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United States Government Accountability Office  
Washington, DC 20548

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November 25, 2008

Congressional Committees

Subject: *Defense Management: Preliminary Observations on DOD's Plans for Developing Language and Cultural Awareness Capabilities*

This letter formally transmits the attached briefing in response to Senate Report No. 110-77, which accompanied the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2008 (Pub. L. No. 110-181). The Senate Report requires GAO to review DOD's plans for the development of language and cultural awareness capabilities and to report to the congressional defense committees by December 31, 2008. On November 24, 2008, we provided the briefing to staff of your committees to satisfy this mandate. We plan to complete our work and issue a final report at a later date.

We are sending copies of this report to the appropriate congressional committees. We are also sending copies to the Secretary of Defense; the Deputy Secretary of Defense; the Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology, and Logistics; the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness; the Secretaries of the Army, Navy, and Air Force; and the Commandant of the Marine Corps. This report will also be available at no charge on our Web site at <http://www.gao.gov>. Should you or your staff have any questions concerning 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 were Patty Lentini (Assistant Director), Gabrielle Carrington (Analyst-in-Charge), John Bumgarner, MacKenzie Cooper, Kathryn Smith, and Traye Smith.

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Enclosure

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# Review of DOD's Language and Cultural Awareness Capabilities

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**Preliminary Observations  
November 24, 2008**

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## Overview

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- Objectives
  - Scope and Methodology
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  - Preliminary Observations
    - DOD's Plans to Develop Language and Cultural Awareness Capabilities
    - DOD's Efforts to Identify Broad Capabilities, Detailed Requirements, and Inventory Data for Language and Cultural Awareness
    - DOD's Training and Education Programs for Developing Language and Cultural Awareness Capabilities
    - DOD's Research and Acquisition Programs for Developing Language and Cultural Awareness Capabilities
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## Objectives

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- Senate Report No. 110-77, which accompanied the FY 2008 National Defense Authorization Act (Pub. L. No. 110-181), directed GAO to review DOD's plans for the development of language and cultural awareness capabilities and to report to the congressional defense committees by December 31, 2008.
  - Our objectives were to assess the extent to which DOD has
    1. Developed plans to address language and cultural awareness capabilities, including funding needs and metrics to evaluate success;
    2. Established processes to identify strategic language and cultural awareness capabilities, requirements to carry out its plans, and inventory of existing capabilities;
    3. Developed training and education programs to support its plans for developing language and cultural awareness capabilities; and
    4. Developed research and acquisition programs to support its plans for developing language and cultural awareness capabilities.
  - This briefing presents our preliminary observations as of November 2008. We plan to complete our work and issue a report at a later date.
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## Scope and Methodology

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- We reviewed DOD's plans and initiatives for developing language and cultural awareness capabilities by (1) gathering and analyzing documentation on DOD's language- and culture-related efforts in the areas of strategic planning, management structure, funding, training and education, and research and acquisition, (2) reviewing key elements of successful organizational transformations, and (3) interviewing knowledgeable officials from pertinent offices, including the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness; the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology, and Logistics; the Joint Staff; the military services; and selected combatant commands. We focused our review on the efforts of DOD and the services to develop language and cultural awareness capabilities within the military force; we did not include a review of the defense agencies.
  - We obtained oral comments from DOD. Officials also provided technical changes that we incorporated as appropriate.
  - We conducted this performance audit from April 2008 to November 2008 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.
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## Background

- DOD and others have conducted several studies that emphasized the importance of developing language and cultural awareness skills among U.S. military personnel. For example:
  - The Defense Science Board's *Summer Study on Transition to and from Hostilities* (December 2004) highlighted the need to treat language and cultural awareness skills as seriously as combat skills in order to achieve U.S. political and military objectives.
  - The *Defense Language Transformation Study* consisted of five DOD-sponsored reports (issued between December 2003 and May 2004) that highlighted the need to better manage language and regional expertise within DOD, the services, and the combatant commands.
- In addition, the *Strategic Planning Guidance* for FY 2006-2011 directed the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness to develop a comprehensive roadmap for achieving the full range of language capabilities necessary to support the 2004 Defense Strategy.
- DOD uses the terms cultural awareness, cultural expertise, regional expertise, and regional proficiency to refer to culture-related skills, but these terms are not consistently used within the department. For the purposes of this briefing, we use all of these terms, depending on which terms are used in DOD documents.

## Objective 1



# DOD's Plans to Develop Language and Cultural Awareness Capabilities

- In 2004, the Deputy Secretary of Defense directed the establishment of positions and entities intended to provide internal oversight and strategic guidance to transform language and culture capabilities, including the following:
  - Senior Language Authorities
    - The Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness appointed the DOD Senior Language Authority to serve as the DOD sponsor for language and regional proficiency.
    - The services, combatant commands, certain defense agencies, and the Joint Staff appointed Senior Language Authorities. The Senior Language Authorities are responsible for assessing their organizations' language needs, tracking language personnel assigned to their organizations, and identifying emerging policy requirements.
  - Defense Language Steering Committee
    - This committee provides senior-level guidance in the language transformation effort and development of DOD's language capabilities. The DOD Senior Language Authority chairs the committee, which is comprised of the Senior Language Authorities.
  - Defense Language Action Panel
    - This panel supports the activities, functions, and responsibilities of the Defense Language Steering Committee. Action officers from the same entities that are members of the Defense Language Steering Committee comprise this action panel.



## Objective 1



# DOD's Plans to Develop Language and Cultural Awareness Capabilities

- In February 2005, DOD issued the *Defense Language Transformation Roadmap*, which was intended to ensure that foreign language capability and accompanying regional expertise are developed and maintained within the military force.
- The *Roadmap* contains four goals:
  1. Create a foundational language and cultural expertise in the officer, civilian, and enlisted ranks of both the Active and Reserve Components.
  2. Create the capacity to surge language and cultural resources beyond these foundational and in-house capabilities.
  3. Establish a cadre of language specialists possessing a level 3/3/3 (listening/reading/speaking) ability.<sup>1</sup>
  4. Establish a process to track the accession, separation, and promotion rates of language professionals and Foreign Area Officers.

<sup>1</sup> The federal Interagency Language Roundtable scale is a measure for assessing an individual's foreign language proficiency. It uses a scale from 0 (no proficiency) to 5 (educated native proficiency) in order to measure listening, reading, and speaking ability in the foreign language. A "+" indicates a half step.

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## DOD's Plans to Develop Language and Cultural Awareness Capabilities

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- DOD identified a total of 43 tasks associated with the *Roadmap's* four goals. Since 2005, DOD reports having completed 91 percent of the *Roadmap* tasks, and it plans to complete most of the remaining tasks by the end of 2008. As of November 2008, tasks completed include:
    - The establishment of the Defense Language Office, within the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, in May 2005 to implement the *Roadmap* and ensure strategic focus on meeting present and future requirements for language and regional expertise.
    - The publication of a DOD instruction in June 2007 that provides guidance for language program management.
    - The publication of an annual *Strategic Language List* in fiscal years 2006, 2007, and 2008, which identifies languages for which DOD needs to develop immediate and long-term capability.
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# DOD's Plans to Develop Language and Cultural Awareness Capabilities

- Our prior work<sup>2</sup> has shown that establishing a strategic plan is a key practice in implementing successful transformations.
  - A strategic plan should include the establishment of performance goals and determination of strategies and resources to accomplish the goals.
  - Strategic planning best practices also call for goals and objectives to be expressed in a manner that allows for measurement of progress.
- In its current form, the *Roadmap* does not contain certain key elements of a strategic plan, including long-term strategic goals that are tied to metrics and to funding priorities. These key elements could help decision makers assess progress toward outcomes and establish strategic funding priorities for language and cultural awareness capabilities within DOD.
- DOD officials stated that the *Roadmap* was not intended to be a strategic plan. Rather, they decided that a detailed document containing specific goals and tasks would allow DOD to more quickly begin language transformation efforts.

<sup>2</sup> GAO, *Results-Oriented Cultures: Implementation Steps to Assist Mergers and Organizational Transformations*, GAO-03-669 (Washington, D.C.: July 2, 2003).

## Objective 1

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### **DOD's Plans to Develop Language and Cultural Awareness Capabilities**

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- DOD is currently developing a new plan for continuing defense language transformation efforts, which is referred to as Phase II.
    - DOD officials stated that Phase II will be similar in format to the original *Roadmap*, i.e., it will include goals and tasks and will not be a fully developed strategic plan. However, the format and composition of this document is evolving.
    - According to DOD officials, Phase II will focus more on developing cultural awareness and regional expertise capabilities than did the original *Roadmap*, which focused primarily on developing language capabilities. They also stated that Phase II will address standard DOD-wide definitions for cultural awareness and regional expertise.
    - DOD plans to have a draft of Phase II available in January 2009 for consideration by the next administration but does not know when it will be finalized.
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## Objective 1

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### **DOD's Plans to Develop Language and Cultural Awareness Capabilities**

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- The services are in different stages of development and completion of strategy documents related to language and cultural awareness. The extent to which these service strategy documents are aligned with the *Defense Language Transformation Roadmap* varies.
- The Air Force, Army, Navy, and Marine Corps have developed or are developing strategy documents intended to guide efforts to develop language and cultural awareness skills within their respective forces.

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## DOD's Plans to Develop Language and Cultural Awareness Capabilities

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- Air Force
  - The Air Force's strategy document, which is titled, *Air Force Culture, Region & Language Strategy*, is still in draft form as of October 2008.
  - It includes goals and tasks that are intended to enable airmen to influence outcomes of operations and maximize operational capabilities in culturally complex environments.
    - These goals and tasks, which are assigned to offices of responsibility, are planned for completion by the first half of fiscal year 2011.
  - The goals and tasks appear to be aligned with the *Defense Language Transformation Roadmap* to some extent. According to the Air Force strategy document, it tailors the goals of the *Roadmap* to the Air Force's mission and is linked to higher-level national, defense, and military strategies.
  - This draft strategy document addresses both language professionals and general purpose forces. Its goals are focused on (1) developing requirements, (2) assessing capability gaps, and (3) developing education and training.

## Objective 1



# DOD's Plans to Develop Language and Cultural Awareness Capabilities

- Navy
  - The Navy's strategy document, which is titled *U.S. Navy Language Skills, Regional Expertise and Cultural Awareness Strategy*, includes goals and tasks that are intended to facilitate and transform the development of the Navy's capacity and capability for language, regional expertise, and cultural awareness skills.
    - These goals and tasks are assigned to offices of responsibility. The Navy also has a separate implementation plan that includes timelines for completion of the goals and tasks.
  - The goals and tasks appear to be aligned with the *Defense Language Transformation Roadmap* to some extent. According to the Navy strategy document, it tailors the goals of the *Roadmap* to the Navy's mission and is indirectly linked to higher-level national, defense, and military strategies.
  - This strategy document addresses both language professionals and general purpose forces. Its goals are focused on (1) developing requirements, (2) assessing capability gaps, and (3) developing education and training.

# DOD's Plans to Develop Language and Cultural Awareness Capabilities

- Army
  - The Army's strategy document, which is titled *Army Culture and Foreign Language Strategy*, is still in draft form as of October 2008.
  - It includes the overarching goal of providing a baseline of culture and language capabilities for all soldiers to support the accomplishment of unit missions. The strategy document includes tasks aimed at achieving this goal.
    - It assigns these tasks to various offices of responsibility within the Army, although it does not provide timelines for completing the tasks. Army officials stated that they will develop a separate implementation plan.
  - The strategy document does not appear to be aligned with the *Defense Language Transformation Roadmap*. It does not discuss the *Roadmap*, although it references the *National Security Strategy* as providing insight to help shape the Army's goals.
  - This draft strategy document focuses on the development of basic culture and foreign language skills in all soldiers through (1) career development and (2) pre-deployment training. However, the strategy does not specifically address additional training for soldiers who are in positions that require advanced language and culture skills.



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## DOD's Plans to Develop Language and Cultural Awareness Capabilities

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- The Marine Corps does not currently have a strategy that addresses language and cultural awareness, although Marine Corps officials stated that they are working to develop a strategy that will address language and cultural awareness skills for both general purpose forces and language professionals. In the absence of a strategy, the Marine Corps relies on DOD and service documents in order to guide its training and education efforts in this area. Examples of documents the Marine Corps uses include the following:
  - *Defense Language Transformation Roadmap*;
  - DOD Directive 5160.41E, which addresses policies and responsibilities for the Defense Language Program; and
  - *The Long War – Send in the Marines* (Marine Corps strategic guidance).

## Objective 2



# DOD's Capabilities, Requirements, and Inventory for Language and Cultural Awareness

- Since the issuance of the *Defense Language Transformation Roadmap* in 2005, DOD has initiated efforts to build processes for developing language and regional expertise within the department to meet current and potential future operational needs. These efforts include
  - Determining broad-based strategic capabilities for specific languages and countries in which language and regional expertise is needed;
  - Establishing detailed requirements for current and potential future operations;
  - Identifying the existing inventory of foreign language proficiency and regional expertise within the military force; and
  - Developing a strategic management tool to identify potential shortfalls in foreign language and regional expertise capabilities.

# DOD's Capabilities, Requirements, and Inventory for Language and Cultural Awareness

## Broad-Based Strategic Capabilities

- DOD has published a *Strategic Language List*, which identifies critical languages needed to carry out its mission, on an annual basis since 2006.
- Pursuant to a task in the *Defense Language Transformation Roadmap*, DOD began conducting a capabilities-based review in July 2007, which is intended to identify the specific languages and countries for which language and regional expertise is needed over the next 10 years. The review is also intended to develop a process and methodology for conducting subsequent reviews. According to DOD officials, DOD expects that the capabilities-based review process will be synchronized with DOD's 2-year strategic planning cycle, with the next review being conducted in conjunction with the development of fiscal year 2010 strategic guidance.
- The results of the capabilities-based review were finalized in November 2008. We have not yet received a copy of these results for analysis.

## Objective 2



# DOD's Capabilities, Requirements, and Inventory for Language and Cultural Awareness

## Detailed Requirements for Current and Potential Future Operations

- In January 2006, DOD established a requirements process for combatant commands to submit detailed language and regional expertise requirements to the DOD Senior Language Authority on a quarterly basis.
  - In the process of implementing the requirements process, DOD asked the services and defense agencies to also submit detailed requirements in order to capture all requirements.
- The requirements data to be submitted must contain certain elements, such as the language and proficiency level, the regional expertise proficiency level, the occupational specialty, and the desired source for filling the requirement (e.g., military or contractor).
  - The combatant commands, services, and defense agencies report any additional requirements pertaining to current operations that are above and beyond established positions.
  - The combatant commands and defense agencies are also to report requirements pertaining to all plans for potential future operations, such as operational plans, contingency plans, and combined plans.

## Objective 2



# DOD's Capabilities, Requirements, and Inventory for Language and Cultural Awareness

## Detailed Requirements for Current and Potential Future Operations

- To carry out current operations and plans for potential future operations, the combatant commands, services, and defense agencies reported, as of March 2008, that they have a total of 141,000 requirements that include personnel with language skills and regional expertise, and machine translation tools.
- However, the methodologies used by the combatant commands to determine language and regional expertise requirements vary, and therefore, estimates of requirements have differed widely.
  - For example, as of February 2008, U.S. Pacific Command's requirements outnumber the requirements of all the other combatant commands combined.
- DOD has recognized that it has more work to do to refine the process for determining and reporting language and regional expertise requirements. DOD has not yet determined whether the combatant commands need to use a standard, consistent methodology when establishing their language and regional expertise requirements for their respective plans.

# DOD's Capabilities, Requirements, and Inventory for Language and Cultural Awareness

## Inventory of Foreign Language Proficiency and Regional Expertise

- DOD has taken actions to identify existing foreign language proficiency and regional expertise within the force:
  - Pursuant to the *Defense Language Transformation Roadmap*, all of the services, except for the Army, have completed a one-time self-report screening of all military personnel for possession of language and regional expertise skills. According to Army officials, the high pace of deployments has affected their response rate and they are continuing to work on completing this task.
    - The services that completed the self-report screening have reported the results to the Defense Language Office and incorporated the information into their personnel records.
  - The Air Force, Navy, and Marine Corps have, at DOD direction, implemented mechanisms to screen personnel upon their accession into the military for existing language and regional expertise skills. This information is maintained in the personnel records of each individual and can be queried by the service and DOD, according to officials from each service.
  - The Army is in the process of mandating that all accessions are screened for existing language skills. The information will be maintained in the personnel records and will be able to be queried as well, according to Army officials.

## Objective 2



# DOD's Capabilities, Requirements, and Inventory for Language and Cultural Awareness

## Strategic Management Tool

- The Defense Language Office is in the process of developing and fielding the Language Readiness Index.
  - The Language Readiness Index is intended to compare the language and regional expertise requirements identified by combatant commands, services, and defense agencies with the existing inventory of language proficiency and regional expertise of military personnel.
    - The Language Readiness Index is intended to be a strategic management tool for DOD that can identify potential shortfalls in language proficiency and regional expertise, so that decision makers can assess risk and take appropriate action, if needed.
- DOD has not yet determined whether it needs a formal planning process to ensure that resources are properly allocated to meet any identified potential shortfalls for language and regional expertise requirements, such as for operational and contingency plans.

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## DOD's Training and Education Programs for Developing Language and Cultural Awareness Capabilities

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### Pre-deployment Training for General Purpose Forces

- The amount of pre-deployment language and culture training that a unit receives at mobilization sites and home stations is based on the nature of the unit's mission and the amount of time available for culture and language training, as articulated by the commander of the unit. Thus, some units receive more training than others, resulting in different levels of knowledge and understanding.
- Each of the services established a center to assist in coordinating, developing, distributing, and providing basic language and culture training, which is tailored to the needs of the unit. For example, training is provided through
  - Service language and cultural center educational products;
  - Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center's (DLIFLC's) Mobile Training Teams; and
  - DLIFLC's Language Survival Kits.
- In addition to the training provided by the services' culture and language centers, some commanders have also initiated language and culture training programs, such as the Language Enabled Soldier program for Stryker Brigade Combat Teams at Fort Lewis, Washington.



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## DOD's Training and Education Programs for Developing Language and Cultural Awareness Capabilities

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### Professional Military Education for General Purpose Forces

- DOD Instruction 5160.70 identifies language and regional proficiency as critical to the continuum of professional military education. Some examples of the services incorporating language and culture into their professional military education are:
  - The Air Force has incorporated cultural instruction into the curricula for its enlisted and officer professional military education, with a focus on providing airmen with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that serve as a framework for cultural understanding. The Air Force has also included language instruction into its professional military education curricula for officers, e.g., by using DLIFLC instructors to provide language training.
  - The Navy has embedded cultural and regional knowledge into the curricula for its enlisted and officer professional military education.

## Objective 3



# DOD's Training and Education Programs for Developing Language and Cultural Awareness Capabilities

### Professional Military Education for General Purpose Forces (cont.)

- The Army has developed and is currently in the process of refining cultural instruction that can be included in professional military education courses. Individual Army schools have flexibility in tailoring this cultural instruction to the specific needs of their curricula.
- The Marine Corps has incorporated cultural instruction into professional military education for its officers and is in the process of adding cultural instruction into the professional military education curricula for enlisted personnel. The Marine Corps has also included language training in the professional military education curricula for captains and majors, which is designed to provide language familiarization skills.

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## DOD's Training and Education Programs for Developing Language and Cultural Awareness Capabilities

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### Training for Language Professionals

- Language professionals, such as human intelligence collectors and signal intelligence analysts, are individuals who require a foreign language to perform their duties.
  - DOD-wide initial, sustainment, and enhancement foreign language training for language professionals is provided by the DLIFLC.
    - DLIFLC provides its foreign language training through a variety of mediums, including classroom instruction, language training detachments, and online materials.
    - Currently, the standard for graduation from DLIFLC is 2/2/1+ (listening/reading/speaking).
    - However, the proficiency goal for DOD language professionals is 3/3/3 (listening/reading/speaking). In order to achieve this goal, the services and defense agencies are required to establish policies, procedures, and training and education plans that enable language professionals to attain and maintain this proficiency level over the course of their careers.
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## DOD's Training and Education Programs for Developing Language and Cultural Awareness Capabilities

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### Education and Training for Foreign Area Officers

- A Foreign Area Officer (FAO) is DOD's uniformed expert who possesses a unique combination of regional expertise and foreign language proficiency with a strategic focus on national security.
  - DOD Instruction 1315.20 established a minimum common set of education and training standards for FAOs across all the services, including foreign language proficiency in one or more languages of the assigned region, a graduate-level degree concentrating in the assigned region, and at least a 6-month immersion in the assigned region. DOD also requires the services to provide sustainment training throughout the FAO's career.
  - DOD's fiscal year 2007 FAO program review and report identified areas that require improvement, such as the following:
    - The minimum immersion experience is not being met by all the services' FAO programs. For example, the Air Force, due to a lack of funding, is currently conducting 2 months of immersion training, but plans to expand to 6 months as required by DOD in fiscal year 2010.
    - DOD and the services recognize that there are a limited number of opportunities for language and regional expertise sustainment training.
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## DOD's Research and Acquisition Programs for Developing Language and Cultural Awareness Capabilities

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- DOD Instruction 5160.70, which lays out the organizational responsibilities of the Defense Language Program, directs the Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology, and Logistics (USD (AT&L)) to
    - Establish and publish procedures for the oversight of DOD efforts to research, develop, and acquire multi-language technology tools, and
    - To ensure, in coordination with other DOD entities, that language content validation occurs during the development phase of the tools.
  - USD (AT&L) officials stated that they have existing procedures in place to carry out these responsibilities, specifically:
    - USD (AT&L) has an established process for oversight of DOD science and technology, which will include language translation technology.
    - USD (AT&L) has acquisition and testing policies already in place, under which language content validation will occur, and is actively working with other DOD entities to ensure that this validation takes place.
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## DOD's Research and Acquisition Programs for Developing Language and Cultural Awareness Capabilities

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- In addition, the *Defense Language Transformation Roadmap* directed USD (AT&L) to establish a coherent, prioritized, and coordinated DOD multi-language technology research, development, and acquisition policy and program.
    - This task was intended to help achieve the *Defense Language Transformation Roadmap* goal of creating the capacity to surge language and cultural resources beyond foundational and in-house capabilities.
  - In response to this task, USD (AT&L) published the *Defense Language Technology Roadmap* in December 2007.
    - The *Technology Roadmap* addresses machine-based language translation technologies.
    - The *Technology Roadmap* does not address language training technologies, stating that this area has been adequately covered by a previous DOD effort.
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## DOD's Research and Acquisition Programs for Developing Language and Cultural Awareness Capabilities

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- The *Technology Roadmap* contains three goals with seven supporting tasks. The three goals are
    - Establish a DOD process for regularly assessing language translation technologies and products.
    - Establish a process for assessing and recommending materiel and non-materiel solutions to language capability needs.
    - Assist the DOD, defense agencies, Joint Staff, and services in identifying technological options, and their maturity levels, to meet emerging language requirements.
  - In addition, USD (AT&L) is leading an effort, known as the Human Social Culture Behavior Modeling program, to develop software tools and decision aids that could allow U.S. commanders to better understand different cultures.
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