



INSTITUTE FOR DEFENSE ANALYSES

## **The Strategic Value of Foreign Area Officers**

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#### About this Publication

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## **Executive Summary**

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This report provides an in-depth analysis of the Foreign Area Officer (FAO) career path across the Department of Defense (DOD), including an evaluation of the Army, Navy, and Marine Corps FAO programs, and the Air Force's Regional Affairs Strategist (RAS) specialty code. We focus on FAO selection, accession, and skill acquisition; assignments, skill sustainment, and quality-of-life issues; and supervisors' perspectives on FAO value to the unit, mission, or agency.

There are significant differences in how the four Services manage their respective FAO communities, the variety of roles and assignments they fill, the regional variations across geographic areas of concern, training and educational opportunities, etc.; however, these officers—possessing significant foreign language, regional knowledge, and country-specific cultural skills—are similar in three important ways. First, FAOs are above all Joint officers, routinely serving in Joint billets. Second, FAOs also regularly serve in interagency assignments; as a result, they often possess considerable interagency acumen. Third, FAOs generally spend the majority of their careers outside of Service operational units (i.e., brigades, divisions, carrier air groups, regimental combat teams, air wings).

This report summarizes the large body of data collected over the course of this effort, including qualitative inputs (from the interviews and focus groups with hundreds of FAOs and RASs), along with the quantitative inputs from a Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC) survey. This report characterizes both the personal dimension of the FAO/RAS experience and the perspectives of their supervisors on the value FAOs represent and also provides a snapshot of the Services' FAO programs as they currently exist.

### **Findings**

#### **Skill Acquisition**

In terms of skill acquisition, FAOs and their supervisors identified the Army FAO program as the best developed and most comprehensive. Across the board, these stakeholders would not welcome any changes in terms of when Army FAOs are accessed (at the time of the interviews, the accession point was the 7- to 9-year mark) or how their skills are developed (a combination of an advanced degree, language training, and regional immersion training).

## **FAO Assignment Preparation**

Organizations make a differentiated investment in assignment preparation for incoming FAOs. For example, those officers who will be serving in Defense Intelligence Agency billets (where they will serve as Defense Attachés) receive preparatory training, including the Joint Military Attaché School and language sustainment training.

FAOs assuming Security Cooperation assignments attend Defense Institute of Security Assistance Management; typically, neither they nor their spouses receive additional language training or assistance.

## **FAO Utilization**

At present, the number of FAO billets (demand) exceeds the inventory of trained FAOs (supply). Some FAOs have had their skill acquisition sequence interrupted to fill vacant billets. Actual FAO-coded billets are often left unfilled when FAOs are assigned to billets that are branch immaterial (any officer can be assigned to fill such a requirement.)

FAO mis- or under-utilization in branch-immaterial billets tends to limit Service and Department return on investment in the skill acquisition and development of FAOs; such utilization can lead to deterioration of FAO regional-specific skills, including language proficiency. Some commanders of FAOs serving in branch-immaterial billets may not even know how to best utilize FAOs.

## **FAO Program Management**

While a single-track FAO program may enable FAOs to develop full professional language proficiency, as well as significant regional expertise, single-track FAOs may face difficulty maintaining contemporary operational relevance as military officers.

## **Leadership and Mentorship**

Service FAO communities would benefit from more proactive senior, flag officer leadership and mentoring. Indeed, the FAO community writ large may benefit from a more formalized mentorship program.

## **Strategic Value**

Through both the DMDC survey and interviews, supervisors of FAOs highlighted the strategic value this community represents across an array of operating environments and missions. Supervisors especially highlighted the value FAOs represent in regions where U.S. presence is minimal. Indeed, many of them emphasized that FAOs can enable a small, strategically significant footprint.

## **Service Perspective**

Given that the majority of FAOs billets are Joint, their strategic value seems to be best understood by Joint and interagency entities. The lack of familiarity that Service senior officers and promotion boards have with FAO roles and missions may affect promotion rates of FAOs. With such long lead times associated with their deliberate skill acquisition, potential for non-rated periods, and unique duty positions that are unlike other officers, FAOs may encounter members of Service promotion boards who may not know in detail what FAOs actually do, what strategic value they represent, and what their roles and missions are.

## **Proponency**

Concerns regarding DOD FAO proponency surfaced as a frequent theme during the interviews. In particular, stakeholders—FAOs, supervisors of FAOs, and organizations employing FAOs—viewed the organizational location of DOD FAO proponency as potentially problematic. On the one hand, Service FAO proponency typically is located within the strategic planning, operations, or international affairs domains within each military department. This organizational location mirrors where FAOs are assigned within combatant commands and other agencies. On the other hand, while the Joint Staff J-5 and OSD Policy have the largest contingents of serving FAOs, it is the personnel communities of the Joint Staff (J-1) and OSD (P&R) that maintain proponency, in accordance with the DOD directive. Such an alignment means that the Joint Staff does not provide a partner for OSD that can fully address FAO utilization policies, planning guidance, and processes to ensure “appropriate consideration of FAO requirements on the Joint Staff and within combatant commands in support of daily operational requirements and contingency plans.”<sup>1</sup>

When proponency is located largely in the personnel domain, the focus is on the development and utilization of the individual. Some stakeholders expressed the need for a strong operational proponent, particularly on the Joint Staff. Such a proponent could establish standards for strategic governance and provide oversight on utilization, from the perspective of emerging demands and mission-critical needs. Given that the vast majority of FAO billets are Joint, Joint FAO governance could help ensure optimal utilization of the FAO communities to achieve Joint force and Department needs with regard to existing and emergent demands.

The Services’ FAO programs are at different stages of development; what is presented here is a snapshot. FAO Programs, whether mature like the Army’s or relatively new like the Navy and Air Force FAO/RAS programs, are responsive to

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<sup>1</sup> Department of Defense Instruction 1315.20, Management of Department of Defense (DOD) Foreign Area Officer (FAO) Programs, 28 September 2007, p. 9.

changing needs and operational demands. And in every case, each Service is looking for the greatest efficiencies in terms of developing FAOs. In an era of constrained resources, especially given the increasing demand for FAOs, it is not surprising that the Services seek ways of augmenting their FAO populations by accessing officers who already possess FAO qualifications without having participated in the formal FAO skill acquisition process.

## **Study Recommendations**

### **Terminology**

In guidance (DODD 1315.17) to the Services regarding FAO programs, the Secretary of Defense should direct the Services to use the common designation “FAO.” Service usage of other terms provides a source of confusion for not only the Defense and Joint communities, but also across the Services themselves. As described in DOD guidance, FAOs are to possess specific skills, including professional-level language proficiency. Possession of this skill set is expected for all FAOs when serving in critical positions outside their military departments. Organizations that employ FAOs expect a certain level of expertise. Officer communities with subsets of FAO attributes who are not language enabled can have different designations (such as the Marine Corps’ Regional Affairs Officers).

### **Utilization**

Given the potential for FAOs to be mis- or under-utilized, OSD should consider reviewing utilization policies in coordination with the Joint Staff and the Services. Though improper utilization may indicate that FAO skills are undervalued, it may also be that that gaining organizations do not know how to use them or do not actually need FAOs for that specific assignment.

- Given the limited supply of FAOs, periodic (perhaps annual) validation of all FAO billets throughout the Department may be merited.

### **Mentoring and Leadership**

Service FAO communities would benefit from more proactive senior, flag officer leadership and mentoring.

- There may be benefit in having Service component commanders serve as senior mentors to FAOs assigned to the region.
- The role of the geographic combatant commands and DOD Regional Centers for Security Studies should be linked to FAO skill acquisition.



## **DODD/DODI Compliance and Proponency**

The DOD Directive and corresponding Instructions should be updated and reissued.

- Several of the organizations with specified responsibilities no longer exist (e.g., Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Plans).
- The movement of proponency from OSD Policy to OSD Personnel and Readiness in the current version of the Directive creates additional considerations that must be addressed.
  - The primary beneficiaries of FAO skills on the Joint Staff and OSD are no longer involved in FAO proponency (J-5 and OSD Policy).
  - Proponency for both OSD and the Joint Staff resides in the personnel, and not the strategy, planning, and operational, domains.

DOD should consider a governance construct that includes robust Joint Staff J-5 proponency and partnership.

Compliance with the current DOD Directive and Instruction has varied across the Services and organizations identified therein.

- DOD should require that FAOs be certified in terms of their full suite of skill-acquisition activities prior to assuming their first FAO billet.
  - With components struggling to find efficiencies during an era of austere budgets, DOD should identify Joint solutions to FAO skill acquisition and sustainment. For example, DOD should consider alternative venues for In-Region Training/In-Country Training experiences as opposed to sending FAOs to assignments with no such experience.
- DOD should require tracking mechanisms that can highlight to the Secretary the extent to which the Department meets the intent and guidance of the DOD Directive and Instruction.
- DOD should address Service noncompliance with the current DOD Directive and Instruction.



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# 1. Introduction

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## A. Background

The research for this report was conducted between November 2011 and January 2013, with the primary data collection taking place before December 2012. This in-depth analysis of the Foreign Area Officer (FAO) career path across the Department of Defense (DOD) entailed an evaluation of the four Services' FAO programs: the Army, Navy, and Marine Corps FAO programs, as well as the Air Force's Regional Affairs Strategist (RAS) specialty code. The Institute for Defense Analyses' (IDA) examination of the FAO career path primarily focused on:

- How the Services select, access, and enable skill acquisition.
- How individuals in the programs experience the career path, including accession, training and skill acquisition, assignments, skill sustainment, as well as quality-of-life issues.
- Supervisors' perspectives on FAO value added to the unit, mission, or agency.

## B. Methodology

In conducting this research, IDA employed a blended methodology with qualitative and quantitative components. The qualitative component of this research centered on interviews and site visits. IDA conducted interviews and focus groups with hundreds of Army, Navy, and Marine Corps FAOs, as well as Air Force RASs, to gain insights into the experiences of individuals who are part of these programs. IDA also interviewed supervisors across the range of organizations where FAOs serve. These interviews and working groups took place at every Geographic Combatant Command, U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM), Service Theater Component Commands, Security Cooperation Officer events, Foreign Area Officer Association (FAOA) events, FAO proponent offices, and at other locations where FAOs are assigned.

The quantitative component of this research focused on a survey conducted by the Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC). IDA developed the survey questions, which the DMDC then administered to stakeholders. The recipients of this survey included FAOs and supervisors of FAOs.

This blended-research approach enabled IDA to conduct a holistic assessment of current FAO programs, examining skill acquisition, assignments and utilization, and career paths. The primary objective of this work was to identify ways to strengthen the

FAO career field to maximize the use of their unique language, regional, and cultural competencies in the Total Force.

### **C. Definitions**

The 2007 Department of Defense Instruction 1315.20, “Management of Department of Defense Foreign Area Officer Programs,” defines Foreign Area Officers as commissioned officers, possessing “broad range of military skills and experiences; qualification in their primary military occupational specialty and/or designator, with graduate-level, regionally-focused education, significant in-country/regional experience, and proficiency in a relevant language.” In addition, FAO assignments span “Service, Joint, and Interagency.” According to this Instruction, these assignments draw heavily on FAOs’ unique skills and expertise, which have them serving as the interface with foreign governments, militaries, and other entities; providing subject-matter expertise “for planning and executing operations”; liaising as attachés; observing and reporting on a range of military issues in international settings (including arms control); and leading security assistance missions.<sup>2</sup>

As used in this report, the designation “FAO” serves as an umbrella term for all uniformed, language-enabled, regional experts across the Services (Army, Navy, and Marine Corps FAOs and Air Force RASs). This discussion focused on the Active Component, but we included Reserve Component FAOs in this study because the Army and Marine Corps currently have Reserve Component FAO programs.

Further, in this report, “FAO” denotes the specialists across the Services who possess or acquire extensive regional expertise, professional-level foreign-language capabilities, and cultural acuity. “FAO” is the term referenced in both the DOD Directive and Instruction, and it is the term recognized throughout the DOD and with other federal departments and agencies.

Several communities with some FAO-like characteristics and skill sets were excluded from this report because they are in development. For example, the Marine Corps is currently developing a noncommissioned officer FAO program called FAS NCO (Foreign Area Staff Noncommissioned Officer). The Air Force Political-Military Affairs Strategist (PAS) and the Marine Corps Regional Affairs Officers (RAOs) are excluded from the FAO designation because of the lack of a language requirement for either community.

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<sup>2</sup> Derived from the definition of FAOs in the Department of Defense Instruction (DODI) 1315.20, Management of Department of Defense (DOD) Foreign Area Officer (FAO) Programs, September 28, 2007, p. 2

## **D. Document Overview**

The next chapter focuses on the Services' individual approaches to the FAO career path. The third chapter highlights the quantitative analysis conducted for this effort. The fourth chapter examines FAOs through vignettes, providing insights into the experiences of the individuals going through these programs. The final chapter includes the conclusion, study findings, and recommendations.





## 2. The Services' FAO Career Programs

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### A. Introduction

Beginning with the 2005 Department of Defense Directive (DODD) 1315.17, "Military Department Foreign Area Officer (FAO) Programs," each Service was directed to develop and sustain an FAO program. The DODD grounded this requirement in terms of enablers to meet national security objectives. The directive identified "foreign language proficiency and detailed knowledge of the regions of the world gained through in-depth study and personal experience" as "critical war fighting capabilities." The DODD stated that it was through the deliberate development of "a corps of FAOs" that the military departments would provide this capability critical for meeting national security objectives.<sup>3</sup>

What follows is a brief overview of each Service FAO program. We describe the Army and Navy programs as being "single-tracked" communities, meaning that once assessed, FAOs from these Services are no longer managed by their former specialty or branch communities, but exclusively managed by their newly assigned FAO communities. FAOs managed by this construct tend to have consecutive FAO assignments. Figure 2-1 depicts the general skill-acquisition path of single-track FAOs.

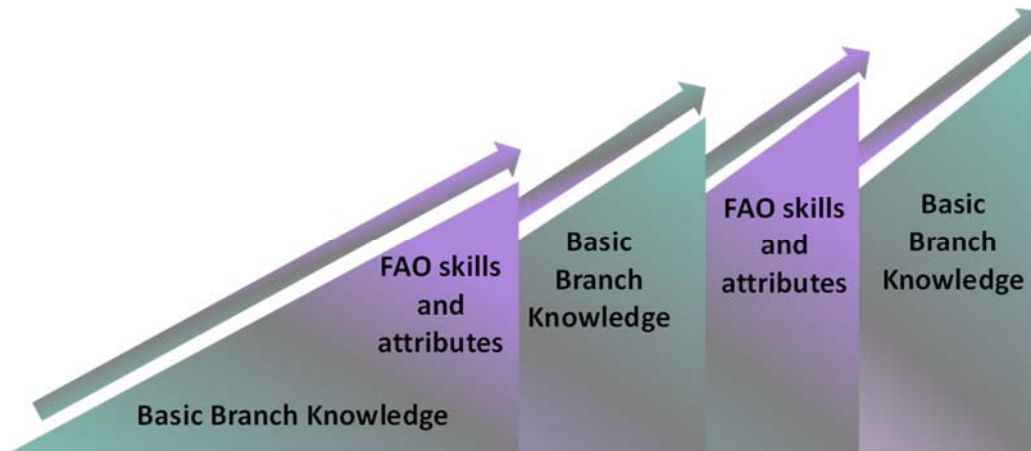


Figure 2-1. Depiction of the Skill-Acquisition Path of Single-Track FAOs

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<sup>3</sup> Department of Defense Directive (DODD) 1315.17, "Military Department Foreign Area Officer (FAO) Programs," 28 April 2005.

Next, we address the “dual-tracked” Air Force and Marine Corps FAO programs. The expression “dual track” commonly refers to a career-management system that allows for two military occupational specialties (MOSs) (in the case of the Air Force, two Air Force Specialty Codes [AFSCs]). FAOs in these programs maintain both their primary MOS or AFSC, and then add FAO or RAS as a secondary MOS (or AFSC), thus alternating assignments between both specialties, as depicted in Figure 2-2.



**Figure 2-2. Depiction of the Skill-Acquisition Path of Dual-Track FAOs**

## **B. Army**

The Army’s is the oldest, largest, and most mature of the FAO programs. Of the roughly 2,000 FAOs currently serving, approximately 60 percent are Army FAOs.<sup>4</sup> Given the ratio of Army FAOs to non-Army FAOs, across the DOD there is greater general familiarity with Army FAOs.

The Army’s FAO program is currently a single-track branch with the designation of Functional Area (FA) 48. Initially, the program was structured in such a way that FAOs had two MOSs, one of which was FAO and the other their primary MOS (i.e., Infantry, Field Artillery, Armor, etc.). Thus, Army FAOs were dual-tracked, with two MOSs. With the changes resulting from the 1997 “Officer Personnel Management System XXI Study,” the Army’s FAO program became a single-track branch with the designation of FA 48, part of the Operations Support Career Field.<sup>5</sup> The FA 48 Foreign Area Officer

<sup>4</sup> The imprecision is due to the number of FAOs in training, as well as the number of FAOs separating from their Service. The numbers fluctuate as a result of both factors.

<sup>5</sup> “Officer Personnel Management System XXI Study,” Final Report, Prepared for the Chief of Staff, Army, 9 July 1997, <http://usacac.army.mil/CAC2/cgsc/carl/docs/OPMSXXI.pdf>. One of the most comprehensive discussions of the history of the Army FAO program is Colonel Timothy D. Mitchell, “The U.S Army FAO Training Program: Time to Break Some More Glass,” Strategy Research Project, United States Army War College, Class of 2013, pp. 2–7.

Proponent Office, located in Army G-3/5/7, Strategic Leadership Division, Strategy, Plans, and Policy Directorate, manages the majority of the Army's Foreign Area Officer Program.

At the time the research for this study was conducted, Army FAOs accessed 7 to 10 years after commissioning.<sup>6</sup> Currently, Army FAOs are accessed in two primary ways—through the Functional Designation Board or via the Voluntary Transfer Incentive Program (VTIP). Army FAOs accessed via Functional Designation Board proceed through a rigorous program of training and skill acquisition. VTIP FAOs are accessed on the basis of their previous education, experience, or background; they are viewed to possess FAO qualifications without having participated in the formal Army FAO skill-acquisition process.<sup>7</sup>

In terms of basic FAO skill acquisition, the Army program, as it has currently existed, is largely regarded by both supervisors and FAOs alike as the “ideal” or benchmark compared to all the other Services. Based on our interviews, this perspective was shared across all agencies, all federal departments; and the military Services.<sup>8</sup> The Army's approach to FAO training consists of the Joint FAO Course, Phase I; Language Training (typically ranging from 26 to 63 weeks); In-Region Training (IRT, the new designation for what was In-Country Training); and Master's Degree with a regional focus.<sup>9</sup>

Many Army FAOs expressed concerns about “negative changes ahead” in terms of FAO training. One example centered on the perception that FAOs will be limited to 12-month master's programs, which will greatly reduce the number of civilian programs that can be considered.<sup>10</sup> We heard concerns about IRT and whether it will continue to be an accompanied tour. A majority of FAOs interviewed stated that unaccompanied IRTs may have a negative impact on FAOs' ability to draw on the contributions of their entire family during future attaché and security cooperation assignments.

FAOs were also concerned about maintaining contemporary operational relevance as military officers. When the Army had a dual-track FAO program, the officers would

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<sup>6</sup> The FAO proponent officer has indicated that the accessions point will be shifted to the 5- to 7-year range. Our research suggests that a significant majority of FAOs do not favor this change.

<sup>7</sup> “Functional Area 48 (Foreign Area Officer) Review,” Strategic Leadership Division G-3/5, Strategy, Plans, and Policy, July 2011. For more on VTIP, see Colonel Timothy D. Mitchell, “The U.S Army FAO Training Program: Time to Break Some More Glass,” Strategy Research Project, United States Army War College, Class of 2013, pp. 38–40.

<sup>8</sup> This generalization is derived from the majority of interviews conducted for this study.

<sup>9</sup> The new designation reflects the emphasis is on providing FAOs with regional exposure.

<sup>10</sup> The shift to a 12-month master's program is discussed in Colonel Timothy D. Mitchell, “The U.S Army FAO Training Program,” pp. 23–24.

shift between serving in assignments for their primary branch and then serving in FAO billets. With a single-track program, FAOs leave their primary branch, spend approximately 3 years in “the training pipeline,” and then go to their first FAO utilization tour, which is likely a 2- to 3-year assignment. Since they now are only career managed in terms of their FAO MOS, it is likely that they may never serve in any billet that is not FAO-coded. Given that the vast majority of Army FAO billets are Joint (recent estimates are as high as 75 percent), the remainder of the operational Army has limited opportunity to see these uniquely trained officers until they themselves serve at Service component, Joint Staff, or combatant command staffs or as the commanders. Sustaining branch knowledge, maintaining operational relevance, and staying current on weapons systems are some of the professional challenges single-track FAOs may face. But we note that at present, a portion of the FAO community likely has combat experience from their time in uniform before accessing as FAOs.

### **C. Navy**

Starting only in 2006, the Navy FAO program is one of the smallest. As with the Army, the Navy’s approach to FAO career management is currently single-track. Navy FAOs are a restricted line-officer community.

The Navy FAO Proponent Office is the International Engagement Branch, Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, N52. While the Chief of Naval Operations’ stated goal was to have 400 Navy FAOs by 2015, by the end of September 2012, there were 256 designated Navy FAOs.<sup>11</sup> Growing the community too quickly is not something the N52 expressed an interest in doing. N52 leadership emphasized the need to access the right people into the FAO program and cultivate them to be elite, professional, highly skilled warrior diplomats. Navy leadership regards FAOs as an essential component of its Maritime Strategy and as a low-density, high-demand asset. Navy FAOs are especially valued because “Trust and cooperation cannot be surged.”<sup>12</sup>

The Navy’s approach to FAO training consists of a master’s degree (the Naval Postgraduate School is the Navy’s primary source for FAO graduate education), language instruction at the Defense Language Institute, and limited (if any) In Country Training (ICT). A few selected Navy FAOs do attend abbreviated ICTs. The Proponent Office goal is to send selected FAOs through two 3-month ICT periods over a 6-year time span. All ICTs executed during FY 2012 were shorter than 12 weeks.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> “Department of Defense (DoD) Annual Navy Foreign Area Officer (FAO) Report FY 2012,” p. 1.

<sup>12</sup> “A Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower,” October 2007, p. 10  
[www.navy.mil/maritime/Maritimestrategy.pdf](http://www.navy.mil/maritime/Maritimestrategy.pdf).

<sup>13</sup> “Department of Defense (DoD) Annual Navy Foreign Area Officer (FAO) Report FY 2012,” pp. 15–16.

During the interviews, some Navy FAOs expressed reservations about the Navy's approach toward FAO training. Given that ICT is widely regarded as a critical component in advancing FAO skill acquisition and experience, it is a cause for concern that ICT is unavailable to most Navy FAOs. Some Navy FAOs said that their ability to perform to their full potential in FAO assignments may be adversely affected by the lack of opportunity to do an ICT. Note that in 2010, the Navy created an FAO Board of Directors with the aim of ensuring that "community governance" involved all major stakeholders. The Board is working to address concerns that emerged in the first years of the Navy's FAO program, including promotion rates, the requirement to establish an FAO Reserve Component, limitations on training opportunities, etc.<sup>14</sup>

During interviews, some Navy FAOs voiced the challenges they have faced maintaining contemporary operational relevance. As with their Army counterparts, Navy FAOs leave their primary branch, spend approximately 2 years in "the training pipeline," and then go to their first FAO utilization tour, which is likely a 2- to 3-year assignment. Since they have now only FAO as their MOS, it is likely that they may never serve in any billet that is not FAO-coded. Given that the majority of Navy FAO billets are Joint, Navy FAOs have limited opportunities to serve in assignments in which they engage with the rest of their Service. Like Army FAOs, Navy FAOs may face challenges in sustaining branch knowledge, maintaining operational relevance, and staying current on weapons systems.

#### **D. Air Force**

The Air Force first began the "deliberate development" of airmen as Regional Affairs Strategists (their equivalent of FAOs) in late 2005. As with the Navy's program, the Air Force's RAS program is new and growing. The Air Force's RAS Proponent is the Office of the Secretary of the Air Force, International Affairs (SAF/IA).

The Air Force has a dual-track career-management system that permits its RAS officers to maintain their primary branch or AFSC, and then add RAS as a secondary or AFSC. RASs then do alternating assignments between their primary and secondary branch specialties, with the primary specialty retaining overall control and decision authority regarding an officer's career management. The Air Force Specialty Code 16F is the designation for RAS.

The Air Force's approach to RAS training consists of a master's degree (generally from the Naval Postgraduate School), language instruction at the Defense Language Institute (DLI), and Regional Affairs Strategist Immersion (RASI—its version of

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<sup>14</sup> "Department of Defense (DoD) 2011 Annual Navy Foreign Area Officer (FAO) Report," p. 1,

ICT/IRT), which is usually a two-part immersion, totaling approximately 4 to 6 months. ICTs less than 6 months are not in accordance with DODI 1315.17.

Originally, the Air Force anticipated filling the requirement for 300 RASs by 2018. Recently, with the decision by the Chief of Staff of the Air Force to return all rated officers, due to shortages throughout the Air Force, to their original AFSC, the community's numbers dropped by 65.<sup>15</sup>

## **E. Marine Corps**

The Marine Corps has a dual-track career-management system that permits Marine Corps officers to maintain their primary branch, and then add FAO as an additional MOS. This additional MOS means that Marine Corps FAOs can do FAO assignments, as well as assignments in their primary MOS, as needed and available. To the extent possible, the Marine Corps FAO proponent office seeks to ensure that FAOs' non-FAO assignments are consistent with their regional focus areas. The Marine Corps designates FAOs with the 994X MOS code, with the final number denoting the region. The Marine Corps' FAO proponent office is the International Affairs Officer Program in the International Issues Branch, Strategy and Plans Division, Plans, Policies and Operations, Headquarters Marine Corps.

The Marine Corps' approach to FAO management incorporates two FAO tracks: Marine Corps FAOs can either be "study track" or "experience track." The training available for study-track FAOs consists of a master's degree, language instruction at DLI, and a 12-month ICT (typically a total of 30 to 36 months). "Experience track" FAOs are selected on the basis of their already possessing the requirements.

While Marine Corps FAOs perform roles that are both operational and tactical, in terms of the value FAOs represent, the Marine Corps' emphasis is on the tactical. In comparison with the other Services, fewer of the Marine Corps billets are Joint assignments.<sup>16</sup> In terms of Service billets, the Marine Corps largely employs FAOs across the range of Marine Corps Formations and Organizations.

Of note, the Marine Corps is also developing a senior noncommissioned officer (NCO) FAO-like program called the Enlisted Foreign Area Staff program. The objective of this program is to install Marines with language and regional expertise in Marine Corps operational units.

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<sup>15</sup> Secretary of the Air Force, International Affairs (SAF/IA) Regional Affairs Strategists Action Panel, 5 February 2013.

<sup>16</sup> According to the briefing "USMC International Affairs Program (IAP) NMIA/FAOA Fall Symposium – Sept 18, 2012," 40 percent of FAO/RAO billets are Joint, and 60 percent are Service billets; see [http://www.faoa.org/Resources/Documents/FAOA%20NMIA%20Symposium%20\(U\).ppt](http://www.faoa.org/Resources/Documents/FAOA%20NMIA%20Symposium%20(U).ppt).

## F. Conclusion

We note that each of the Services' FAO programs is in some ways in development. Whether mature or new, they are responsive to changing needs and operational demands. And each of the Services is looking for greatest efficiencies. For example, the Army's VTIP, the Marine Corps "experience track," and the Air Force's leveraging of their Language Enabled Airmen Program (LEAP) are ways to "grow" FAOs more rapidly and at lower expense.<sup>17</sup> In an era of constrained resources, especially given the increasing demand for FAOs, it is understandable that the Services seek ways of augmenting their FAO populations; however, as the next section illustrates, there are notable differences between organic and cultivated FAOs. The extent to which such efficiency maneuvers affect the overall skill set that FAOs bring to the Department and beyond remains to be determined.

Service FAO proponency tends to fall within the strategic planning, operations, or international affairs domains within each military department. This arrangement largely mirrors where FAOs are assigned based on their unique skill set within combatant commands and other agencies. Conversely, while the Joint Staff J-5 and OSD Policy have the largest contingents of serving FAOs, it is the personnel communities of the Joint Staff and OSD that maintain proponency in accordance with the DOD directive. Such an alignment means that the Joint Staff, with responsibilities articulated in the DOD instruction, does not really provide a partner for OSD that can fully address FAO utilization policies, planning guidance, and processes to ensure "appropriate consideration of FAO requirements on the Joint Staff and within combatant commands in support of daily operational requirements and contingency plans."<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> The Air Force instituted the Language Enabled Airmen Program in October 2009 to develop a core group of airmen across all Air Force specialties and careers with the capability to communicate in one or more of the languages on the Air Force's Strategic Language List.

<sup>18</sup> Department of Defense Instruction 1315.20, "Management of Department of Defense (DOD) Foreign Area Officer (FAO) Programs," 28 September 2007, p. 9.





## **3. Quick Compass Survey**

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### **A. Introduction**

To quantitatively capture FAOs' attitudes regarding careers, skill acquisition, sustainment of skills, and quality of life, along with the perspectives of their supervisors, the Defense Language and National Security Education Office (DLNSEO) tasked IDA to develop a survey instrument that would be separately administered by the DMDC Survey branch. The DLNSEO contracted DMDC to conduct the survey operations for what would ultimately be the 2012 Quick Compass Survey of FAOs and Supervisors. Once completed, DMDC provided IDA with survey-tabulated responses that are incorporated into this report. In this chapter, we describe survey design and operations, response rates, challenges uncovered while conducting field research, and survey responses associated with two themes:

- Accessions, career development, management, and sustainment.
- Value to supervisors (effectiveness, skill set, characteristics) and flag-officer billets.

Requests for copies of the DMDC Statistical Methodology Report; the Administration, Datasets, and Codebook report; or the survey-tabulated responses should be directed to the Office of the Director, DLNSEO.

### **B. Design, Operations, and Response Rate**

Based on an agreement regarding research design between IDA and DLNSEO, the target population for this survey consisted of Active and Reserve Component Service members who were currently FAOs or, with the addition of civilians, were potentially current or former supervisors of FAOs. The term "FAO" was meant to reflect the language-enabled members of each Service's program, identified by occupational specialty code. This is an important distinction because several Services have communities of non-language-enabled occupational specialties working in FAO or FAO-like positions. In a separate agreement between DMDC and DLNSEO, a determination was made that the sample frame would be narrowed to the ranks of O-4 and above for the FAO communities and O-6 and GS-15 and above for FAO supervisors, which was a total of 28,843 potential research participants. IDA was informed by DLNSEO that expanding this sample frame was simply cost prohibitive. Actual fielding of the 85-question survey took place between January and February of 2012, and it was limited to those with e-mail addresses with a ".mil" domain. Individuals serving in positions with "state.gov" or with other e-mail domains would not be recipients of the survey, regardless of whether they

were FAOs or FAO supervisors. Even with this limitation, according to DMDC there was an adjusted weighted response rate of 21 percent, including both FAOs and supervisors.<sup>19</sup> Note that not all of the responses to survey questions were “usable.” On the contrary, respondent numbers vary on each question, based on whether a respondent answered the question and whether or not the response was actually recordable.

Table 3-1 depicts the response rate of those identifying themselves as FAOs during the survey. The FAO population numbers were derived from the 2011 Annual Foreign Area Officer Report.

**Table 3-1. FAO Response Rate to the DMDC Quick Compass Survey**

Service	FAO Participants	FAO Population (2011)	Response Rate
Army	232	1254	19%
Navy	51	243	21%
USMC	34	302	11%
USAF	104	301	35%

During the course of the qualitative fieldwork, where hundreds of FAOs and FAO supervisors were interviewed, part of the interview protocol was to ask the interview participants if they received and responded to the DMDC Quick Compass Survey. While these interviews were conducted, it became apparent to us that many who should have been part of the sample did not actually receive the survey. Conversely, there were individuals who identified themselves as FAOs that were not actually designated by their Service as being FAOs. This seemed to occur most frequently with members from the Air Force. For accuracy purposes, the Air Force proponent office did provide a by-name list of those officers that they manage, which IDA transmitted to DMDC. As of the date of this report, DMDC has not differentiated Air Force results between those that are actually managed as Service FAOs and those that perceive that they are Air Force “FAOs.” Regardless, fieldwork suggests that the officers that responded to this lengthy, official survey who perceived that they were FAOs did so because they were serving in FAO positions and received certain portions, if not all, of their Service’s FAO training.

### **C. Accessions, Career Development, Management, and Sustainment**

This section discusses the survey responses associated with FAO valuation and perception of skill acquisition, sustainment, career management, and development. Responses to all 85 questions will not be addressed in this document, but summaries of the major findings will be described.

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<sup>19</sup> Defense Manpower Data Center Report Number 2012-016, “2012 Quick Compass of Foreign Area Officers and Supervisors: Administration, Datasets, and Codebook.” April 2012.

Commencing with question 61 regarding FAO training, fully 61 percent of the FAO respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that training was *sufficient*. As Table 3-2 shows, responses varied by military Service.

**Table 3-2. FAO Response to Sufficiency of Training**

<b>Question 61</b>	<b>Army</b>	<b>Navy</b>	<b>Marine Corps</b>	<b>Air Force</b>	<b>Total</b>
Strongly Disagree	7	4	1	8	20
Disagree	27	11	4	24	66
Neutral	23	11	7	24	65
Agree	90	14	11	28	143
Strongly Agree	75	6	5	12	98

Question 65 asked the FAOs how valuable the *In Country* or *In Region Training* experience was for FAO development, with 97 percent of respondents indicating that it was valuable or very valuable. Response to this question was reinforced during the hundreds of FAO interviews conducted in the field.

FAOs were next asked to rate the strengths and weaknesses of their Service FAO programs in terms of training, assignments, promotion opportunity, mentorship, and skill maintenance (question 67). Table 3-3 to Table 3-7 depict the responses.

**Table 3-3. Rate the strength of your Service FAO program in terms of training.**

<b>Question 67A Training</b>	<b>Army</b>	<b>Navy</b>	<b>Marine Corps</b>	<b>Air Force</b>	<b>Total</b>
Very Weak	6	3	0	8	17
Weak	8	10	5	30	53
Neither Strong nor Weak	18	12	3	28	61
Strong	92	15	10	25	142
Very Strong	98	6	9	4	117

**Table 3-4. Rate the strength of your Service FAO program in terms of assignments.**

<b>Question 67B Assignments</b>	<b>Army</b>	<b>Navy</b>	<b>Marine Corps</b>	<b>Air Force</b>	<b>Total</b>
Very Weak	8	0	1	10	19
Weak	10	8	8	30	56
Neither Strong nor Weak	30	9	6	26	71
Strong	106	24	10	25	165
Very Strong	67	5	2	4	78

**Table 3-5. Rate the strength of your Service FAO program in terms of promotion.**

<b>Question 67C Promotion</b>	<b>Army</b>	<b>Navy</b>	<b>Marine Corps</b>	<b>Air Force</b>	<b>Total</b>
Very Weak	15	7	4	20	46
Weak	26	8	2	29	65
Neither Strong nor Weak	84	15	11	34	144
Strong	80	16	8	11	115
Very Strong	17	0	2	1	20

**Table 3-6. Rate the strength of your Service FAO program in terms of mentorship.**

<b>Question 67D Mentorship</b>	<b>Army</b>	<b>Navy</b>	<b>Marine Corps</b>	<b>Air Force</b>	<b>Total</b>
Very Weak	22	5	4	22	53
Weak	57	11	6	45	119
Neither Strong nor Weak	74	16	12	22	124
Strong	57	8	4	5	74
Very Strong	12	5	1	1	19

**Table 3-7. Rate the strength of your Service FAO program in terms of skill maintenance.**

<b>Question 67E Skill Maintenance</b>	<b>Army</b>	<b>Navy</b>	<b>Marine Corps</b>	<b>Air Force</b>	<b>Total</b>
Very Weak	12	4	0	14	30
Weak	72	14	9	43	138
Neither Strong nor Weak	79	18	14	26	137
Strong	53	9	4	12	78
Very Strong	5	1	0	0	6

For additional information regarding attitudes associated with skill maintenance, consider responses to question 54, where the resource of *time* was identified as being a main issue for sustainment of language, region, and culture qualifications (Table 3-8).

**Table 3-8. Are the following resources sufficient for sustaining your language, region, and culture qualifications – time?**

<b>Question 54A Time</b>	<b>Army</b>	<b>Navy</b>	<b>Marine Corps</b>	<b>Air Force</b>	<b>Total</b>
Very Insufficient	42	9	2	16	69
Insufficient	88	17	13	45	163
Neither Sufficient nor Insufficient	33	12	10	21	76
Sufficient	54	7	2	9	72
Very Sufficient	8	1	1	5	15

Question 56 asked the extent to which specific factors contribute to the success of FAOs. Table 3-9 gives the responses.

**Table 3-9. Importance of individual performance factors most attributable to the success of FAOs.**

<b>Question 56</b>	<b>% Important/Very Important</b>
Individual characteristics and abilities	99%
Experience on the job	98%
Military formal training and education	82%
Regional/cultural education and training	99%
Language education training	94%

In the final two areas of survey questioning, FAOs were asked about the best time in a career to *access* FAOs into the program, and looking ahead, what were their opinions regarding *careers*. Responses to question 59 (Table 3-10) answered the former question, with the majority of respondents citing the 7- to 9-year point as most appropriate.

**Table 3-10. When is the best time to access Foreign Area Officers?**

<b>Question 59 Accession Point</b>	<b>Army</b>	<b>Navy</b>	<b>Marine Corps</b>	<b>Air Force</b>
Less than 7 years	40	5	8	34
7 to 9 years	164	32	17	48
10 or more years	17	9	3	14

Question 79 asked the FAOs how they saw their personal future career outlook, while question 80 asked how they perceived the future of the FAO career field in general. In each case, the overall response depicted positive or very positive perceptions for the majority of respondents (Table 3-11 and Table 3-12).

**Table 3-11. How do you see your future career outlook as a Foreign Area Officer?**

<b>Question 79 FAO Career Outlook</b>	<b>Army</b>	<b>Navy</b>	<b>Marine Corps</b>	<b>Air Force</b>
Very Negative	14	2	0	4
Negative	18	3	2	16
Neither positive nor negative	58	10	7	42
Positive	88	24	13	26
Very Positive	41	7	5	6

**Table 3-12. How do you perceive the future of Foreign Area Officers as a career field?**

<b>Question 80 Future of FAO Career Field</b>	<b>Army</b>	<b>Navy</b>	<b>Marine Corps</b>	<b>Air Force</b>
Very Negative	6	0	1	4
Negative	18	4	4	21
Neither positive nor negative	40	7	4	33
Positive	104	18	13	33
Very Positive	52	17	5	4

#### **D. Value to Supervisors and Flag Officer Billets**

FAO and non-FAO supervisors provided responses to the Quick Compass Survey. For the purposes of this report, it is the responses of the non-FAO supervisors giving their perspectives on the value that FAOs bring to their organizations that are the focus of the following discussion. To begin this portion of the survey, question 20 asked how the supervisors would rate the quality of FAO products or advice (Table 3-13). In this case, 74 percent responded that these *products or advice* were either very good or excellent. Similarly, when asked in question 22 how they would rate the *effectiveness* of FAO contributions to organizational efforts, 90 percent of the non-FAO supervisors responded effective or very effective (Table 3-14)

**Table 3-13. How would you rate the quality of Foreign Area Officer products or advice?**

<b>Question 20 Quality of FAO Products or Advice</b>	<b>Non FAO Supervisors</b>
Poor	9
Fair	57
Good	273
Very Good	549
Excellent	421

**Table 3-14. How would you rate the effectiveness of Foreign Area Officer contributions to your organization's efforts?**

<b>Question 22 Effectiveness of FAO Contributions</b>	<b>Non FAO Supervisors</b>
Very Ineffective	6
Ineffective	8
Neither Effective nor Ineffective	110
Effective	634
Very Effective	552

In the next series of questions, these same supervisors were asked to assess the importance of characteristics that they felt contribute to FAO job performance (Table

3-15). In their responses, non-FAO supervisors say that *individual characteristics and abilities*, and *regional or cultural education and training* are very important, along with *language education and training*. When asked for their perspective regarding the importance of the skills that FAOs should possess (question 24), supervisors highlighted *cultural understanding, regional expertise, and language skills* as being most important (Table 3-16).

**Table 3-15. How important are the following characteristics that contribute to a Foreign Area Officer's job performance?**

<b>Question 23 Characteristics Contributing to Job Performance</b>	<b>Very Unimportant</b>	<b>Unimportant</b>	<b>Neither Important nor Unimportant</b>	<b>Important</b>	<b>Very Important</b>
Individual Characteristics and Abilities	1	2	15	354	930
Experience on the Job	3	6	75	696	511
Formal Military Training and Education	5	12	167	821	293
Regional/Cultural Education and Training	4	6	45	321	924
Language Education and Training	7	10	87	487	711

**Table 3-16. How important are the following skills that Foreign Area Officers should possess?**

<b>Question 24 Importance of FAO Skills</b>	<b>Very Unimportant</b>	<b>Unimportant</b>	<b>Neither Important nor Unimportant</b>	<b>Important</b>	<b>Very Important</b>
Staff Knowledge	2	4	123	861	304
Interagency Knowledge	2	6	120	694	468
Language	4	15	94	482	690
Regional Expertise	2	8	50	311	921
Cultural Understanding	3	3	41	281	963
Foreign Personal Contacts	4	26	206	623	431
Basic Branch Knowledge	9	35	362	752	134

Question 26 asked supervisors to discern the importance of core competencies that they felt that FAOs should possess (Table 3-17). In this series of responses, non-FAO supervisors highlighted understanding the depth, breadth, and context of a specific region; advanced intercultural expertise; and ability to apply knowledge to strategic problems as being very important. This is similar to responses to question 31, where supervisors were asked to look ahead 5 to 10 years and highlight what they perceived the importance of certain competencies would be with regard to enhancing the value of FAOs. In these responses (Table 3-18), language proficiency, cultural awareness, regional expertise, critical-thinking skills, and interpersonal skills were deemed very important.

**Table 3-17. How important are the following core competencies that Foreign Area Officers should possess?**

<b>Question 26 Importance of FAO Core Competencies</b>	<b>Very Unimportant</b>	<b>Unimportant</b>	<b>Neither Important nor Unimportant</b>	<b>Important</b>	<b>Very Important</b>
Grounded in the Profession of Arms	8	14	215	744	309
Regional Understanding – Depth, Breadth, and Context	1	2	34	380	867
Understand JIIM Environments	1	9	97	691	490
Advanced Intercultural Expertise	2	7	106	544	627
Advanced Interpersonal Skills	1	2	45	522	717
Advanced Foreign Language Expertise	4	18	149	618	495
Ability to Apply Knowledge to Strategic Problems	1	7	32	373	876

In question 33, supervisors were asked to comment on general officer billets that should be filled by FAOs. As a preliminary question, supervisors were asked if FAO experiences and development offer the right balance of training, education, and experience to permit competitive promotion to general or flag officer. Answers to this question (number 32) are categorized as mixed, with 54 percent responding “no.” When



asked about specific billets, non-FAO supervisors provided the responses suggesting that there are additional flag officer billets where the FAO skill set might be best suited (Table 3-18).

**Table 3-18. Which of the following types of General Officer billets should Foreign Area Officers serve?**

<b>Question 33 Flag Officer Billets</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
Deputy J-5 in Combatant Commands	825	408
Deputy Commanders in Service Component Commands	329	904
Senior Defense Officials or Senior Service Officers in select countries (e.g., China, Russia, Egypt, Kuwait, Turkey)	993	240
U.S. Military Representative to NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) or other Intergovernmental organizations	778	455
Deputy Director Political-Military Affairs (e.g., Mid-East, WHEM, Asia), OSA, Joint Staff	869	364
Principal Director, Regional Affairs Bureaus in the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD)	741	492
Chief of Staff, Combatant Commands	218	1,015
J-5, Combatant Commands	562	671
Political/Military Advisor to Director of Defense Intelligence Agency, National Security Agency	621	612

In conclusion, the Quick Compass Survey of FAOs and supervisors permitted data collection of a sample size far exceeding that examined via qualitative interviews. While the latter permitted an examination of experiences and perspectives of a small number of FAOs and supervisors (in relative terms, when compared to the number of individuals who received the DMDC survey), the quantitative data from the surveys highlight some of the research themes that will be articulated in the subsequent chapters of this paper, reinforcing what we learned from the hundreds of interviews conducted.



## 4. FAO Vignettes

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### A. Introduction

The Foreign Area Officer career field designation evokes specific connotations, both positive and, unfortunately, negative. The perceptions of FAOs vary dramatically from “uniformed embassy diplomats” to “Soldier-Statesmen” or “Strategic Scouts” who must serve in austere locations, advance national security, defense, and military strategy, and do so with minimal DOD presence. In very general terms, FAOs are all these things and more. While conducting interviews, the IDA team found tremendous diversity across the FAO community. Their landscape of experiences varied not only by Service, but also by region, by roles and missions, accession timing and type, and especially by their primary branch (i.e., MOS or AFSC).

Given this diversity and the guidance of the research sponsor, one way to examine what the FAO career field means, who FAOs are, and what value they add to whatever organization or mission is to highlight the experiences of individuals who have taken part in these programs.<sup>20</sup> What follows is a presentation of 21 vignettes, grouped by Service, which spans the programs, ranks, accession type, and FAO roles and missions. Every effort has been made to make the following discussion (while not exhaustive) both illustrative and representative. IDA conducted interviews and focus groups with hundreds of Army, Navy, and Marine Corps FAOs, as well as Air Force Regional Affairs Strategists, to gain insights into the experiences of individuals who are part of these programs.

### 1. Army

#### a. Major General Charles W. Hooper, 48F<sup>21</sup>

The current General or Flag Officer communities contain very few FAOs. Under the Army's current career management system, Major General Hooper is one of only a very select few to be selected for General Officer rank; many FAOs regard him as the “face of FAO.”

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<sup>20</sup> The IDA team wishes to thank the full range of individuals with whom we interacted as we conducted the research for this report. It would be impossible to canvas the array of experiences conveyed to us during the numerous interviews conducted for this study. In vignette form, we present here some of the highlights.

<sup>21</sup> Major General Charles Hooper, interview, Pentagon, Washington DC, November 2012.

When interviewed, General Hooper was serving as the Director of Strategy, Plans, and Programs, U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM), Germany (the J-5). Although he is actually a China FAO (48F), as the J-5 and senior resident FAO, General Hooper regards being a proponent for AFRICOM FAOs as one of his essential roles. In fact, in several of his previous assignments, including serving as the Deputy Director, J-5, Strategic Planning and Policy, U.S. Pacific Command, and serving as the Senior Army Officer and Foreign Area Officer Coordinator at the Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, California, General Hooper saw being an advocate for the FAO community as one of his fundamental responsibilities. Even as U.S. Defense Attaché to People's Republic of China, which was the assignment during which he was selected for Brigadier General, Hooper sought to ensure that the FAOs going through training in that region were engaged in relevant activities and had a sense of the roles and responsibilities they could anticipate once they were accessed as FAOs.

In addition to discussing his own career path, which began as cadet at the United States Military Academy, General Hooper shared his views on some of the key attributes that contribute to the success of FAOs and how to maximize their strategic value. During the interview, General Hooper emphasized that understanding the “fundamentals of culture” is critical for FAOs, because “FAOs need to understand what motivates people” and how to “change strategic behavior.”

General Hooper also emphasized that it is essential for FAOs to “maintain contact with the operational community” and to “maintain credibility with warfighters.” When he was on the Army staff (where he served as the Chief, Army International Affairs Division, Strategy, Plans and Policy Directorate, Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff G3/5/7), General Hooper had a sign on his door reading, “relevance, relevance, relevance.” During that time, then Colonel Hooper was determined to link what FAOs did with the values of the Army Chief of Staff and to associate FAOs with the phrase “Soldier Statesmen.”

**b. Colonel Lawrence Kinde, 48C<sup>22</sup>**

Colonel Lawrence Kinde was commissioned from the United States Military Academy in 1983, where he had been the commander of the Corps of Cadets his senior year, studying international relations and comparative politics. The child of missionary parents, Colonel Kinde said that he “always wanted to be an FAO”—there were aspects of typical FAO assignments that he found familiar and appealing. When he accessed as an FAO, Colonel Kinde’s year group was on the cusp of selection for battalion command, and he had been advised that his record was competitive. It was a significant crossroads.

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<sup>22</sup> Colonel Lawrence Kinde, interview, U.S. European Command (EUCOM) Strategy Conference, Ramstein Air Base, February 2012; subsequent e-mail interactions.

Kinde (an engineer) said that his preference was to dual track; in fact, it was “a tough family decision to single track as an FAO.” His wife was also a child of missionary parents, and after long reflection, they came to believe that their strengths as individuals and as a family (by now they had two boys and two girls) would be best suited to service where they interacted directly with other cultures on a daily basis. Whereas some Service personnel found such circumstances unsettling, cross-cultural immersion was comfortable for them, as a family. Kinde had also been advised that in practice his dream of dual tracking would be a “lose-lose” proposition—neither his basic branch nor the FAO community would view dual-track officers as one of their own. Dual-trackers would be “orphans.” Colonel Kinde commented, “The only way to be an FAO... was to be an FAO.” Looking back, he said that while he missed the privilege and bonds that came from leading soldiers in combat units, he had come to realize that the FAO role of shaping policy and building bridges across cultures was its own special privilege. Kinde realized that “their insights had proved correct—FAO service was a great fit for the whole family.”

Following his first FAO utilization tour (at the United States Military Academy), Kinde served in a range of FAO assignments, including as an FAO Colonels Assignment officer; as an attaché in Kosovo, Finland, and Estonia; as the Chief of the Office of Defense Cooperation in Hungary; and then as Security Force Assistance chief in the Polish sector of Regional Command-East in Afghanistan. When interviewed for this research, Colonel Kinde was serving as Plans and Strategy Director at the George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies, where he supervised four FAOs and two German FAO equivalents.

Colonel Kinde’s observation was that the core FAO skill was the ability to understand the view from other cultures and communicate it effectively to policy-makers. Regardless of the environment, whether in dress-mess at a ball, coat and tie at a dinner or reception, or Army Combat Uniform in a village shura, this ability was what FAOs brought to the fight. Some of these environments were perceived as being more prestigious than others, such as serving in an embassy or advising very senior leaders, and an FAO could have broader impact at this level. But Colonel Kinde took particular issue with the view that service with tactical units was somehow “beneath” an FAO. On the contrary, Colonel Kinde indicated that the core FAO skill—understanding the view across a cultural divide—was key to success in this job, and “FAOs, if doing it right, could ‘break the code’ at this level and help the whole force, too.” He found it extremely rewarding. He felt that the FAO background, which in his case went back to his childhood, had given him the requisite cross-cultural skills necessary to work with the Afghans and coalition partners in a complex and challenging environment. In that operational realm, it was important to have both language skills and cross-cultural acuity.

Colonel Kinde said that the FAO service as team leads in Security Force Assistance missions and in Provincial Reconstruction Team-type settings may be of considerable value both for FAOs professionally and for the missions. Such command opportunities would provide greater experience and promotion possibilities for FAOs across the community. According to Colonel Kinde, in the Army's current single-track system, it is vitally important for Army FAOs to have opportunities to deploy; it is critical for FAOs to "maintain their relevance."

**c. Colonel Timothy Mitchell, 48J<sup>23</sup>**

A 1987 graduate of the United States Military Academy, Colonel Timothy Mitchell is the senior FAO assigned to U.S. Army Africa (USARAF). Among his previous FAO assignments, Colonel Mitchell served as the Defense Attaché at the embassies in Chad and Tanzania. During the interview, Colonel Mitchell reflected both on his experiences performing FAO assignments and on his supervisory role at USARAF, where among his other duties, he also has the responsibility for monitoring FAOs-in-training in the AFRICOM Area of Concern.

Reflecting on the demanding and extensive training required to become an Army FAO, Colonel Mitchell compared being FAO qualified as akin to an officer being Ranger qualified. When someone sees an officer wearing a Ranger tab, it says something about that officer. But experienced soldiers know that simply earning a Ranger tab does not make one a good officer. This is similar for FAOs; while the rigorous FAO training is essential for developing qualified FAOs, the training itself does not guarantee that an officer will be a good FAO. Colonel Mitchell said that he views FAO qualifications as encompassing more than language skills and advanced education; according to him, "FAOs need to perform well in unstructured environments with minimal guidance. Education is important as it provides FAOs with the tools to perform effectively in this environment; however, experience is critical as it provides both the context in which current decisions are made, and widens an FAO's frame of reference, which improves future decision-making."

**d. Colonel Robert Paddock, 48G<sup>24</sup>**

Colonel Robert Paddock is currently attending the Royal Jordanian National Defense College, where he is enrolled in a 12-month long, Arabic-language, master's program in Strategic Planning and Analysis. Among his previous FAO assignments,

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<sup>23</sup> Colonel Timothy Mitchell, interview, U.S. Army Africa (USARAF), Caserma Ederle, Vicenza, site visit, March 2012; subsequent e-mail interactions.

<sup>24</sup> Colonel Robert Paddock, interview, Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center site visit, Monterey, CA, December 2011; subsequent e-mail interactions.

Paddock served as the Deputy Chief in the Office of Security Cooperation, Tunisia, and as a Political-Military Advisor for Lebanon and Jordan at U.S. Central Command. When interviewed, Colonel Paddock was serving as the Director of the Foreign Area Officer Program Office, at the Defense Language Institute, a position that involved advising and mentoring newly accessed FAOs as they began their initial skill acquisition.<sup>25</sup>

During the interview, Colonel Paddock reflected on the range of his experiences from FAO assignments and the training and preparation available for FAOs before taking such billets. According to Paddock, there exists what he termed “almost a caste system” structure between FAOs going to Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) billets (where they will serve as Defense Attachés) and those going to non-DIA billets (e.g., those who will serve in Offices of Security Cooperation). En-route Defense Attachés are typically afforded language training or sustainment, as well as 13 weeks of formalized training at the Joint Military Attaché School, in preparation for their assignment. On the other hand, for FAOs going to a security cooperation billet, the only training typically available is the now 4-week course at Defense Institute of Security Assistance Management (DISAM). As Colonel Paddock noted in subsequent correspondence, a recent OSD Pilot Language Sustainment Program administered by Army FAO Proponent, “which provides funding for any FAO to receive language sustainment training, has helped to level the playing field a bit.”<sup>26</sup>

Colonel Paddock also reflected on the attributes most valuable for FAOs. According to him, “personality matters so much for what FAOs do—it is essential for FAO success.” Of all the language modalities, Paddock contended that “speaking is the critical skill.” Especially for FAOs in security cooperation billets, traditional branch knowledge is critically vital. In Colonel Paddock’s view, “it is essential for FAOs to keep up their soldier skills.”

**e. Colonel JM, 48J<sup>27</sup>**

Colonel JM accessed as an FAO in 1996. His In-Country Training in the AFRICOM Area of Concern was abbreviated due to his selection to be Deputy Defense Attaché and the requisite preparation, including attending Joint Military Attaché School. His subsequent FAO assignments included serving as attaché in several other African

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<sup>25</sup> Colonel Paddock indicated in a subsequent e-mail, “Technically, I was only responsible for the Army FAOs. I did help out the other Services as much as possible, because they didn’t have a dedicated FAO advisor/mentor in the Monterey area.”

<sup>26</sup> The Defense Language and National Security Education Office has been funding language sustainment programs in FY 12 and 13, which has been administered by the Service Proponent Offices of the Army and Marine Corps.

<sup>27</sup> Colonel JM, interview, DISAM site visit, Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, Ohio, February 2012. This individual asked that his vignette be made anonymous.

countries. He also served on a U.S. Central Command J5 billet and in OSD-Policy. In between FAO assignments, Colonel JM filled Individual Augmentee billets three times: once in Djibouti and twice for deployments to Iraq.

During the interview, Colonel JM reflected on how many of his FAO assignments showed great variance experientially. For example, he remarked on the many differences between FAO experiences serving in embassies and then in OSD or at Combatant Commands. He said that the latter “is an ego check for an FAO. FAOs there have less power by far than they have on embassy tours.” He commented that many of the FAOs who spend a great deal of time hanging around embassies “start thinking like State Department people.”

Colonel JM also identified experiential distinctions across the range of FAO billets in the different Combatant Command Areas of Concern. For example, when “downrange,” Central Command FAOs generally do their tours unaccompanied (i.e., without their families). In addition, he commented that although he had the experience of being shot at in Africa while filling an FAO billet, he had not received combat pay.

Colonel JM identified several skills and FAO characteristics as being essential for the roles they play. With regard to foreign language skills and modalities, he related, “speaking is more important than reading,” emphasizing that “listening is critical, too.” He said that he regards regional expertise as of great importance for FAOs, but given the size and diversity of some regions, “niche experience” is not always of utility. On the other hand, cultural awareness is essential for FAOs.

With such unique attributes, he reflected on a particular disadvantage FAOs, as a career field, may face: “promotion boards may not know what FAOs actually do and what they are.” JM also commented that those same unique attributes may be tremendously valuable to operational commanders.

**f. Colonel (retired) Thomas Wilhelm, 48E<sup>28</sup>**

Thomas Wilhelm, who now serves as Director of the Foreign Military Studies Office at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, retired as a colonel in 2007. Regarding his FAO career, Wilhelm describes himself as “one of the last dual-trackers.” A 1980 graduate of the United States Military Academy, he was originally branched infantry, ultimately serving as both a battalion and task force executive officer. As an FAO he was a 48E, serving in both Soviet and post-Soviet eras. During his 27-year career, Wilhelm’s FAO utilization tours included service as an attaché, in security cooperation billets, as a tactical and operational-level liaison officer, in arms control, and in academic assignments.

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<sup>28</sup> Colonel (ret) Thomas Wilhelm, interview, Partner Language Training Center, Europe Garmisch, site visit, March 2012; subsequent e-mail interactions.



During the interview, Wilhelm reflected on his experience with the Army's then dual-tracked FAO program. While he noted that it was very difficult to meet the requirements and associated time lines mandated by each infantry and FAO career track, he also explained that his "infantry street credentials" helped to rapidly establish credibility with his foreign counterparts, as well as maintain his operational relevance. "The muddy boot time was useful," he said. Regarding the challenges of the current single-track system, Wilhelm said that "it is too easy for FAOs to become action officers on staffs, tied to endless meetings with other U.S. personnel and to the e-mail in-box, instead of critically identifying and working strategic issues with foreign government and military counterparts." Wilhelm asserted, "FAOs should be operational and strategic assets—they are strategic scouts. They are the Services' connection with the entire world of critical thinkers and should be the regional experts complete with well-established career-long contacts." Wilhelm was emphatic about the strategic value FAOs represent: "FAOs are all about building strategic relationships."

**g. Colonel Gregory Wright, 48E<sup>29</sup>**

Colonel Wright accessed as an FAO in 1994. His first FAO utilization tour was teaching Russian at the United States Military Academy at West Point. Colonel Wright's other FAO billets spanned the range of security cooperation and attaché assignments, including Chief of the Defense Threat Reduction Office in Kiev, FAO Assignments Officer in Human Resource Command, Chief of the Office of Defense Cooperation in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Defense Attaché in Uzbekistan, and his present assignment as Chief of the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty/Nuclear Division, On-Site Inspection Directorate, Defense Threat Reduction Agency (DTRA).

Before serving in his current position at DTRA, Colonel Wright was sent to Camp Eggers, Afghanistan, on Worldwide Individual Augmentee System tasker. During this time, he served as the Director of International Security Cooperation at Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan. Wright noted that although this was not an FAO-coded billet, his language skills were of utility both with coalition partners and even with Afghan senior officers, some of whom spoke Russian.

During the interview, Colonel Wright also mentioned the exceptional language-sustainment opportunities available for FAOs serving at DTRA. DTRA has on-site instructors who work with each FAO to develop an individual language training plan, which focuses on addressing any deficiencies or weaknesses in the individual's Russian language proficiency. Through on-site language classes and robust availability of Russian media in an array of formats, FAOs at DTRA can not only sustain but also improve their

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<sup>29</sup> Colonel Gregory Wright, interview, Defense Threat Reduction Agency site visit, March 2012; subsequent e-mail interactions.

Russian language skills; efforts are also made to hone their regional expertise and cultural familiarity. DTRA also provides Russian-immersion opportunities, including temporary duty trips to embassies in Russian-speaking countries.

#### **h. Lieutenant Colonel Hashem Bayatpoor 48G<sup>30</sup>**

With his Persian ethnicity, considerable language skills (Arabic, Pashto, Dari, and Persian), regional expertise, Lieutenant Colonel Bayatpoor, since accessing as an FAO, has both deployed and also served in a wide array of overseas FAO billets. Lieutenant Colonel Bayatpoor's Combatant Command tours have included 3 years as a desk officer at U.S. Central Command, later serving in an FAO billet in the J2 at U.S. Special Operations Command (SOCOM), which was his job when interviewed. On Combatant Command staffs, FAOs generally serve as political-military, intelligence, or desk officers. Lieutenant Colonel Bayatpoor commented that not all roles make equally good use of FAO attributes and abilities; some supervisors simply do not know what FAOs are or can do.

Lieutenant Colonel Bayatpoor has also served on embassy staffs, most recently as attaché in Yemen and before that in Kuwait and Jordan. Reflecting on those experiences and how such roles are perceived by those in uniform, Bayatpoor commented that "There's nothing I can do to make 'pol-mil officer at an embassy' sound as good as 'battalion commander.'"

During the interview, Lieutenant Colonel Bayatpoor also described some of his experiences as an FAO deployed to serve in branch-immaterial billets. On one deployment to Iraq, Bayatpoor commented that once the commander saw he "was not infantry," he sought to use Bayatpoor as his "interpreter and personal advisor."

Lieutenant Colonel Bayatpoor expressed some concern for how FAO assignments are handled. During the interview he asked, "Who tracks which FAOs get sent to branch-immaterial billets? What FAO billets are thereby left unfilled? Who cares that FAOs may not be getting sent to assignments that make sense?"

Although as a 48G many of his assignments are unaccompanied, Lieutenant Colonel Bayatpoor expressed his view that it is essential for the In-Country Training (now called In-Region Training) to be accompanied. "Everyone in the entire family is an FAO," he commented.

Since being interviewed, Lieutenant Colonel Bayatpoor was selected below zone for colonel and was slated to attend the War College in Academic Year 2013–2014. Beginning in July 2013, he will attend the Jordanian National Defense College, which

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<sup>30</sup> Lieutenant Colonel Hashem Bayatpoor, interview, USSOCOM, MacDill Air Force Base, FL, March 2012; subsequent e-mail interactions.

will be followed by a tour as the Senior Defense Official/Defense Attaché in the Arabian Gulf Region.

**i. Lieutenant Colonel Thomas M. Butler, 48E<sup>31</sup>**

At the time of the interview, Lieutenant Colonel Tom Butler was serving as Chairman of the Department of Eurasian Security Studies Program at the George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies. During the interview, Lieutenant Colonel Butler described the role of the Marshall Center and the model for newly accessed FAOs of that region. This model provides formal guidance, mentorship, and an individualized training plan. Within this construct, senior FAOs at the Marshall Center, as well as throughout the Area of Concern, mentor FAOs during their In-Region Training. Working out of relevant U.S. Embassy offices, including the Defense Attaché Office and Security Cooperation Office, senior FAOs conduct internships, put in time on the ground in all regions within the Area of Concern, and visit commands and agencies that employ FAOs, such as U.S. European Command (EUCOM). The goal of the program is to provide new FAOs with as much education and experience as possible to prepare them to work as an FAO, as well as help them gain a good understanding of their assigned region and the issues and challenges associated with it.

After the interview, Lieutenant Colonel Butler was sent on a Worldwide Individual Augmentee System tasker to Afghanistan, where he served in the Security Assistance Office-Afghanistan, advising both the Afghan Ministry of Defense and Ministry of the Interior. In this position, Butler had regular interaction with host-nation representatives, including escorting several of them back to the United States for security assistance training and participation in U.S.-Afghan security assistance discussions in Washington.

Lieutenant Colonel Butler's prior FAO billets included being assigned to DTRA, Darmstadt, from 2002 to 2005, during which time he deployed to Iraq searching for weapons of mass destruction. His other FAO assignments included Defense Attaché to Moldova and the Office of Defense Cooperation Chief in Latvia.

During the interview, Lieutenant Colonel Butler reflected on some of the abilities FAOs possess. They understand the concept of teams and the value of cooperation. They have the mental agility and flexibility to effectively listen, analyze, and act and must be comfortable doing this while working in ill-defined environs. FAO diversity of character is a strength for the Army. They are force multipliers with a very light "footprint."

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<sup>31</sup> Lieutenant Colonel Thomas Butler, interview, U.S. European Command (EUCOM) Strategy Conference, Ramstein Air Base, February 2012, and subsequent e-mail interactions 26 February 2013.

**j. Lieutenant Colonel Timothy Lawrence, 48G<sup>32</sup>**

Lieutenant Colonel Timothy Lawrence accessed as an FAO in 1998 (given his language proficiency in French and his regional expertise, he originally accessed as a 48C). During the course of his FAO training, Lieutenant Colonel Lawrence was shifted to being a 48G.

In summer 2004, when Lieutenant Colonel Lawrence ascertained that he had a 5-month window of time (after studying Arabic at the Defense Language Institute and before starting graduate school at Johns Hopkins), he sought to volunteer to deploy with Special Operations Forces (SOF); however, the FAO Branch Chief at the time opposed volunteer deployments. Lieutenant Colonel Lawrence persevered, and “when this issue got elevated to the Chief of Staff, G3/5/7, given the many unfilled requirements at the time, he disregarded the opposition of the FAO Branch Chief and offered me my choice of deployments.”

Lieutenant Colonel Lawrence’s first FAO assignment was at DIA, from 2006 to 2009. Lawrence noted that although he was in an FAO billet during this time, while at DIA, he was performing more in an intelligence-management capacity. Since many of the FAO billets at DIA do not, according to Lawrence, effectively use FAOs, he recommends a billet validation before an FAO is sent to an FAO billet at DIA. At the time, Lawrence brought this to the attention of the FAO proponent office, but took no action: “while they agreed verbally, it was clear it was too much work to re-look individual billets.” With considerable effort and a sense of no support from his branch or from senior Army FAOs, Lawrence took the initiative to do what was necessary to change positions internally to DIA during the 3-year tour.

For his second FAO tour, Lieutenant Colonel Lawrence served as Assistant Army Attaché in Israel. For this 2-year assignment, he received no language training; when confronted with language barriers, he made “the best use” possible of his French proficiency. Nevertheless, “During this tour, FAO branch stopped paying me for my proficiency in French—despite the fact that I was able to effectively utilize French for mission purposes.” Given the manner in which the Army implemented the Foreign Language Proficiency Bonus, Lawrence contended that there was absolutely no incentive to learn Hebrew on his own time and with his own resources.

Lieutenant Colonel Lawrence’s final FAO assignment sent him to Fort Polk; this was also the job from which he subsequently retired. Lawrence regarded this assignment as a “bad utilization,” one that made poor use of FAO skills and capabilities. Assigning 21 FAO billets to the 162nd Infantry Brigade at Fort Polk rendered other Army FAO

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<sup>32</sup> Lieutenant Colonel Timothy Lawrence, interview, U.S. Central Command Security Cooperation Education and Training Working Group (SCETWG), Tampa, March 2012; and Ft Polk site visit, April 2012; subsequent e-mail interactions.

billets, for example at Theater Component Commands, unfilled. Moreover, Lawrence stated that FAOs are doing a considerable amount of “branch-immaterial work at Ft Polk.” Lawrence commented, “The Army is trying to establish Regionally Aligned Forces that can act as Subject Matter Experts around the world for Security Cooperation. Why? Because SOF does not have the capacity to conduct all the requested engagements across the globe.” Lawrence remarked, “When the first group of FAOs first arrived at Polk (17 arrived in the Fall of 2011), the Commanding General said he did not need them until 2014,” so they had to figure out what to do to train for the Security Force Assistance Training (SFAT) mission. Lawrence elaborated “The decision to use FAOs to train SFATs had some logic since the 162nd was tasked with this mission—as a direct result of some larger draw-down policy decisions—so the unit commander was simply making use of his assigned resources.” Lieutenant Colonel Lawrence was one of the few FAOs at Fort Polk who had considerable operational deployment experience. Conversely, some of the FAOs at Fort Polk were on their first utilization tour: “The problem here was that very few of the FAOs had deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan, thereby making it difficult to stand in front of deploying SFATs and tell them what it is going to be like.” Of the five lieutenant colonels sent to Fort Polk, all but one submitted their retirement papers within the first few months of the assignment. Lawrence said that this was “an outcome that FAO Branch and Proponency was well aware would happen.”

During the interview, Lieutenant Colonel Lawrence expressed his view that the “major problem with the FAO program is that it does not have a senior level owner.” In terms of proponency, there is no Army senior general officer who is the overarching advocate for FAOs. A greater level of general officer involvement in the FAO program might ensure best utilization of FAOs and thus the highest extent of Service return on investment.

Lieutenant Colonel Lawrence said that FAOs can and do succeed at all levels—tactical, strategic, and operational. FAOs are good at networking, flattening organizations, liaising between agencies (especially between Special Operations Forces, across the military Services, and with the Intelligence Community).

**k. Lieutenant Colonel Michael C. Regan, 48B<sup>33</sup>**

Lieutenant Colonel Michael Regan is a South American FAO. Regan’s FAO assignments included serving in the Security Cooperation Office in Brazil; as attaché in Colombia then Chief, U.S. Military Group Nicaragua; and in the J59 at U.S. Southern Command (SOUTHCOM).

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<sup>33</sup> Lieutenant Colonel Michael Regan, interview, U.S. Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) Chief of Mission Conference, Miami, November 2011; subsequent e-mail interactions.

During the interview, Lieutenant Colonel Regan emphasized the value of In-Country Training: “It is a reality check.” He said that instead of “measuring things by our yardstick,” ICT gives you the chance to see your corollaries “and how they live—you gain greater appreciation for what they live with every day. You will know those guys forever; they don’t leave their Services.” On his ICT, Regan traveled to Uruguay, Paraguay, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, and Peru, on average 3–4 days per country.

During his ICT, Lieutenant Colonel Regan took the Captain’s Command Course, a 4-month program, in Quito, Ecuador. Lieutenant Colonel Regan found that foreign militaries like it when FAOs take “their courses,” commenting that they feel “the American is not too big to take this course.” The potential for relationship building in such a setting is immense.

Regan served on a 6-month deployment to Afghanistan. In this assignment, Lieutenant Colonel Regan reported that he did not use his regional, cultural, or foreign language skills (as specific to being a 48B) per se, but he did regularly draw on FAO-relevant skill sets and experiences in the performance of his duties.

During the interview, Lieutenant Colonel Regan was asked about “the best and worst things about being an FAO,” to which he replied, “Best and worst? You are the ‘Face of America.’” He added that the FAO’s spouse also “serves as the ‘Face of America,’ the ‘Diplomatic Corps.’” Because only attaché spouses receive training for the mission, many FAO spouses are rendered ill-prepared for security cooperation assignments. Regan emphasized the importance of etiquette training, given the situations in which FAOs (and their spouses) frequently find themselves.

#### **1. Lieutenant Colonel Peter Teil, FAO, in the Army Reserve, Civil Affairs<sup>34</sup>**

Lieutenant Colonel Peter Teil is FAO reservist. He entered the Army Reserves while in the Reserve Officers’ Training Corps (ROTC) at Princeton University. As an undergraduate, he concentrated on Soviet and West European politics with a minor in modern German literature. He self-financed his Sloan master’s in business at the London Business School later in his Reserve career. A native German and fluent French speaker, Teil has served on active duty in the J5 at EUCOM and AFRICOM for 17 years; before that, he served as a Public Affairs, Civil Affairs, and Protocol Officer on longer tours in Germany, Korea, and Kuwait, and at the Corps of Engineers Headquarters in Washington, DC.

During the interview, Lieutenant Colonel Teil stressed that reservists seeking to access into the FAO program may face some challenges. Because the FAO accession

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<sup>34</sup> Lieutenant Colonel Peter Teil, interview, U.S. European Command (EUCOM) Strategy Conference, Ramstein Air Base, February 2012; subsequent e-mail interactions.

process remained dormant or unresponsive for most of his Army career, he performed FAO duties in J5 billets as a Civil Affairs officer for over 16 years. Only in the last year, did the FAO Branch evaluate his qualifications and award him the FAO designation. The problem is that the Reserve accession process is staffed by fellow reservists who sporadically review packets on individual drill weekends and are not accountable to the Human Resource Command (HRC). In his opinion, there are some skilled reservists who may be deterred from pursuing FAO accession because HRC and the FAO Proponent Office have limited involvement in the review process.

Lieutenant Colonel Teil thought that a strategic messaging campaign to advertise the FAO program at civilian universities might draw some excellent talent into the ROTC, as well as the Reserve and Active Duty FAO corps. There may be a broader pool of potential officers who would be drawn to the FAO program specifically, rather than drawn to the military for whatever reason and then drawn to the FAO program. Teil referenced the thousands of civilian students with international relations and political science degrees who do not know that there may be another option than the Foreign Service, think tanks, or nongovernmental organizations for pursuing their passions. No other career path provides fully funded undergraduate and graduate education, extensive language training, and practical application abroad of foreign policy aspirations, all while providing compensation that far exceeds that of the aforementioned alternatives.

**m. Major Adam Kordish, 48G<sup>35</sup>**

Major Adam Kordish is a Middle East FAO who just finished the FAO “training pipeline,” which for him consisted of Farsi language studies at DLI, a master’s degree from the Monterey Institute of International Studies, and ICT in Amman, Jordan. His ICT included regional embassy tours, embassy staff section internships, organizational development work at the King Abdullah Special Operations Training Center, and being embedded for 3 months with Jordanian Special Forces.

A former Special Forces officer, Major Kordish estimates that roughly 15 to 20 percent of Army FAOs are Special Forces. Kordish reflected on the fact that the FAO branch does not formally code FAO billets for officers with SOF backgrounds—the U.S. Special Operations Command (SOCOM), on the other hand, would like an FAO-like career path option for middle company-grade to senior field-grade level SOF officers. The increasing desire from SOCOM for Special Operations Liaison Officers (SOLOs) reflects the compatibility of “18” and “48” as career paths, particularly in the areas of professional education, training, and dedicated, progressively senior duty positions. Based on the unique missions of SOCOM, SOLOs are envisioned to provide the critical

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<sup>35</sup> Major Adam Kordish, interview, USSOCOM, MacDill Air Force Base, FL, March 2012; subsequent e-mail interactions.

link between the U.S. Country Team and the very specific capabilities that USSOCOM can provide to a theater, region, or country. SOLOs have the unique mission of liaising between U.S. Country Teams and foreign national entities on matters related to SOF development and coordination. SOLOs liaise with host nations, providing SOF expertise and resources to their national SOF headquarters, coordinate in-country U.S. SOF operations, and leverage the U.S. SOF enterprise in support of creation of a national, Joint-level SOF headquarters. There are examples of Army FAOs with Special Forces backgrounds being identified by SOCOM as ideal for SOLO overseas assignments.

Major Kordish, now in his first FAO utilization assignment, is serving in an FAO-coded billet in the J55 International Engagement Division at SOCOM. In this billet he feels he is leveraging many of his FAO skills. In terms of roles and missions, FAOs in the J55 are expected to expand SOF networks within and between U.S. partner nations. J55 FAOs are able to utilize a combination of political-military understanding, knowledge of security-cooperation activities and authorities/funding, numerous briefing opportunities with international distinguished visitors, and leading in-country staff assistance visits in support of same. Major Kordish stated that one of the most FAO-oriented aspects of this assignment is when he is able to brief partner nation distinguished visitors (sometimes in-language) on the strategic security implications of developing a national, Joint SOF capability.

There are 14 FAO billets at SOCOM—8 are Army. In general, Major Kordish noted that some FAOs at other combatant commands are not consistently well-utilized. That there are FAOs in billets that are not good fits renders security cooperation billets elsewhere vacant because there are simply not enough FAOs to go around.

**n. Major Garrett Jones, 48C<sup>36</sup>**

Major Garrett Jones graduated from the United States Military Academy in 1996. He was designated as an FAO in 2002 and started language training at DLI in 2005, studying French and Italian; the latter is his control language (the ascribed language, which the Service tracks, in which he is expected to maintain proficiency). He also completed a 12-month In-Country Training in Italy, during which he attended a 10-month, Italian-language, Joint Staff College program. During the ICT, he traveled approximately one week a month, visiting EUCOM, NATO, and several European countries to gain an appreciation of current U.S. security-policy issues with respect to those countries.

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<sup>36</sup> Major Garret Jones, interview, U.S. European Command (EUCOM) Strategy Conference, Ramstein Air Base, February 2012; subsequent e-mail interactions.



Major Jones's first FAO utilization tour was at USARAF, in the Security Cooperation Division. Although this assignment was to be a 3-year tour, 10 months after arriving, Major Jones was volunteered (i.e., went involuntarily) for Afghanistan-Pakistan (AFPAK) Hands (APH), to be sent to Regional Command-West in Afghanistan—"where the Italians are." Major Jones understood that the Army had made him a specialist: a 48C. He was told being part of APH would be a "broadening experience."

In November 2009, as an FAO in the APH program, Major Jones launched into 4 months of Dari language training in Washington, DC (after which he reached the 1+/1+ mark), which he deemed insufficient as compared to his FAO training. He commented that "four months in a Category 3 language does not get you very far." The program also lacked meaningful area-familiarization instruction. Reflecting on why he was inducted into the APH program, Major Jones said that as an FAO who had not deployed, his assignment team believed that APH would be a valid FAO utilization that would also satisfy the deployment requirement. Moreover, the International Security Assistance Force Commander reportedly wanted FAOs to serve as liaison officers. Jones said that there were three FAOs who were part of the first APH cohort: an Italy FAO (him), a Germany FAO, and a Turkish FAO.

As was the experience for many AFPAK Hands in the first cohort, Major Jones experienced a "bait and switch" with his first assignment. Jones said that he ended up in a position that failed to utilize both his APH training and FAO skill set. He landed at a fusion center at Regional Command-West. This was a new fusion center—with empty seats that needed to be filled. Jones commented that lack of a background in military intelligence rendered him ill suited to perform that function. In terms of his day-to-day activities, Major Jones performed the duties of "an admin/logistics officer," an experience he found to be "very demoralizing." When Jones tried to be proactive with regards to his APH assignment, he was told he was too essential to the organization in his current capacity. For instance, Major Jones highlighted critical gaps, such as liaison positions to local Afghan security forces, that he could readily fill—but his requests were denied. During the interview, Jones did reflect on a positive experience he had as an AFPAK Hand as a Commander's Emergency Response Program project manager in Herat. He transitioned to this position during the later part of his tour. Major Jones was well positioned to foster cooperative relationships with the Italian-led Provincial Reconstruction Team to advance an ambitious reconstruction agenda.

Following that 12-month deployment, Major Jones then started the second portion of the APH language-training continuum. The instruction was added to his normal duty schedule, however, thereby limiting his ability to attain fluency in Dari. Jones ultimately questioned the utility of having "a 1 or even a 2" in a language, given how AFPAK Hands are intended to be utilized. For FAOs the value of having professional level

language skills “is apparent,” stated Jones. “But for APH? Does having a 1 or 2 in the language really make a difference?”

Reflecting on the experience of being an FAO in the APH program, Major Jones said, “The experience of being in an APH cohort is like being a second lieutenant again. It can get you off course for your career development.” Jones stated that for many AFPAK Hands, their skills are not well utilized; in particular, APH interrupts the ability of an FAO to develop core competencies. What he noted was that “the utilization of FAOs in APH could make sense if FAO skills are well utilized.”

During the interview, Major Jones contended that the potential benefits of deploying FAOs often go unrealized, particularly in the area of security assistance. The potential “shaping role of FAOs in this setting,” where they can build up good will and establish relationships, effectively and efficiently enables a small footprint, “so the tactical Army does not need to be there.” The extent to which FAOs are enabled to conduct this shaping role tends to be personality driven and somewhat ad hoc. Jones explained his view that part of the reason for this utilization issue is that Army FAO leadership has not communicated to tactical-level organizations the value of FAOs. The lack of understanding of competencies of FAOs leads some commanders to use FAOs as branch-immaterial operators rather than “bigger picture” political-military specialists.

## 2. Navy

### a. Rear Admiral Douglas J. Venlet<sup>37</sup>

Rear Admiral Douglas Venlet is the Director, International Engagement (N52), Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, and the senior FAO serving in the Department of the Navy. In this role, he highlights to senior leadership what FAOs do, helps determine where Navy FAOs need to be, and fills billets with professionally qualified officers. Before this assignment, Rear Admiral Venlet served as the Senior Defense Official and Defense Attaché to Russia.

Before becoming a Naval Surface Warfare Officer, Rear Admiral Venlet began his distinguished military career by enlisting in the United States Marine Corps. During this period he received his initial language training in Russian. Following his commissioning, Rear Admiral Venlet served in challenging assignments, including command of two surface combatants, USS *Wadsworth* and USS *Chosin*. He served in both Europe and the Pacific, and had the unique opportunity to be deputy executive secretary of the National Security Council in the Executive Office of the President. In a previous assignment to the

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<sup>37</sup> Rear Admiral Douglas J. Venlet, interview, U.S. European Command (EUCOM) Strategy Conference, Ramstein Air Base, February 2012; subsequent e-mail interactions.

Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, Rear Admiral Venlet served as branch head for Strategic Concepts, Strategy and Policy Division (N5SP).

Rear Admiral Venlet stressed the importance of having the best officers, with strong operational experience, serving as Navy FAOs. This experience is vital for FAOs assigned to positions associated with defense security cooperation and foreign military sales. Navy FAOs need to be both warriors and diplomats, employing personal intellect and energy in operational environments that might be austere and challenging. Accordingly, FAOs must present themselves to both military and civilian leaders as being professional, diplomatic, highly skilled and self-motivated (including language sustainment) to be viewed as elite assets to the Navy and the Department of Defense.

**b. Captain Bernie Wang<sup>38</sup>**

A Hong Kong native, Captain Bernie Wang accepted a lateral transfer into the FAO community in 2007 while a student at the DLI learning Tagalog. Captain Wang's first FAO utilization tour was as the FAO Community Manager at the Bureau of Naval Personnel in Millington, Tennessee. Next he reported to the Naval Postgraduate School, where he is currently serving as the Military Associate Dean of the School of International Graduate Studies. An Asia-Pacific FAO, Wang is proficient in Mandarin, Cantonese, and Tagalog.

During the interview Wang reflected on how new the Navy FAO program is, saying that there are many aspects of the Navy FAO program that are still being ironed out. When an FAO briefs the record of an FAO to the promotion board and does not know how best to describe what qualities constitutes "best and most fully qualified" to non-FAOs on the panel, then promotion boards may react accordingly: "Although Navy FAOs only compete against each other for promotion, their promotion boards [comprise] officers from the line communities. If FAO representatives on the board cannot adequately communicate that performance and FAO qualifications are unique attributes, then non-FAO board members may potentially revert to standards that represent their communities." Wang concluded, "Ducks pick ducks" (i.e., officers on boards select those who have files and experiences that look like their own by default).

**c. Lieutenant Commander Enid Brackett<sup>39</sup>**

Lieutenant Commander Enid Brackett accessed as an FAO in 2007. She studied French at DLI. Brackett said that had In-Country Training been an option, she would have benefitted from it. In particular, In-Country Training would have helped

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<sup>38</sup> Captain Bernie Wang, interview, Naval Postgraduate School site visit, Monterey, California, December 2011; subsequent e-mail interactions.

<sup>39</sup> Lieutenant Commander Enid Brackett, interview, AFRICOM SCETWG, Garmisch, May 2012.

considerably with solidifying her language skills. Lieutenant Commander Brackett's first FAO utilization tour was as the Navy Programs and International Military Education and Training Officer, Office of Security Cooperation, Tunisia.

During the interview, Lieutenant Commander Brackett said that she chose to "go FAO" because it was in line with her interests and passions. As a first-generation American (her father is from Iraq, and her mother is from Luxembourg), Lieutenant Commander Brackett had an interest in foreign language, cultures, overseas assignments, and building strategic partnerships. At the time of her selection, she was assigned as an African FAO without the opportunity to submit her preference for a region, but is ultimately happy with her regional designation.

Lieutenant Commander Brackett reported that promotion is a "near constant discussion" among peers. Although she thinks the promotion numbers seem to be normalizing, Brackett indicated that the non-observed fitness-report issue remains a serious problem for Navy FAOs. That hurdle will remain a point of difficulty "until non-FAOs understand who FAOs are and the value they bring."

Lieutenant Commander Brackett stated that foreign language skill sustainment is very difficult—especially since almost all of her daily communications are in English. She eventually found funding for tutoring once a week and would like to do more, but heavy workloads make even minimal training challenging.

Brackett commented that since DLI was actually designed for "18 year old crypto-linguists, not mid-career professional communicators," it is of marginal benefit for FAOs. Brackett contended that there was a lot of wasted time at DLI that could have been better utilized developing one's skills for the FAO program. Brackett commented that DLI has great teachers, but the focus is really on crypto linguists and the modalities required for that intelligence specialty. This is not the appropriate and optimal model for FAOs.

Lieutenant Commander Brackett said that the Navy's FAO community would benefit from more proactive leadership. While she has unofficial mentors, Brackett stated that she thinks the FAO community could benefit from a more formalized mentorship program.

### **3. Air Force**

#### **a. Colonel James (Gato) Hetherington, 16F C<sup>40</sup>**

Colonel James Hetherington is currently serving as Division Chief of the International Airmen Division, Secretary of the Air Force, International Affairs

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<sup>40</sup> Colonel James Hetherington, interview, Secretary of the Air Force, International Affairs, Office of the Under Secretary of the Air Force, Washington, DC, August 2012.

(SAF/IA). In this capacity, he oversees Air Force attachés, the Military Personnel Exchange Program, and the RAS program.

Colonel Hetherington is an F-16 pilot. A participant in the Air Force's original FAO program, Hetherington became an RAS based on his experience and qualifications: he had completed a 3-year exchange program with the Argentine Air Force, where he gained proficiency in Spanish. Hetherington considers himself to be a "hybrid" RAS officer; he has no advanced degree in regional studies, but he possesses language skills in Arabic and Spanish, as well as regional expertise from the exchange experience.

Following his exchange with the Argentinean Air Force, Hetherington went to Cannon Air Force Base to fly F-16s. He was frequently called on to use his Spanish language skills as Latin American military officers frequently visited this facility. Colonel Hetherington's next assignment was as squadron commander at an airbase in Honduras (which he described as an "RAS type" command billet). He later served as the Air Attaché to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, working in the U.S. Embassy, in Riyadh.

In his capacity as division chief of the International Airmen Division, Colonel Hetherington is overseeing the RAS program during its formative stages. As both a former FAO (under the Air Force's initial FAO program) and now an RAS, he has insights into the strategic utility FAOs represent and the challenges of a dual-track approach to managing the community. During the interview, Colonel Hetherington explained why he supports a dual-track approach: "While single track may be a great enabler, if one loses one's combat ability—the ability to be warrior-diplomat—the extent to which an FAO can be effective is limited. RAS officers need to be current and up to date on the latest Air Force equipment and procedures in order to enable them to engage effectively with foreign partners."

**b. Lieutenant Colonel Mafwa Kuvibidila, 16F F<sup>41</sup>**

At the time of the interview, Lieutenant Colonel Mafwa Kuvibidila was serving in the Office of Military Cooperation, Cairo, Egypt. She said that although she was hired to perform one job, focused on training, her actual utilization proved to be something completely different. Three months after her arrival, Lieutenant Colonel Kuvibidila ended up working as an executive officer, which is primarily administrative staff support to the unit commander. She returned to the training branch after a year as an executive officer with both jobs "counting as an FAO tour," since that is how her billet was coded. A promotion board would see that she performed duties both as an executive officer and as a training branch chief during her FAO assignment.

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<sup>41</sup> Lieutenant Colonel Mafwa Kuvibidila, interview, U.S. Central Command SCETWG, Tampa, March 2012; subsequent e-mail interactions.

Lieutenant Colonel Kuvibidila's primary Air Force Specialty Code is Space Operations. At the time, she described the transition from RAS billet back to her primary AFSC, or career field, as being "awkward at best." Since individuals can spend up to 5 years outside their career fields on their initial RAS assignments (including language training), keeping up with changes in that career field while gone and the transition back is one of the most difficult aspects of career management and progression. Better expectations management both from the primary and FAO communities on what FAOs will do, how they will progress, and how they will reintegrate back into their primary career fields would create better understanding for all involved parties and ease the awkwardness of going back and forth between the two.

Lieutenant Colonel Kuvibidila noted that one of the other challenges RASs faced at the time is a "lack of a sense of community." Since the interview, SAF/IA (Air Force office that oversees the RAS and PAS programs) has taken additional steps to better communicate with the RAS/PAS community on language, cultural, and assignment opportunities; however, there is still a lack of information on developments or changes to the career field. The primary means of sending information is through e-mail. Although SAF/IA created a forum and a Community of Practice, Lieutenant Colonel Kuvibidila asserted that the hosting website is cumbersome and needs to be better advertised if SAF/IA intends to use it as a primary means of communication other than e-mail or Air Force Portal. Another potential suggested alternative is for SAF/IA to use Facebook as a valuable community-building resource for RASs.

Reflecting on online resources that she has found valuable, Lieutenant Colonel Kuvibidila said that FAOweb has been useful both for maintaining contact with FAOs she met while at DLI and as a source for information and online tools. FAOweb would be even more beneficial, she asserted, if it "included a lessons learned database—so I can get information on lessons learned on operating in Egypt or Jordan, etc." If FAOweb, or some other resource, featured an overall FAO database, enabling FAOs to know who is where, in what capacity, and their contact information, this would greatly facilitate communication across the entire FAO community. Another useful resource is Joint Language University, which consolidates several online language and culture tools, as well as links to other sites that host similar information, allowing for greater flexibility in learning approaches.

**c. Major RS, 16F<sup>42</sup>**

At the time of the interview, Major RS was serving as Deputy Chief in the Office of Security Cooperation, in a country in the AFRICOM Area of Concern. This 24-month assignment is his first RAS utilization tour. His primary branch is aircraft maintenance.

Major RS said that he first learned about the FAO program from a briefing given while he was a cadet at the Air Force Academy. He also became acquainted with several FAOs who were instructors there.

Major RS's RAS training consisted of 12 months at Naval Postgraduate School for a master's degree and 6 months at DLI for French. He had no RASI; he was told that the first 6 months of his tour in the country in the AFRICOM Area of Concern would count as his In-Country Training. Although he attended a DLI for French, his experience in the AFRICOM Area of Concern has involved no language other than English. In fact, he has found that almost all the Air Force billets in AFRICOM are English-speaking. To sustain what he learned at DLI, he requested funding for tutoring at the French embassy; he was urged to pursue online options (which according to him are of limited value given the poor Internet connectivity in the part of Africa in which he resides).

During the interview, Major RS made several recommendations, one of which was that "RAS should be called FAOs in order to raise awareness about the program." He also expressed the view that a more formal approach to mentorship would be valuable. He said that he hopes to see greater involvement by the Air Force leadership in the RAS program as it matures.

**4. Marine Corps**

**Lieutenant Colonel Edward Sullivan, 9944<sup>43</sup>**

Lieutenant Colonel Edward Sullivan began his career as a logistics officer who was then selected as an FAO. His FAO training consisted of Arabic at DLI, a master's degree at Naval Postgraduate School, and ICT during which time he was based out of Cairo, Egypt.

Since that time, Lieutenant Colonel Sullivan said that he has done 9 years of FAO work—albeit not always in FAO billets. From 2004 to 2008 he was heavily involved in Iraq. Initially serving in 2004 as an advisor to the commander of Regimental Combat Team-1 (RCT-1), he acted as the de facto liaison with Fallujah regional leadership,

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<sup>42</sup> Major RS, interview, AFRICOM SCETWG, Garmisch, May 2012; subsequent e-mail interactions. This individual asked that his vignette be made anonymous.

<sup>43</sup> Lieutenant Colonel Edward Sullivan, Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center site visit, Monterey, California, site visit, interview, December 2011; subsequent e-mail interactions.

arranging meetings, drafting U.S. Marine Corps talking points, and participating in Civil Affairs–type evolutions. In 2005, he again served with 2d Marine Division G-2 as an advisor to the staff and the commanding general, while interacting daily with Al-Anbar provincial leadership. Based on the experience and insight gained through these tours, Sullivan changed his career designation to intelligence and attended intelligence school following his second tour. After working as the co-writer of the intel annexes—particularly the enemy situation/critical vulnerability portions of the document—he was given the position of “Fusion Officer” for Multi-National Forces West, making him the senior intelligence analyst for the Marine Corps in Iraq. While not strictly an FAO job, the last two billets were a direct result of his experience and knowledge as an FAO. It was the working and talking with the Iraqis on a daily basis and understanding the way in which they viewed the world that brought value to the table for the commander. Following his third Iraq tour in 2008, he then attended Joint Military Attaché School, before serving as Naval Attaché in Oman (2008–2011). As Naval Attaché, Lieutenant Colonel Sullivan said that he garnered diplomatic, intelligence, and FAO experience. In his most recent FAO role, Sullivan was the commander of the Marine Corps detachment at Monterey, where he was able to assist and mentor officers studying to be FAOs and RAOs, sharing his experiences and lessons learned.

Though Lieutenant Colonel Sullivan did not discount the importance of language skills, he said that he feels strongly that the operational necessity of language skills for FAOs depends on the specific assignment. Sullivan’s Arabic was strongest in late 2005—prior to becoming the fusion officer, a job that allowed little exposure to locals. Surprisingly, the diplomatic posting in Oman did little to advance his Arabic language skills because “most people in Oman speak English.”

At the beginning of the interview, Lieutenant Colonel Sullivan asserted that professionally as a Marine, he had “done everything we were not supposed to do” when it came to career planning. In addition to a late-career lateral move (changing MOS from Logistics to Military Intelligence as a major with 13 months time in grade) and serving as a school-trained FAO, he served as a Defense Attaché. He said that any one of these things used to be regarded as a “career killer,” yet today Sullivan commands one of three intelligence battalions in the Marine Corps. He attributed his success in being command-selected to the unique capabilities and understanding he was able to bring to his assignments as a result of his FAO experiences.

Lieutenant Colonel Sullivan identified a differentiation in terms of how the Marine Corps uses FAOs: “Marines generally use FAOs in a more tactical setting—different than what the other Services do.” He said that his experiences have shown that FAO skills have tremendous value at the tactical level. He also said that he was not convinced having an FAO “on staff,” simply as a matter of course, is a good utilization of their skills; they need to be at the division level or below. Furthermore, he feels that individual personality



traits of the FAO, and those directing their employment, are the single greatest determinants of the effect FAOs have on their environment. He contended that much of the time, FAOs may not actually be best suited for strategic-level positions. Marine Corps RAOs can take the staff jobs and do them well. In fact, Sullivan contended that often when people say they “want an FAO” what they really want is an RAO, but they do not know the distinction.

Lieutenant Colonel Sullivan said that due to their language and operational experience, most Marine Corps FAOs have “credibility through the roof.” This can be contrasted with the Army FAO program, where Army FAOs have extensive training and greater in-country experience, but over time—as they serve strictly in FAO-coded (typically embassy) billets—they may begin to lose operational currency because military officers, as they have simply been away from the field too long. Lieutenant Colonel Sullivan contended that with the Marine Corps, operational experience is often essential for being able to advise and win the respect of field commanders. Without respect for the abilities and operational credibility of the FAO providing the information, the commander will have no respect for the information either, and it will go unutilized.

## **B. Conclusion**

These 21 vignettes highlight the diversity of the FAO experience, as well as some of the commonalities. During the interviews, FAOs were asked to address selection and accession, skill acquisition and sustainment, utilization, quality-of-life issues, and career concerns.

As stated in the DODD 1315.17, each Service was directed to create and sustain an FAO program. The directive called for the military departments to develop of “a corps of FAOs” that would provide critical capabilities for meeting national-security objectives.<sup>44</sup> It identified some of the desired capabilities (“foreign language proficiency and detailed knowledge of the regions of the world gained through in-depth study and personal experience”) but did not dictate to the Services how to create these programs. Thus, each Service has a distinct FAO program, with oftentimes different skill-acquisition processes, different management processes, and a lexicon filled with FAO and FAO-like occupational specialties, all of which are confusing within and outside the DOD. As highlighted in these vignettes, the variations across the FAO community reflect more than just Service variations; the variations reflect what specifically each Service wants its FAO community to accomplish. The other factors that we found to be prominent variables included primary branch, regional specialization, the manner of language acquisition, ranks, roles, and missions.

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<sup>44</sup> Department of Defense Directive (DODD) 1315.17, Military Department Foreign Area Officer (FAO) Programs, April 28, 2005.



## 5. Conclusion

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### A. Findings

What has been presented here summarizes the large body of data collected over the course of this effort, including qualitative inputs (from the interviews and focus groups with hundreds of FAOs and RASs), along with the quantitative inputs from a Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC) survey. This report characterizes both the personal dimension of the FAO/RAS experience and the perspectives of their supervisors on the value FAOs represent and also provides a snapshot of the Services' FAO programs as they currently exist.

#### 1. Skill Acquisition

In terms of skill acquisition, FAOs and their supervisors identified the Army FAO program as the “gold standard.” This praise may not be surprising, given that the Army’s is the most mature and largest of the FAO programs (indeed, many interagency supervisors had had limited experience with anything but Army FAOs). Across the board, these stakeholders would not welcome any changes in terms of when Army FAOs are accessed (at the time of the interviews, the accession point was the 7- to 9-year mark) or how their skills are developed (a combination of an advanced degree, language training, and In-Country Training).

#### 2. Assignment Preparation

Organizations make a differentiated investment in assignment preparation for incoming FAOs.

- Those officers who will be assuming billets within the Intelligence establishment, that is, those who will be serving in DIA billets (where they will serve as Defense Attachés) receive preparatory training, including the Joint Military Attaché School and language sustainment training.
- FAOs assuming Security Cooperation assignments attend DISAM, but typically neither they nor their spouses receive additional language training or assistance.

#### 3. Utilization—Filling Billets

Given that the number of FAO billets (demand) exceeds the inventory of trained FAOs (supply):

- Some FAOs have had their skill acquisition sequence interrupted to fill vacant billets.
- In addition, actual FAO-coded billets are left unfilled when FAOs are assigned to billets that are branch immaterial (any officer can be assigned to fill such a requirement), such as many of the individual augmentee billets.
- FAO mis- or under-utilization in branch-immaterial billets tends to limit Service and Department return on investment in the skill acquisition and development of FAOs; such utilization can lead to deterioration of FAO regional-specific skills, including language proficiency. Some commanders of FAOs serving in branch-immaterial billets may not even know how to best utilize FAOs.
- Given the limited supply of FAOs, periodic (perhaps annual) validation of all FAO billets throughout the Department may be merited.

#### **4. FAO Program Management**

While a single-track FAO program may enable FAOs to develop full professional or even bilingual language proficiency, as well as significant expertise in their region, single-track FAOs may face difficulty maintaining contemporary operational relevance as military officers. This seems to be a perception of senior leaders.

#### **5. Leadership and Mentorship**

Service FAO communities would benefit from more proactive senior, flag officer leadership and mentoring. In fact, the FAO community writ large may benefit from a more formalized mentorship program.

#### **6. Reserve Component Programs**

Contrary to spirit of the DOD Instruction, Services do not really offer Reserve Component programs that encompass FAO careers. The lack of such programs prohibits the Department from surging a cadre of trained FAOs for missions when the capacity of the active component is insufficient to meet operational and strategic demands.

#### **7. Strategic Value**

Despite the differences across the landscape of FAOs—including how each community is managed by its Service, the myriad roles and assignments each fills, the regional variations, the range of training and educational opportunities, etc.—these language-enabled, regionally adept, and culturally adroit officers have a number of characteristics in common, which our research suggests are widely valued by their supervisors.

Through both the DMDC survey and interviews, supervisors of FAOs highlighted the strategic value this community represents across an array of operating environments and missions. Supervisors especially highlighted the value FAOs represent in regions where U.S. presence is minimal. Indeed, many of them emphasized that FAOs can enable a small, strategically significant footprint. One noteworthy finding from the survey was that non-FAO supervisors overwhelmingly value FAO products or advice—with 74 percent stating that they are very good or excellent.

## **8. Joint Perspective**

Although their value to their individual Service should not be minimized, FAOs are above all Joint. From the point of their skill acquisition, FAOs routinely serve in Joint billets. FAOs also regularly serve in interagency assignments and as a result possess considerable interagency acumen. Moreover, FAOs generally spend the majority of their careers outside of Service operational formations (i.e., brigades, divisions, carrier air groups, regimental combat teams, air wings).

## **9. Service Perspective**

Given that the majority of FAOs billets are Joint, their strategic value seems to be best understood by Joint and interagency entities. The lack of familiarity that Service senior officers and promotion boards have with FAO roles and missions may affect promotion rates of the “best and most fully qualified” FAOs.

With such long lead times associated with their deliberate skill acquisition, potential for non-rated periods, and unique duty positions that are unlike other officers, FAOs may encounter members of Service promotion boards who may not know in detail what FAOs actually do, what strategic value they represent, and what their unique roles and missions are.

## **10. Proponency**

Concerns regarding DOD FAO proponency surfaced as a frequent theme during the interviews. In particular, stakeholders—FAOs, supervisors of FAOs, and organizations employing FAOs—viewed the organizational location of DOD FAO proponency as potentially problematic. On the one hand, Service FAO proponency typically is located within the strategic planning, operations, or international affairs domains within each military department. This organizational location mirrors where FAOs are assigned within combatant commands and other agencies. On the other hand, while the Joint Staff J-5 and OSD Policy have the largest contingents of serving FAOs, it is the personnel communities of the Joint Staff (J-1) and OSD (P&R) that maintain proponency, in accordance with the DOD directive. Such an alignment means that the Joint Staff does not provide a partner for OSD that can fully address FAO utilization policies, planning

guidance, and processes to ensure “appropriate consideration of FAO requirements on the Joint Staff and within combatant commands in support of daily operational requirements and contingency plans.”<sup>45</sup>

When proponency is located largely in the personnel domain, the focus is on the development and utilization of the individual. Some stakeholders expressed the need for a strong operational proponent, particularly on the Joint Staff. Such a proponent could establish standards for strategic governance and provide oversight on utilization, from the perspective of emerging demands and mission-critical needs. Given that the vast majority of FAO billets are Joint, Joint FAO governance could help ensure optimal utilization of the FAO communities to achieve Joint force and Department needs with regard to existing and emergent demands.

Given that an FAO-like program, AFPAK Hands, became the chairman’s number one priority, it is only prudent that the acknowledged community of language-enabled, regional experts, the FAOs, would also be a priority for the Chairman, with Joint Staff proponency by the J5 Strategic Plans and Policy themselves. Currently, AFPAK Hands proponency falls within the purview of the J5, yet it takes no such role with the FAO community, despite the J5 having the largest pool of the FAOs assigned to the Joint Staff.

The Services’ FAO programs are at different stages of development; what is presented here is a snapshot. FAO programs, whether mature like the Army’s or relatively new like the Navy and Air Force FAO programs, are responsive to changing needs and operational demands. And in every case, each Service is looking for the greatest efficiencies in terms of developing FAOs. In an era of constrained resources, especially given the increasing demand for FAOs, the Services are seeking ways of efficiently augmenting their FAO populations by accessing officers who already possess FAO qualifications without having participated in the formal FAO skill acquisition process.

## **B. Recommendations**

### **Terminology**

In guidance (DODD 1315.17) to the Services regarding FAO programs, the Secretary of Defense should direct the Services use the common designation “FAO.” Service usage of other terms provides a source of confusion for not only the Defense and Joint communities, but also across the Services themselves. As described in DOD guidance, FAOs are to possess specific skills, including professional-level language proficiency. Possession of this skill set is expected for all FAOs when serving in critical

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<sup>45</sup> Department of Defense Instruction 1315.20, Management of Department of Defense (DOD) Foreign Area Officer (FAO) Programs, 28 September 2007, p. 9.

positions outside their military departments. Organizations that employ FAOs expect a certain level of expertise. Officer communities with subsets of FAO attributes who are not language enabled can have different designations (such as the Marine Corps' Regional Affairs Officers).

### **Utilization**

Given the potential for FAOs to be mis- or under-utilized, OSD should consider reviewing utilization policies in coordination with the Joint Staff and the Services. Though improper utilization may indicate that FAO skills are undervalued, it may also be that gaining organizations do not know how to use them or do not actually need FAOs for that specific assignment.

- Given the limited supply of FAOs, a periodic (perhaps annual) validation of all FAO billets throughout the Department may be merited.

### **Mentoring and Leadership**

Service FAO communities would benefit from more proactive senior, flag officer leadership and mentoring.

- There may be benefit in having Service component commanders serve as senior mentors to FAOs assigned to the region.
- The role of the geographic combatant commands and DOD Regional Centers for Security Studies should be linked to FAO skill acquisition.

### **DODD/DODI Compliance and Proponency**

The DOD Directive and corresponding Instructions should be updated and reissued.

- Several of the organizations with specified responsibilities no longer exist (e.g., Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Plans).

The movement of proponency from OSD Policy to OSD Personnel and Readiness in the current version of the Directive creates additional considerations that must be addressed.

- The primary beneficiaries of FAO skills on the Joint Staff and OSD are no longer involved in FAO proponency (J-5 and OSD Policy).
- Proponency for both OSD and the Joint Staff resides in the personnel, and not the strategy, planning, and operational, domains.

DOD should consider a governance construct that includes robust Joint Staff J-5 proponency and partnership

Compliance with the current DOD Directive and Instruction has varied across the Services and organizations identified therein.

- DOD should require that FAOs be certified in terms of their full suite of skill acquisition activities prior to assuming their first FAO billet.
  - With components struggling to find efficiencies during an era of austere budgets, DOD should identify Joint solutions to FAO skill acquisition and sustainment. For example, DOD should consider alternative venues for In-Region Training/In-Country Training experiences as opposed to sending FAOs to assignments with no such experience.
- DOD should require tracking mechanisms that can highlight to the Secretary the extent to which the Department meets the intent and guidance of these documents.
- DOD should address Service noncompliance with the current DOD Directive and Instruction.



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## Acronyms

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AFPAK	Afghanistan-Pakistan
AFRICOM	U.S. Africa Command
AFSC	Air Force Specialty Code
APH	AFPAK Hands
DIA	Defense Intelligence Agency
DISAM	Defense Institute of Security Assistance Management
DLI	Defense Language Institute
DLIFLC	Defense Language Institute-Foreign Language Center
DLNSEO	Defense Language and National Security Education Office
DMDC	Defense Manpower Data Center
DOD	Department of Defense
DODD	Department of Defense Directive
DODI	Department of Defense Instruction
DTRA	Defense Threat Reduction Agency
EUCOM	U.S. European Command
FA	Functional Area
FAO	Foreign Area Officer
FAOA	Foreign Area Officer Association
FAS NCO	Foreign Area Staff Non-Commissioned Officer
HRC	Human Resource Command
IAOP	International Affairs Officer Program
ICT	In-Country Training
IDA	Institute for Defense Analyses
IRT	In-Region Training
JMAS	Joint Military Attaché School
LEAP	Language Enabled Airmen Program
MOS	Military occupational specialty
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NCO	Non-Commissioned Officer
OPNAV	Office of the Chief of Naval Operations
PAS	Political-Military Affairs Strategist
RAO	Regional Affairs Officer
RAS	Regional Affairs Strategist
RASI	Regional Affairs Strategist Immersion
ROTC	Reserve Officers Training Corps
SAF/IA	Office of the Secretary of the Air Force, International Affairs
SCETWG	Security Cooperation Education and Training Working Group

SFAT	Security Force Assistance Training
SOF	Special Operations Forces
SOLO	Special Operations Liaison Officer
SOUTHCOM	U.S. Southern Command
USARAF	U.S. Army Africa
USAF	U.S. Air Force
USMC	U.S. Marine Corps
USSOCOM	U.S. Special Operations Command
VTIP	Voluntary Transfer Incentive Program



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<b>14. ABSTRACT</b> In his December speech delivered at the National Press Club, "The Force of the 21st Century," Secretary of Defense Panetta emphasized the need for a smaller, leaner, agile, and flexible military, adept at building partnership capacity and security cooperation. Panetta's speech echoed and reinforced the January 2012 Defense Strategic Guidance document "Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense." Both this speech and the Defense Strategic Guidance document emphasize the need to cultivate partnerships with other nations. Central among the conventional forces critical in such missions are the Foreign Area Officers (FAOs). The FAO community consists of language enabled, regional experts—Army, Navy, and Marine Corps Foreign Area Officers, as well as the Air Force's Regional Area Strategists. FAOs represent the most concentrated source of foreign language capabilities, cultural and regional expertise in uniform. The Department of Defense Instruction (DODI) 1315.20 requires each of the Services to maintain a FAO program. The variations across the Services include how FAOs are selected, accessed, trained, employed, and managed. This document summarizes IDA's examination of the FAO career path, focusing on the variations across the Services' programs, the professional experiences of FAOs, and their supervisors' perspectives on FAOs' strategic value.						
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