

Why GAO Did This Study

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

What GAO Recommends

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

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

MILITARY TRAINING

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

What GAO Found

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

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