require follow-on training, the amount of training required, or appropriate mechanisms for delivering the training.

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<sup>26</sup>According to the Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center, the Very Low Range Defense Language Proficiency Test is explicitly designed to make distinctions among personnel with language proficiency skill levels of 0+, 1, and 1+.



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## DOD and Service Guidance on Sustainment Training for Language Skills

DOD guidance instructs the services to develop sustainment language and regional proficiency training and education plans for language professionals and language-skilled personnel.<sup>27</sup> Likewise, service documents reinforce the need to sustain language skills. For example, according to the Army's December 2010 Culture and Foreign Language Strategy Execution Order, the Army will sustain the language skills of soldiers who achieve low levels of language proficiency.<sup>28</sup> Additionally, the *Marine Corps Language, Regional and Culture Strategy: 2011-2015* notes that without an effective sustainment program, the war-fighting benefits from language training will be lost, which minimizes the service's return on investment for this training.<sup>29</sup> Consequently, the strategy states that the Marine Corps must explore and leverage all cost-effective solutions to sustain language capabilities. Moreover, the Marine Corps has published guidance that states that mission accomplishment and efficiency can be enhanced if marines attain and maintain language proficiency, even at the lowest levels of proficiency.<sup>30</sup>

Additionally, a DOD strategy calls for the services to build on existing language skills for future needs. The *Department of Defense Strategic Plan for Language Skills, Regional Expertise, and Cultural Capabilities (2011-2016)* notes that in order to meet the requirements generated by an expanding global role, it is incumbent on the department to build on current language skills and invest in basic and continuing language, regional, and culture training and education.<sup>31</sup> The strategy also states that by identifying language, regional, and cultural requirements and building these capabilities, DOD will be able to more effectively engage with not only partners and allies, but also with the indigenous populations in order to build rapport and establish trusting relationships.

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<sup>27</sup> Department of Defense Instruction 5160.70, *Management of DOD Language and Regional Proficiency Capabilities* (June 12, 2007).

<sup>28</sup> Army Headquarters Execution Order 070-11, *Army Culture and Foreign Language Strategy* (Dec. 27, 2010).

<sup>29</sup> *Marine Corps Language, Regional and Culture Strategy: 2011-2015* (January 2011).

<sup>30</sup> Marine Corps Administrative Message 195/11, *FY2011 Marine Corps Foreign Language Proficiency Pay* (Mar. 28, 2011).

<sup>31</sup> *Department of Defense Strategic Plan for Language Skills, Regional Expertise, and Cultural Capabilities (2011-2016)* (February 2011).

## Army and Marine Corps Have Made Considerable Investments in Predeployment Language Training

The Army and Marine Corps have made considerable investments in time and resources to provide some service members with extensive predeployment language training in order to prepare them for ongoing operations in Afghanistan. For example, according to Army documents, the Army spent about \$12.3 million through August 2011 to establish and maintain language training detachment sites for Afghan language training. The Army estimated that it will spend an additional \$31.6 million from fiscal year 2012 through fiscal year 2015 to maintain these sites. The Marine Corps has also funded Afghan language training courses at San Diego State University and Coastal Carolina Community College. Table 2 summarizes the number of soldiers and marines who completed selected language training programs since 2009, the length of the training, and the estimated cost of training.

**Table 2: Selected Afghan Language Training Program Enrollments and Costs Since 2009**

Language training	Number trained <sup>a</sup>	Length of training (hours)	Estimated cost of training <sup>b</sup>
Army language training detachment	848	At least 480	\$12,334,400
Marine Corps language training detachment	639	Between 40 and 160	\$1,288,600
San Diego State University	258	320	- <sup>c</sup>
Coastal Carolina Community College	770	160	\$134,750

Source: GAO analysis of DOD data.

<sup>a</sup>Data as of July 2011.

<sup>b</sup>Data for Army and Marine Corps language training detachments as of August 2011. Data for Coastal Carolina Community College as of July 2011.

<sup>c</sup>The Marine Corps does not pay a cost per student for the San Diego State University language training program. If entitled, a marine is reimbursed for travel and per diem costs to attend training. Marine Corps officials were unable to provide us with the number of marines who received travel and per diem payments and, as a result, we were unable to estimate the total cost of this training.

Note: Additional soldiers and marines were enrolled in these training programs at the time of our review. For example, as of July 2011, 225 soldiers were participating in training at Army language training detachments.

## Army and Marine Corps Have Not Developed Formal Sustainment Plans for Language Skills Already Acquired through Predeployment Training

While informal language training programs exist, the Army and Marine Corps have not developed formal plans to sustain language skills acquired through predeployment training for ongoing operations. Officials with Army and Marine Corps units preparing for deployment and those deployed in Afghanistan reported that some informal follow-on training programs were available to service members to sustain language skills, for example, utilizing self-directed learning tools such as computer-based training programs. However, the use of informal training options to refresh and maintain language skills was voluntary and left to service members'

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personal initiative. The Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center has reported that although personal initiative is necessary, it is almost never sufficient for maintenance of such a complex skill as foreign language proficiency.<sup>32</sup>

We found that the Army and Marine Corps had not yet determined which service members require follow-on training to sustain language skills, the amount of training required, or appropriate mechanisms for delivering the training. Army officials stated they recognized the need to sustain language skills acquired through predeployment training with a formal training program, particularly in light of the number of service members who already received language training that will have multiple deployments to the same region. At the time of our review, the Army was evaluating various sustainment training options, but had not yet developed a formal plan or identified the resources required to provide the training. The Marine Corps is not planning to sustain the Afghan language skills of marines that were acquired through predeployment training with a formal training program. Marine Corps officials cited several reasons as the basis for this approach, for example because of the turnover of personnel within the Marine Corps from one deployment to the next. Additionally, according to current plans, the service will provide language training for a variety of languages as part of its career development program.<sup>33</sup> However, we found that this program is not intended to maintain or build upon language skills already acquired by some marines through extensive predeployment Afghan language training. In the absence of formal sustainment training to maintain and build upon service members' language skills acquired for ongoing operations at considerable expense in time and resources, the Army and Marine Corps may miss opportunities to capitalize on the investments they have already made to provide predeployment language training.

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<sup>32</sup>Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center Pamphlet 350-9, *Guidelines, Policies and Procedures for DOD Command Language Programs* (Nov. 1, 1995).

<sup>33</sup>The language component of the Regional, Culture, and Language Familiarization program is intended to provide basic language familiarization to support general purpose force marines' ability to build rapport, establish credibility, and apply specific words and phrases in a target language necessary to conduct military missions.

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## Conclusions

DOD has recognized that its ability to identify general purpose forces that have language and culture knowledge and skills will be critical to managing these forces in the future. However, by not capturing information within service-level training and personnel systems on the completion of language and culture training and corresponding proficiency gained from training, the Army and Marine Corps do not have the information they need to effectively leverage the language and culture knowledge and skills of these forces when making individual assignments and assessing future operational needs. Further, the Army and Marine Corps face competing demands for limited training time and resources and, in this context, not all service members who acquired skills through predeployment language training may require follow-on training. Despite the fact that the Army and Marine Corps have made considerable investments to provide some service members with extensive predeployment language training, the services have not determined which service members require follow-on training to sustain language skills, the amount of training required, or appropriate mechanisms for delivering the training. As a result, the Army and Marine Corps may not fully maximize the return on investment already made for predeployment language training for current operations.

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## Recommendations for Executive Action

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

To provide decision makers with greater visibility on the language and culture knowledge and skills of Army and Marine Corps general purpose forces that could inform force management processes, we recommend that the Secretary of Defense direct the Secretary of the Army to:

- Establish clearly defined data fields for all mandatory language and culture training tasks within the Digital Training Management System and update Digital Training Management System records for soldiers who completed training prior to these fields being established.
- Document the language proficiency for soldiers completing predeployment language training within the Digital Training Management System and the Army Training Requirements and Resources System.

We further recommend that the Secretary of Defense direct the Secretary of the Navy, in consultation with the Commandant of the Marine Corps, to:

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- Designate which training and/or personnel systems the Marine Corps should use to document the completion of marines' language and culture training.
  - Administer formal tests to marines completing a significant language training event using DOD's agreed-upon method to measure proficiency, and ensure the results of these tests are documented in marines' personnel records within the Marine Corps Total Force System.

To capitalize on the investments in time and resources made in providing language training to service members, we recommend that the Secretary of Defense direct the Secretary of the Army and the Secretary of the Navy, in consultation with the Commandant of the Marine Corps, to:

- Determine which soldiers and marines with language skills require follow-on training, the amount of training required, and appropriate mechanisms for delivering the training, and make any adjustments to training programs that may be needed.

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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 three recommendations. DOD's comments are reprinted in their entirety in appendix II. DOD also provided technical comments, which we incorporated into the report as appropriate.

In addition to providing detailed responses to our recommendations, DOD provided two general comments about our report. First, DOD pointed out that our report noted the extent to which the Army and Marine Corps used service-level training and personnel systems to record service members' proficiency gained from predeployment training that meets DOD's definition of "significant language training." DOD stated that, since it believed the current definition in the report may have taken the definition out of context, it would like to clarify what constitutes a "significant language training event," noting that DOD Instruction 5160.71 defines such an event as "at least 150 hours of immersion training or 6 consecutive weeks of 5-hours-a day classroom training, or other significant event as defined by the Secretaries of the Military Departments and the Heads of Defense Agencies and DOD Field Activities."<sup>34</sup> DOD

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<sup>34</sup>DOD Instruction 5160.71, *DOD Language Testing Program* (Jan. 26, 2009).

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stated that this definition was not intended to be associated with the initial acquisition of a language, but rather is associated with modifying the retesting interval for someone who has already achieved a measured proficiency. In a follow-up discussion, DOD officials clarified that language training offered during predeployment training falls into the category of initial acquisition of a language, and therefore, under the instruction, testing for proficiency is not required. These officials noted, however, that the military services are not precluded from testing for language proficiency at this stage, and therefore have the option of administering tests. As we noted in our report, the Army has decided to exercise this option and is in fact testing the proficiency of its service members upon completing extensive predeployment training. Given the considerable investments that the Marine Corps is making to provide some marines with extensive language training prior to deploying to Afghanistan, we continue to believe it is prudent for the Marine Corps to take a similar approach to testing. In the absence of such action, we continue to believe that DOD may be missing an opportunity to gain greater visibility of the language skills of its forces and therefore effectively leverage this capability when making individual assignments and assessing future operational needs.

Second, DOD acknowledged our recommendation to develop sustainment training programs to maintain and build upon service members' language skills. The department noted that DOD Instruction 5160.70 emphasizes the importance of sustainment language and regional proficiency training and education programs for language professionals and language-skilled personnel.<sup>35</sup> DOD stated that with an increasing number of general purpose forces attending predeployment language training at language training detachments, the department will examine ways to capitalize on the investments already made to ensure that it builds, enhances, and sustains a total force with a mix of language skills, regional expertise, and cultural capabilities to meet existing and emerging needs.

DOD also provided detailed comments on each of our recommendations. DOD concurred with our recommendation that the Secretary of Defense direct the Secretary of the Army to establish clearly defined data fields for

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<sup>35</sup>Department of Defense Instruction 5160.70, *Management of DOD Language and Regional Proficiency Capabilities* (June 12, 2007).

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all mandatory language and culture training tasks within the Digital Training Management System and update Digital Training Management System records for soldiers that completed training prior to these fields being established. DOD stated that deficiencies within the Digital Training Management System have been identified and that the Army, in a December 2010 order, had directed the development of solutions to address these deficiencies. As stated in our report, we recognize that the Army directed that units record training in the Digital Training Management System. However, its direction did not include requiring that adjustments be made in the system. Specifically, it did not call for action to be taken to add new data fields for all required language and culture predeployment training tasks that would allow training officials to document soldiers' completion of these tasks. Therefore, because the Army has not directed this action, we continue to believe that our recommendation has merit.

DOD concurred with our recommendation that the Secretary of Defense direct the Secretary of the Army to document the language proficiency for soldiers completing predeployment language training within the Digital Training Management System and the Army Training Requirements and Resources System. DOD stated that most predeployment language training is of such short duration that language proficiency will not be measurable and that the department's emphasis will be to document language proficiency for general purpose forces completing predeployment foundational language training (usually 16 weeks or longer) conducted at language training detachments. DOD also noted that the Total Army Personnel Database will remain the primary system for recording language proficiency of Army personnel. DOD further noted that the Army Training Requirements and Resources System already facilitates the requirement for tracking and reporting certain language and culture training courses. For example, DOD noted that the Army has, within the system, assigned specific codes for all language and culture training courses; modified functions to require a proficiency score for these courses; and assigned codes to each of the courses for a specific language. However, in its comments, DOD did not state whether the Army plans to take any actions to document language proficiency within the Digital Training Management System, as we also recommended. We continue to believe this action is needed to provide decision makers with better information on the language and culture knowledge and skills of soldiers to make individual assignments and assess future operational needs.

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DOD partially concurred with our recommendation that the Secretary of Defense direct the Secretary of the Navy, in consultation with the Commandant of the Marine Corps, to designate which training and/or personnel systems the Marine Corps should use to document the completion of marines' language and culture training. DOD stated that, as outlined in our report, current Marine Corps systems, such as the Marine Corps Training Information Management System, are designed to track the completion of institutional training and professional military education, not the completion of individual and unit-level training. DOD stated that although efforts are being pursued that may eventually allow for this capability, the Marine Corps believes that a comprehensive cost-benefit analysis needs to be conducted beforehand in order to accurately capture the costs in time, fiscal resources, and infrastructure enhancements associated with implementation and determine whether those costs necessary to track the completion of language and culture training at the individual and unit levels are warranted, particularly when prioritized against other validated operational requirements in a fiscally- and time-constrained environment. We agree that the Marine Corps should consider the costs associated with documenting the completion of language and culture training beyond those already incurred at the unit level to record this information and determine whether the benefits are warranted. As part of its analysis, we would expect that the service would also consider the potential opportunity cost of not recording this information, such as how it might affect the ability of decision makers to make timely and informed decisions on assigning forces or assessing future operational needs if they do not have complete information on the knowledge and skills of their forces.

DOD partially concurred with our recommendation that the Secretary of Defense direct the Secretary of the Navy, in consultation with the Commandant of the Marine Corps, to administer formal tests to marines completing a significant language training event using DOD's agreed-upon method to measure proficiency, and ensure the results of these tests are documented in marines' personnel records with the Marine Corps Total Force System. DOD stated that the Marine Corps' predeployment language training programs are not specifically designed to produce a measurable language proficiency score using DOD's agreed-upon method for measuring it. Rather, the programs are focused on the military/tactical domain, and are designed to provide marines with the communication skills necessary to accomplish a specific mission-related task/skill. DOD stated, however, that the Marine Corps is assessing the feasibility of incorporating metrics into its predeployment language training programs that would produce a proficiency score, such



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as using the Very Low Range series of Defense Language Proficiency Tests and oral proficiency interviews. DOD also restated the need for clarification in our report over what constitutes “significant language training,” noting that the current definition was not intended to represent initial acquisition of a language but rather is associated with modifying retesting intervals. As discussed previously, DOD officials clarified that the military services are not precluded from testing proficiency following the completion of courses that fall into the category of initial acquisition of a language, such as predeployment training. As we noted in our report, the Marine Corps has made considerable investments to provide some marines with extensive predeployment language training prior to deploying to Afghanistan. To date, the Marine Corps has not required these marines to take a Defense Language Proficiency Test system of tests to measure their language proficiency. Without this information, we continue to believe that DOD may be missing an opportunity to gain greater visibility of the language skills of its forces and therefore effectively leverage this capability when making individual assignments and assessing future operational needs.

DOD partially concurred with our recommendation that the Secretary of Defense direct the Secretary of the Army and the Secretary of the Navy, in consultation with the Commandant of the Marine Corps, to determine which soldiers and marines with language skills require follow-on training, the amount of training required, and appropriate mechanisms for delivering the training, and make any adjustments to training programs that may be needed. DOD stated that the Army is formulating a plan for sustainment of language skills acquired at Army language training detachments and that such a plan would rely heavily on existing distributed learning resources. We would expect that as the Army develops this plan, it would specifically address which soldiers require additional training, the amount of training required, appropriate mechanisms for delivering the training, and whether any adjustments to existing training programs would be made. DOD also stated that the Marine Corps has made a decision to formally build and sustain language, regional, and culture skills via the Regional, Culture, and Language Familiarization program for general purpose forces that specifically targets its officer corps and enlisted ranks starting at sergeant and above. DOD noted that given high attrition rates for first-term enlisted marines, applying this program or other deliberate institutional programs designed to target the first-term enlisted population group have been deemed cost prohibitive. For these marines, language, regional, and culture skills are provided through predeployment training programs and common skills training, and sustained via informal mechanisms by

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providing access to language learning software and other computer-based technologies. We recognize that the Marine Corps has developed the Regional, Culture, and Language Familiarization program that is focused on its career force. However, as we stated in our report, the Marine Corps has made a considerable investment in time and resources to provide some marines with extensive predeployment language training in order to prepare them for ongoing operations in Afghanistan, but at this point, the Regional, Culture, and Language Familiarization program is not intended to maintain or build upon the language skills already acquired by these marines. In the absence of formal training to sustain these language skills, DOD may miss opportunities to capitalize on the investments already made to provide predeployment language training.

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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, and the Commandant of the Marine Corps. 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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# 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 Army, and the Marine Corps. To evaluate the extent to which the Army and Marine Corps captured information within service-level training and personnel systems on the completion of language and culture training and proficiency gained by personnel through training, we focused on Army and Marine Corps language and culture predeployment training programs administered since 2009 to prepare general purpose forces for ongoing operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. Therefore, for this review, we excluded service training programs for language and regional experts (e.g., foreign area officers and intelligence specialists) and special operations forces. We reviewed information available in service-level training and personnel systems and department-level information systems on service members' completion of language and culture training and the corresponding acquisition of skills—specifically, the time frame when this training occurred and the proficiency service members had achieved. We defined “proficiency” using the Department of Defense (DOD) agreed-upon method for measuring it.<sup>1</sup> We conducted interviews with Army and Marine Corps officials who are responsible for developing predeployment training programs and documenting information on training completion in service-level training and personnel systems. We also discussed the extent to which the services used these systems to record any proficiency gained from training, in particular the training that meets DOD’s definition of a significant language training event—at least 150 hours of immersion training or 6 consecutive weeks of 5-hour-a-day classroom training.<sup>2</sup> We also interviewed officials with Army and Marine Corps units that were participating in predeployment training and units that were deployed in Afghanistan at the time of our review to discuss the extent to which they used service-level training and personnel systems and other processes to

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<sup>1</sup>DOD measures an individual’s language proficiency using the Defense Language Proficiency Test system of tests. Service members who complete a test are given an Interagency Language Roundtable score for listening, reading, and speaking proficiency as measured on a scale from 0 (no proficiency) to 5 (functionally native proficiency). For culture, DOD has established broad guidelines for regional proficiency, which includes cultural awareness, but the department has not yet established a way to test or otherwise evaluate the culture knowledge and skills of service members in accordance with these guidelines.

<sup>2</sup>Department of Defense Instruction 5160.71, *DOD Language Testing Program* (Jan. 26, 2009). The instruction also includes “a significant event as defined by the Secretaries of the Military Departments and the Heads of Defense Agencies and DOD Field Activities” in its definition of significant language training.

document the completion of language and culture predeployment training and proficiency gained from this training. In identifying Army and Marine Corps unit personnel to speak with, we selected an illustrative nongeneralizable sample of units that were deployed for contingency operations or preparing to deploy during the time frame of October 2010 through June 2011. We assessed the Army's and Marine Corps' efforts in light of DOD guidance that requires that the services document all language and regional proficiency training, education, and experience in training and personnel systems and Army and Marine Corps documents that state that language and culture training completion and corresponding proficiency should be documented in service-level systems.<sup>3</sup> For our review, we focused on language and culture-related training, which DOD includes in its description of regional proficiency skills. We also discussed with Office of the Secretary of Defense and Army officials the content and status of ongoing departmental and Army efforts, such as the Army's Language Tracking Task Force, which are intended to improve the accuracy of information on the language proficiency of service members available in personnel systems.

To evaluate the extent to which the Army and Marine Corps have developed plans to sustain language skills acquired through predeployment training, we interviewed Army and Marine Corps training officials to discuss the extent to which the services had developed specific training programs for general purpose forces to sustain language skills. We interviewed officials with Army and Marine Corps units that were participating in predeployment training and units that were deployed in Afghanistan at the time of our review to discuss formal programs used by service members to sustain skills acquired through language training. We also discussed other informal training programs that were available to service members to sustain language skills. In identifying Army and Marine Corps unit personnel to speak with, we selected an illustrative nongeneralizable sample of units that were deployed for contingency operations or preparing to deploy during the time frame of October 2010 through June 2011. To gain an understanding of the investments associated with predeployment language training, we collected

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<sup>3</sup>See, for example, Department of Defense Instruction 5160.70, *Management of DOD Language and Regional Proficiency Capabilities* (June 12, 2007); Army Headquarters Execution Order 070-11, *Army Culture and Foreign Language Strategy* (Dec. 27, 2010); and Marine Corps Order 7220.52E, *Foreign Language Proficiency Pay (FLPP) Program* (June 6, 2006).

information from service training officials on the number of soldiers and marines completing training from January 2009 through July 2011, the amount of time spent in training, and the cost of these training programs. To ensure the reliability of our data, we interviewed knowledgeable officials about the data and internal controls on the systems that contain them. We determined that the data were sufficiently reliable for the purposes of this audit. We reviewed Army and Marine Corps training programs and plans in light of DOD and service guidance that emphasize the need to sustain language skills and the DOD strategic plan for language, regional, and culture skills that calls for the services to build on existing language skills for future needs.<sup>4</sup>

To gain insights on Army and Marine Corps units' perspectives on capturing information on language and culture training in service-level training and personnel systems and discuss any steps taken to sustain skills acquired through language training, we interviewed officials with Army and Marine Corps units that were participating in predeployment training and that were deployed in Afghanistan at the time of our review. Specifically, we met with officials with one Army brigade combat team preparing for deployment and five subordinate combat arms and support battalions, three Marine Corps combat arms and one support battalion preparing for deployment, and through formal requests for information from the United States Forces Afghanistan staff, we received written responses from three Army combat arms and two Army support brigades deployed in Afghanistan. The team focused on combat arms units because training guidance from the battlefield commander focused on language training for these units.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>See, for example, Department of Defense Instruction 5160.70, *Management of DOD Language and Regional Proficiency Capabilities* (June 12, 2007); Army Headquarters Execution Order 070-11, *Army Culture and Foreign Language Strategy* (Dec. 27, 2010); *Marine Corps Language, Regional and Culture Strategy: 2011-2015* (January 2011); and *Department of Defense Strategic Plan for Language Skills, Regional Expertise, and Cultural Capabilities (2011-2016)* (February 2011).

<sup>5</sup>Commander International Security Assistance Force/U.S. Forces Afghanistan Memorandum, *Training Guidance for Language Training* (Jan. 24, 2010).

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
  - Defense Language Office

**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
- Assistant Secretary of the Army, Manpower and Reserve Affairs
- 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
- 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 Command
- Marine Corps Forces, Pacific
- I Marine Expeditionary Force
- II Marine Expeditionary Force
- III Marine Expeditionary Force

**Other DOD Components**

- U.S. Central Command
  - U.S. Forces Afghanistan

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We conducted this performance audit from June 2010 to October 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.

# Appendix II: Comments from the Department of Defense



PERSONNEL AND  
READINESS

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

OCT 17 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-12-50, "LANGUAGE AND CULTURE TRAINING: Opportunities Exist to Improve Visibility and Sustainment of Knowledge and Skills in Army and Marine Corps General Purpose Forces," dated September 15, 2011 (GAO Code 351506).

DoD concurs with most of the recommendations made in the draft report. Detailed responses to those recommendations are contained in the enclosure. In addition, we would like to offer the following comments on the report.

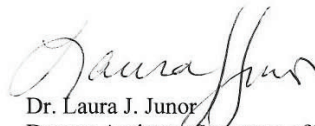
The report noted the extent to which the Army and Marine Corps used Service-level training and personnel systems to record service members' proficiency gained from predeployment training that meets the DoD's definition of "significant language training." The Department would like to clarify what constitutes a "significant language training event", since the current definition being utilized in the report may have been taken out of context. DoD Instruction 5160.71 defines a significant language training event as "at least 150 hours of immersion training or 6 consecutive weeks of 5-hours-a day classroom training, or other significant event as defined by the Secretaries of the Military Departments and the Heads of Defense Agencies and DoD Field Activities." This definition was not intended to be associated with initial acquisition of a language, but rather is associated with modifying the retesting interval for someone who has already achieved a measured proficiency.

The Department acknowledges the report's recommendation to develop sustainment training programs to maintain and build upon service member's language skills. DoD Instruction 5160.70 currently emphasizes the importance of sustainment language and regional proficiency training and education programs for language professionals and language skilled personnel. However, with an increasing number of general purpose forces attending predeployment language training at Language Training Detachments, the Department will examine ways to capitalize on the investments already made to ensure we build, enhance, and sustain a Total Force with a mix of language skills, regional expertise, and cultural capabilities to meet existing and emerging needs.



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

Sincerely,



Dr. Laura J. Junor  
Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense  
(Readiness)

Enclosure:  
As stated

GAO DRAFT REPORT DATED SEPTEMBER 15, 2011  
GAO-12-50 (GAO CODE 351506)

“LANGUAGE AND CULTURE TRAINING: OPPORTUNITIES EXIST TO  
IMPROVE VISIBILITY AND SUSTAINMENT OF KNOWLEDGE AND  
SKILLS IN ARMY AND MARINE CORPS GENERAL PURPOSE  
FORCES”

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE COMMENTS  
TO THE GAO RECOMMENDATIONS

**RECOMMENDATION 1:** The GAO recommends that the Secretary of Defense direct the Secretary of the Army to establish clearly defined data fields for all mandatory language and culture training tasks within the Digital Training Management System and update Digital Training Management System records for soldiers that completed training prior to these fields being established.

**DoD RESPONSE:** Concur. The deficiencies identified within the Digital Training Management System (DTMS) have been identified and the development of solutions addressing these deficiencies has been directed by HQ Department of Army Execution Order of December 2010 regarding the implementation of the Army Culture Foreign Language Strategy.

**RECOMMENDATION 2:** The GAO recommends that the Secretary of Defense direct the Secretary of the Army to document the language proficiency for soldiers completing predeployment language training within the Digital Training Management System and the Army Training Requirements and Resources System.

**DoD RESPONSE:** Concur. Most predeployment language training is of such short duration that language proficiency will not be measurable. Rather, emphasis will be to document language proficiency for general purpose forces (GPF) completing predeployment foundational language training (usually sixteen weeks or longer) conducted at Language Training Detachments. The Total Army Personnel Database will remain the primary system for recording language proficiency of Army personnel.

The Army Training Requirements and Resources System (ATRRS) already facilitates the requirement for tracking and reporting language and culture training through completion of ATRRS managed training courses. ATRRS has assigned a specific “select code” for all identified Language Culture Training Courses for reporting purposes. ATRRS has modified Input and Graduate functions to require

a proficiency score for Language Culture Training Courses. Additionally, ATRRS has assigned a Language Identification Code to each of the Language Culture Training Courses for a specific language. Finally, reports can be requested within ATRRS to track/analyze the above actions. ATRRS routinely provides training completion transactions to the Total Army Personnel Database in support of its role as the Army's authoritative source/system of record for personnel data.

**RECOMMENDATION 3:** The GAO recommends that the Secretary of Defense direct the Secretary of the Navy, in consultation with the Commandant of the Marine Corps, to designate which training and/or personnel systems the Marine Corps should use to document the completion of marines' language and culture training.

**DoD RESPONSE:** Partially concur. As outlined in the report, current Marine Corps systems such as the Marine Corps Training Information Management System (MCTIMS) are designed to track completion of institutional training and professional military education, not completion of individual/unit-level training. Though efforts are being pursued that may eventually allow for this capability, to include the possible addition of a module to MCTIMS and other efforts to track IW-related individual skills, the Marine Corps believes a comprehensive cost-benefit analysis needs to be conducted beforehand in order to: 1) accurately capture the "real costs" in time, fiscal resources, and infrastructure enhancements associated with implementation; and 2) determine whether those real costs/additional expenditures in time, resources, and funding necessary to implement tracking completion of language and culture training at the individual and unit-levels is worth the cost, particularly when prioritized against other validated operational requirements in a fiscally and time constrained environment.

**RECOMMENDATION 4:** The GAO recommends that the Secretary of Defense direct the Secretary of the Navy, in consultation with the Commandant of the Marine Corps, to administer formal tests to marines completing a significant language training event using DOD's agreed upon method to measure proficiency, and ensure the results of these tests are documented in marines' personnel records with the Marine Corps Total Force System.

**DoD RESPONSE:** Partially concur. The Marine Corps' predeployment language training programs are not specifically designed to produce a measurable global proficiency score on the ILR scale. The program is focused on the military/tactical domain, and is designed to provide the Marine with the communication skills necessary to accomplish a specific mission related task/skill. Developing measures of effectiveness that target performance based requirements, vice global proficiency, is what is truly needed. This is accomplished by the Marine Corps

during mission rehearsal exercises such as Enhanced Mojave Viper prior to deployment. With the introduction of the Very Low Range series of Defense Language Proficiency Tests (DLPT) and oral proficiency interviews, the Marine Corps is assessing the feasibility of incorporating these metrics into the predeployment language training programs. Additionally, clarification is required to determine what constitutes “significant language training.” There is concern that the current definition being utilized may have been taken out of context, and was not intended to represent initial acquisition of a language but rather is associated with modifying retesting intervals.

**RECOMMENDATION 5:** The GAO recommends that the Secretary of Defense direct the Secretary of the Army and the Secretary of the Navy, in consultation with the Commandant of the Marine Corps, to determine which soldiers and marines with language skills require follow-on training, the amount of training required, and appropriate mechanisms for delivering the training, and make any adjustments to training programs that may be needed.

**DoD RESPONSE:** Partially concur. The Marine Corps has made a decision to formally build and sustain language, regional, and culture skills via deliberate institutional programs for the GPF that specifically targets its Career Force. As outlined in the report, the Regional, Culture, and Language Familiarization (RCLF) Program is designed to build, enhance, and sustain these critical enablers in a focused, deliberate manner for its Career Force, comprised of its officer corps and enlisted ranks starting at sergeant and above. Given the very high first term enlisted attrition rates characteristics of the Marine Corps, robust application of the RCLF Program, or implementation of other deliberate institutional programs designed to target the first term enlisted population group, have been deemed cost prohibitive. At this level, language, regional, and culture skills are provided through predeployment training program and common skills training, and sustained via informal mechanisms by providing access to language learning software and other computer based technologies.

As for the Army, it is formulating a plan for sustainment of language skills acquired at the Language Training Detachments. Such a plan would rely heavily on existing distributed learning resources.

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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

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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; Amie Steele; Matthew Ullengren; and Chris Watson made significant contributions to this report.

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U.S. Government Accountability Office, 441 G Street NW, Room 7149  
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