



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

MILITARY TRAINING

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

Why GAO Did This Study

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

What GAO Recommends

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

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

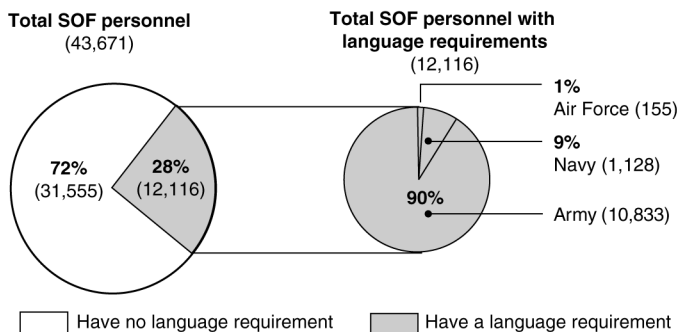
To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Neal Curtin at (757) 552-8100 or curtinn@gao.gov.

What GAO Found

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

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

Number of SOF Personnel Requiring Language Skills



Source: Special Operations Forces Language Office.