

The Army FAO Training Program: Time to Break More Glass

by

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Abstract

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The unpredictable and more globalized world of the 21st Century requires U.S. Army officers with more language and cultural capabilities. The Army recognizes this need, and has increased authorizations into the Foreign Area Officer (FAO) career field by almost 30% percent over the past 10 years. At the same time, the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and the current fiscal crisis made the Army more aware of the cost in time and money to train FAOs. The Army conducted a review of the FAO Program in 2011, and recommended changes to improve the program. However, the changes implemented in response to the review focused primarily on making FAO training more efficient, not producing more effective FAOs. This paper looks at the history of the FAO training program and the role of the FAO in the 21st century. It then uses the current FAO training cycle to review each phase of FAO training, and proposes recommendations designed to ensure the Army efficiently produces the most effective FAOs.

The Army FAO Training Program: Time to Break More Glass

Language, regional and cultural skills are enduring war fighting competencies that are critical to mission readiness in today's dynamic global environment. Our forces must have the ability to effectively communicate with and understand the cultures of coalition forces, international partners, and local populations.¹

—Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta, August 2011

Department of the Army Pamphlet 600-3 describes Foreign Area Officers (FAOs) as, “regionally focused experts in political-military operations with advanced language skills, cultural understanding and the ability to advise senior military and civilian strategic decision-makers in an era of persistent conflict.”² In today's increasingly globalized world where the Army is more likely to work with and through allies, the Army's need for highly trained FAOs to support future military operations is clear and quantifiable. FAO authorizations grew 29% from 2003 to 2012, and in 2013 FAO accessions will increase by 20%.³ What is less clear is whether the current FAO training program remains the most effective and efficient way to produce FAOs.

In 2010 Major General (MG) Peter Bayer, Director, G-3/5 Strategy, Plans and Policy on the Army staff, directed FAO Proponent to conduct a comprehensive review of the Functional Area 48 (Foreign Area Officer) program. MG Bayer advised FAO Proponent, “(not to be) held back by conventional thinking....break some glass.”⁴ And FAO Proponent did. But not enough, and perhaps not the right glass. The glass they broke made the FAO training program more efficient, but did not make the Army FAO more effective. With MG Bayer's guidance in mind, this paper examines the establishment of the Army FAO program, the genesis and evolution of FAO training, assesses the efficacy of the training, and provides recommendations to improve the

Army FAO training cycle to better meet the needs of the U.S. Army and Department of Defense (DoD) in the 21st Century.

The Establishment of the Foreign Area Officer (FAO)

The genesis of today's FAO program resulted from the success of the WWII Army Language Program. The realization that the Army benefitted from developing officers with a comprehensive knowledge of the language, history, culture and sociology of particular regions and countries led to the establishment of the Foreign Area Specialty Program (FASP). FASP training consisted of three phases: language training, a civilian graduate degree program in regional studies, and in-region training (IRT). The training time varied by region, but in general, initial training required three to four years. Language training ranged from six months to two years, graduate schooling was completed in one year, and IRT, which comprised regional travel, research and study under the direction of the Army or Defense Attaché within the assigned country, ranged from one to two years.⁵ Entry into FASP was voluntary; officers retained their basic branch identities and tended to alternate between FASP and basic branch assignments.

Most FASP-coded billets involved intelligence work, to include assignments as Army attachés in U.S. embassies. The Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence (ACSI) on the Department of Army (DA) staff was responsible for oversight of FASP to include policy development, overseas training and identification and validation of FASP positions. When FASP was established in 1947, the DoD had military attachés in 45 countries. By 1956 DoD would have military attachés in 71 countries, 68 of which were Army, and this number would continue to grow in the 1960s.⁶ Over time FASP became associated with military intelligence. A 1968 Army study showed that 87% of Army FASP billets were in intelligence or intelligence-related activities.⁷ Consequently, those

outside the Military Intelligence community considered FASP a promotion dead end because it resulted in time spent working outside of an officer's basic branch.

The Army's experience in Vietnam in the late 1960s highlighted the need to create more generalist officers with politico-military training and experience. However, major Army commands failed to validate additional FASP positions due to FASP's strong association with intelligence.⁸ The Army realized that it needed to broaden FASP by identifying all positions requiring politico-military skills and ensuring it trained an adequate number of officers to fill these positions.⁹ The Army's 1968 DCSPER Study 40 identified over 2,000 positions requiring politico-military skills, but only a portion of these billets required specific area orientation. These positions included jobs in what are now associated with Civil Affairs, Psychological Operations and Special Forces. In addition, more broad-based jobs, such as assignments to Military Groups (MilGroups), advisory duties in foreign countries, and combined or joint staffs, were identified.¹⁰ As a result, the Army established the Military Assistance Officer Program (MAOP) to meet the demand for increased politico-military trained generalists in 1969.

MAOP consisted of the Army Civil Affairs Special Career Program and encompassed psychological operations and other politico-military positions.¹¹ MAOP focused on aspects of military advisory duty and civic action having social, political or psychological aspects.¹² MAOP had a much less extensive and uniform training requirement than FASP. The core MAOP requirement was a 19-week politico-military course taught at the John F. Kennedy (JFK) Center for Military Assistance at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. Follow-on training such as graduate school or language training was dependant on the position which the MAOP-trained officer would fill.¹³ MAOP met

with initial success, growing from 229 members in 1969 to over 460 members in early 1973. In just four years, MAOP had almost as many members as FASP (580 members).¹⁴

The U.S. Army now had two politico-military career oriented programs. FASP focused on producing officers with linguistic skills and a regional focus, and was driven by intelligence. MAOP focused on developing officers with advisory and civic action skills, and was driven by operations.¹⁵ The two programs were effective and complementary; so much so that in 1972 the Chief of Staff of the Army directed that FASP and MAOP merge into a single, more cohesive management system called the Foreign Area Officer (FAO) Management System. In the merger of these two programs one can see the origins of the two primary roles played by FAOs in embassies today—those of the attaché and the security cooperation officer.

The FAO training program combined the best of the two programs. The FASP standard of 12-month graduate school, language training, and in-country training were maintained, and MAOP's six-month Foreign Area Officer school at the JFK Center at Fort Bragg was added. In theory, the result was the lengthening and standardization of initial training for all FAOs. In practice, from the post-Vietnam era through the mid-1980's, fewer than 50 percent of the Army officers designated as FAOs attended the FAO school at Fort Bragg, and it's estimated that only 20 percent of FAOs received graduate degrees and language training.¹⁶

The disparity in the levels of training among FAOs during this era resulted in a distinction between a trained FAO and a FAO who merely possessed the identifier. Furthermore, the Army wanted FAO training to focus more on creating regional

expertise than on preparing officers for job or country specific positions.¹⁷ These two factors led to the FAO Enhancement Plan of 1985. The FAO Enhancement Plan accomplished four objectives: it streamlined FAO billets from 1300 to 760, assigned FAO proponency to the Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations (DCSOPS), outlined the training requirements for a FAO (language, advanced civil schooling, and in-region training), and established a typical FAO career path.¹⁸ Concurrently, civil affairs and psychological operations were established as separate programs. The latter change led to the elimination of the 40-week Foreign Area Officer Course (FAOC) as initial training for FAOs. In its place the Army established a one-week FAOC at Monterey, California.¹⁹

These changes had a profound impact on the Army FAO program. The reduction in FAO-coded billets reduced yearly FAO accessions from between 250 to 300 officers to 135.²⁰ The lower accession rate enabled the Army to enhance selection criteria by requiring all officers to be “branch qualified” (successful company command) in their basic branch, have acceptable Defense Language Aptitude Battery (DLAB) test scores, possess a bachelor’s degree and pass the Graduate Record Examination (GRE) with scores that would qualify an officer for acceptance at a “prestige university”.²¹ With fewer new FAOs to train annually, the Army also mandated that all FAOs receive the required initial FAO training. The combination of these two changes led to a more talented and better trained Army FAO.

The Army Officer Professional Management System (OPMS) XXI led to another important change to the Army FAO program in 1997. Prior to OPMS XXI, FAOs and other specialty career fields “dual tracked”, i.e., worked in both their basic branch and their career field. For FAOs, the pre-OPMS XXI dual track system required an officer to

spend 36-42 months in initial FAO training, and then immediately serve a tour in their basic branch. Under this system recently trained FAOs' skills atrophied, and officers risked further promotion by subsequently choosing to serve in a FAO billet. OPMS XXI determined that the current Army personnel management system, "requires field-grade officers to do too many different things today for them to excel at any one of them."²² OPMS XXI established four separate career fields in which officers would compete for promotion to ensure the Army's officer corps would have the skills required to meet the challenges of the 21st Century. The Foreign Area Officer career field was placed in the Operations Support career field along with Acquisition officers; FAOs would subsequently compete against other FAOs and Acquisition Corps officers for promotion instead of officers of their basic branch.²³ OPMS XXI eliminated "dual tracking" between FAO positions and operational assignments.

The OPMS XXI changes resulted in increased FAO promotion rates to O-5 and O-6, and the elimination of the dual-track system allowed FAOs to spend more time working in FAO billets. The increased promotion opportunities led to better candidates applying for entry into the FAO program, thus increasing the quality of officers in the FAO career field. The cumulative result of assessing more qualified officers and the increased time spent working in FAO billets led to increased expertise within the FAO community.²⁴

While OPMS XXI looked at ways to better organize the Army's officer corps to meet the needs of the post-Cold War Army, the Joint Force went through a similar experience that would impact the Army FAO community. The Goldwater-Nichols Defense Reorganization Act of 1986 was on its way towards making the individual

services more joint, and the end of the Cold War led to an increase in the non-traditional, peacetime engagement role of the services. The combination of these factors led the Department of Defense to direct the Military Services to develop FAO programs in 1997. For the first time, DoD directed the individual services to develop politico-military officers with language capabilities and a broad range of skills. DoD Directive 1315.17 required each service to develop a FAO program, stating,

military-diplomatic offices at U.S. Embassies and diplomatic posts must be staffed with commissioned officers with a broad range of skills and experiences. The officers also must be versed in politico-military affairs; familiar with the political, cultural, sociological, economic, and geographic factors of the countries and regions in which they are stationed; and proficient in the predominant language(s) of the populations of their resident countries and regions. As well, the DoD Components require officers with similar capabilities to serve in their organizations.²⁵

The DoD Directive tasked the services with specific responsibilities and established specific training guidelines, to include the need for FAOs to have graduate-level education and foreign language skills at the professional level in the predominant language of their region.²⁶ While the need for in-country regional experience was implied in the Directive's guidance those FAOs, "must be.... familiar with the political, cultural, sociological, economic and geographic factors of the countries and regions in which they are stationed", DoD Directive 1315.7 did not mandate an IRT like experience.²⁷ DoD Directive 1315.7 had little impact on the Army's FAO program as it already met the standards laid out in the directive. Long-viewed as the gold standard for providing well-trained FAOs, one can presume that the specific responsibilities outlined in the DoD Directive were modeled after the Army's existing FAO training program.

The most recent major change to the FAO program again came from DoD in the form of a 2005 update to DoD Directive 1315.7. The updated Directive went into more detail than its predecessor, specifically addressing the critical role the FAO plays in war fighting. It stated that it is DoD policy that, “The Combatant Commands shall have the requisite war fighting capabilities to achieve success on the non-linear battlefields of the future. These critical war fighting capabilities include foreign language proficiency and detailed knowledge of the regions of the world gained through in-depth study and personal experience.”²⁸ This shifted the primary role of the FAO from support to military-diplomatic missions overseas to support to the Combatant Commander. While again not specifically mandating IRT-like training, this update required FAOs to, “have familiarity with the political, cultural, sociological, economic, and geographic factors of the countries and regions in which they are stationed.”²⁹ Two years later DoD was more explicit in the need for IRT by requiring FAOs to have served not less than six months (preferably a year) in the country/region of specialty before being certified by their service as a qualified FAO.³⁰

Another significant change in the 2005 Directive and the follow-on Instruction in 2007 required services to provide for language and regional expertise sustainment and refresher training programs throughout the lifecycle career of the FAO.³¹ DoD Instruction 1315.20 issued in 2007 directed the Service Secretaries to certify officers as FAOs in accordance with these minimum standards:

1. The officer must be qualified in their basic branch (grounded in the profession of arms).

2. FAOs must possess a graduate level education in one of several categories focusing on but not limited to political, cultural, economic or sociological factors of their assigned region.
3. FAOs must have, “duty experience of not less than 6 months (preferably a year) in the country/region of specialty involving significant interaction with host nationals and/or host nation entities in the foreign countries or regions which they specialize.”
4. Possess foreign language skills in one or more of the predominant languages used by the people of their assigned region.³²

Furthermore, the DoD Directive directed all services to provide for a career path and develop officers who have opportunities for promotion to General Officer.³³

The shift towards providing more direct FAO support to the Combatant Commander was further cemented in 2008 with the consolidation of Defense Attaché Offices (DAOs) and Offices of Security Cooperation (OSC) under the Senior Defense Official/Defense Attaché (SDO/DATT). The SDO/DATT works directly for the Combatant Commander, which means for the first time all defense related activities in a country, to include intelligence related activities, fall directly under the purview of the Combatant Commander.

Producing the Army FAO for the 21st Century

Three Army FAO training requirements- language training, in-region training (IRT) and advanced civil schooling (ACS) - have remained consistent since the need for regional specialists was first identified in 1947. The generally accepted reason is that this program works, producing generally effective FAOs. In 1989 a Naval officer and FAO at the Naval Post Graduate School conducted a study of the different services

FAO programs. Citing the Army's combination of academic training balanced with experiential learning, he stated that "without doubt" the Army had the best FAO program of all the services, a fact he attributed to the Army's willingness to spend the time and money to train the "ideal" FAO.³⁴ Twenty years later, a 2012 study commissioned by the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness came to a similar conclusion when it determined that, "in terms of basic FAO skill acquisition the Army program... is largely regarded by both supervisors and FAOs alike as the "ideal" or benchmark compared to other services."³⁵ But the Army's FAO training program comes at a high cost in terms of both time and money- costs accepted by the Army since implementation of the reforms initiated by the FAO Enhancement Plan in the late 1980s.

The volatile security environment of the 21st Century highlighted to DoD leadership the increased importance of FAOs. Army FAO requirements increased by 23% from 2003-2008, reflecting the increased importance both DoD and the Army placed on FAOs.³⁶ However, in the midst of fighting two long wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, over the same time period the Army only accessed 50 of the 70 officers required annually to meet future FAO fill requirements.³⁷ Further, in an effort to better utilize FAOs in the on-going wars and to ensure deployment equity among all soldiers, i.e., getting FAOs "into the fight", FAOs increasingly filled Worldwide Individual Augmentation System (WIAS) taskers in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The combination of fewer officers assessing as FAOs and assigning FAOs to non-FAO coded billets in Iraq and Afghanistan led to the Army not filling Joint FAO billets at an increasing rate. 76% of FAO billets are in Joint Commands, and by FY11

FAO fill rates Army-wide were at 79%, down from a 100% fill rate just five years earlier.³⁸ The Army's decreasing ability to fill Joint FAO billets caught senior Army leadership by surprise, and drew attention to the average 40 months of time FAOs spent in Trainees, Transients, Holdees and Students (TTHS) status during their initial training period. More aware of the cost in both time and money to produce a FAO, the Army began to look for ways to reduce FAO TTHS time. But the only way to reduce Army FAO TTHS time is to make changes to one or more of the three foundations of FAO training- language, IRT and ACS. To do so, the Army risks diluting DoD's best FAO program at a time when DoD is placing more emphasis on the importance of Service FAO programs.

The dual pressures of declining military budgets and increasingly complex security challenges require the Army FAO program to produce and develop effective FAOs efficiently. But what is an effective FAO? The Army's FAO Vision is defined as:

Army Foreign Area Officers are Soldiers grounded in the Profession of Arms; who provide leadership and expertise in diverse organizations in joint, interagency, intergovernmental and multinational (JIIM) environments; who advise seniors as regional experts; and who offer unique war fighting competencies- cross-cultural capabilities, interpersonal communications and foreign language skills- that are critical to mission readiness of the Army in today's dynamic strategic environment.³⁹

Brigadier General Tom Cosentino, the Deputy J-5 for the Middle East on the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), provides an example that illustrates the FAO Vision. "FAOs are the ultimate economy of force weapon available to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The U.S. military does not have bases in most countries, but FAOs provide a persistent presence that provides a tether between the host nation and U.S. leadership, particularly during times of crisis. A good FAO's access and engagement with the partner nation sets the conditions during peace time that enables the U.S. to leverage

the relationship in times of need. Never was this more evident than during the lead-up to the June 2012 elections in Egypt.”⁴⁰

FAO Proponent lists six core competencies of the Army FAO. A FAO must be grounded in the profession of arms; possess JIIM leadership and expertise; and have regional expertise, a cross-cultural capability, and interpersonal communication and foreign language skills.⁴¹ The Army developed a FAO Training cycle to ensure all FAOs develop the required core competencies. Army FAO Proponent classifies FAO training into six pillars.⁴² (See Figure 1 below.)



Figure 1: ⁴³

The end state of the FAO training program is to develop a fully qualified FAO Colonel.⁴⁴

The paper will now assess each of these six pillars, and recommend ways to make them more efficient and/or effective.

Joint FAO Course, Phase I

This one-week course is “FAO 101”. It introduces FAOs from every service to the roles and responsibilities of the FAO. The course is conducted bi-annually at DLI in Monterey, CA and annually in the Washington, D.C. area. The course is generally perceived as effective and important in preparing new FAOs for their new career field; it is a week’s worth of time and money well spent. The Joint FAO Course Phase I warrants no further discussion in this paper.

Language Training

FAOs receive language training in at least one of the predominant languages in their assigned area of concentration (AOC). FAOs are assigned specialties in nine different AOCs: Latin America (48B), Europe (48C), South Asia (48D), Eurasia (48E), China (48F), Middle East/North Africa (48G), Northeast Asia (48H), Southeast Asia (48I), and Sub-Saharan Africa (48J).⁴⁵ (The remainder of this paper uses the terms AOC and region interchangeably when referring to one of the nine AOCs/regions.) Language training ranges in duration from six to 18 months, depending upon the level of difficulty of the targeted language. The more difficult languages (Chinese and Arabic) require up to 18 months of training, while the Romance languages (French, Italian, etc.) only require five months of initial training. Initial language training is designed to produce a FAO with a minimum language proficiency of General Professional Proficiency, Interagency Level Roundtable (ILR) Level 2/2/1+ (Reading, Listening, and Speaking).⁴⁶ An officer must achieve the minimum language proficiency during this entry-level training in order to continue in the FAO program.

FAO Proponent considers a language skill one of the six core competencies of the FAO, and foreign language skills are an increasingly valued skill for a military officer

in the 21st century. Outgoing Supreme Allied Commander Europe, Admiral James Stavridis, recently stated as much while singing the praises of FAOs and suggesting that perhaps all U.S. officers should speak a second language.⁴⁷ Yet despite the Army's upfront investment in language training, Army FAOs do not adequately maintain their language skills. The Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) requires all attachés to score a Level 3 on the General Professional Proficiency ILR language test in the language of the country to which they are assigned. In 2011 only 45% of FAOs met this standard.⁴⁸ A 2011 review of FAO Officer Record Briefs (ORBs) showed that only 38% of FAOs had tested on the Defense Language Proficiency Test (DLPT) within the past year.⁴⁹ The low rate of annual DLPT testing among FAOs suggests a degradation of language skills among FAOs, since FAOs who have maintained or improved their language skills are incented to take the DLPT annually in order to receive Foreign Language Proficiency Pay (FLPP). If language is a core competency for a FAO, why does this happen? More importantly, if language skills are so important and Army FAOs are so bad at maintaining theirs, why are Army FAOs considered so good?

Language degradation occurs for myriad reasons, and differs by region. First and foremost, learning a second language is not easy, and it's a perishable skill. During initial language training a FAO is 100% engaged in learning the targeted language for six to 18 months, and most FAOs diligently apply themselves to the task. Upon completion of initial language training the FAO is well-trained in the basics of his target language. However, without constant use language skills atrophy. Ideally, a new FAO will go from initial language training to an 18-month graduate school program, where they take advanced language classes, followed by a 12-month IRT assignment

immersed in their target language. In such a model, the FAO should be able to build the required base in their target language to maintain the language throughout their career as a FAO. In practice, this rarely happens. First, timing, funding and previous qualifications force newly accessed FAOs to conduct language training, ACS, and IRT in random rather than sequential order. Second and most importantly, many IRT sites do not provide language immersion opportunities. An example from the Sub-Saharan Africa (48J) AOC highlights the latter problem.

AR 600-3 lists 28 countries as part of the Sub-Saharan Africa (48J) AOC; of these 28 countries, 14 are English-speaking, 11 French-speaking and three Portuguese-speaking. As a result, French is the primary foreign language learned by 48J FAOs. In 2012 11 new 48J FAOs conducted IRT. Of these 11 FAOs, less than half (five) were assigned to locations in Africa where they would be immersed in either French (four) or Portuguese (one). The other seven IRT FAOs were assigned to either English-speaking African countries (two), or they conducted IRT from Italy while based at U.S. Army Africa (two) or Washington, DC while assigned to the Africa Center for Strategic Studies (two).

The problem is compounded because follow-on assignment timelines require most officers to conduct permanent change of station (PCS) moves during the summer. The summer assignment cycle can pose problems for an AOC such as 48B (Latin America), 48C (Europe), and 48J (Sub-Saharan Africa). First, it adds unnecessary TTHS time to the FAOs training program. And in the case of 48Js, it is often counter-productive to learning their targeted language. It is not uncommon for a 48J FAO to learn Portuguese while the officer awaits the normal summer rotation cycle after

graduating from the five-month French language course. Not only does learning Portuguese after “learning” French make the retention of either language more difficult, the officer also has less than a 50% chance of being assigned to an IRT site where he will be immersed in either language. So while the new FAO has been trained in two languages, without the IRT immersion experience it will be difficult for most officers to maintain their language proficiency in either language.

A related problem is that some regions speak many different languages, so even if a FAO receives initial language training and conducts IRT in an immersion environment, the officer may never again be assigned to a job in the language they were trained in. The 48C (Europe) AOC best illustrates this problem. DA PAM 600-3 lists 39 countries in the 48C AOC, and these countries have 23 different primary languages.⁵⁰ Only three of the 23 languages are spoken in more than two countries- French (3), German (4), and Serbo-Croat (5). In FY12, 11 48Cs will attend IRT in ten different countries in the AOC, but only two officers will learn French, and one officer will learn German. The remaining eight officers- over 70% of the FAO 48C cohort- will learn a language and conduct IRT in a language only spoken in one country in the 39 country AOR. Is it realistic to expect 48Cs to maintain the language skills they learned during language training? Is it even necessary for all 48Cs to conduct initial language training?

An example from the region illustrates the point. A current 48C O-6 learned Polish during initial language training and conducted IRT in Poland. The officer has never served in Poland, but subsequently served a tour as the SDO/DATT in Albania, and will likely be assigned to a Spanish or French speaking country next. How did the officer learn Albanian prior to serving as the SDO/DATT? DIA provided him four months

of language training prior to his assignment. How will the officer learn Spanish or French prior to his next assignment? In a similar manner, or he will speak English and/or use an interpreter. Similar situations exist in South Asia (48D) and Southeast Asia (48I AOR).⁵¹

The Southeast Asia region (48I) is comprised of 25 countries; 146 Army 48I FAOs currently speak 11 different languages. But only five of the 11 languages are spoken by more than ten officers: Indonesian, Malay, Filipino, Vietnamese and Thai.⁵² Of these five countries, English is the co-national language in the Philippines, a strong second language in Malaysia, and the second language and growing in importance at a rapid rate in Vietnam. Even the Asian countries in the region recognize the importance of English; English is the official language of the most important regional organization, the Association of Southeast Asia Nations (ASEAN), to which Indonesia and Thailand are both members.⁵³ Do we need to send *all* 48I FAOs to initial language training?

The examples just described raise the question of whether language is a FAO core competency or just an enabler. In the *Lexus and the Olive Tree*, Thomas Friedman describes how today's world is much more globalized than in the past, and that to understand international relations foreign policy practitioners must think globally, not regionally.⁵⁴ And English is the language of choice for much of the world. In Africa, seven of the eight Army O-6 billets are in English-speaking countries. English is the official language of NATO. As one travels across the Pacific, English is the national language in many countries, and widely spoken in most.

Yet FAO regional alignment remains mired in the Cold War construct.⁵⁵ LTG (ret) Michael Vane stated that it was only after dealing with FAOs that he realized that a FAO

is really a strategist, not a linguist. On a daily basis, FAOs are required to understand and articulate U.S. strategy. Language is an enabler, not the skill. “FAO Proponent should de-emphasize the FAO as a linguist and define language ability for what it really is, an enabler. A soldier might speak a language, but unless he has solid political, military, and strategic knowledge, he is useless as an advisor. The reverse is not necessarily true, however.”⁵⁶

Even in regions where language skills are required to conduct the FAO mission (Latin America, China, and Middle East), the “language as an enabler” argument has merit. The question is not whether a FAO needs language skills, but which languages a FAO should speak, and what is the best way for a FAO to acquire and retain the required language skills. Yet the 2011 FAO Review’s only recommendation was to research and develop a system to ensure FAOs maintain and annually document their language proficiency.⁵⁷ In the area of language training, the FAO Survey broke no glass, despite evidence that our current language training program is not producing FAOs who meet DoD’s language requirements. Changes can and should be made to the FAO language training program to make it more efficient (less time and money spent) and effective (more qualified linguists).

Recommendation #1: Do not Provide Initial Language Training to All FAOs

Language is an enabler; all FAOs do not require language training to become effective FAOs. The importance and predominance of foreign language skills within each region should drive the number of FAOs that receive initial language training. For example, all 48Bs (Latin America), 48Es (Eurasia), 48Fs (China), 48Gs (Middle East), and 48Hs (Northeast Asia) should receive initial language training. All 48Cs (Europe), 48Ds (South Asia), 48Is (Southeast Asia), and 48Js (Sub-Sahara Africa) should not.

The AOCs that do not send all FAOs to initial language training must identify the languages and number of officers that must be trained annually. For example, six of 11 48Cs may receive initial language training, and those six would receive training in French, German or Serbo/Croat. Five of 10 48Js may receive language training, with four learning French and the other learning Portuguese. If a FAO cannot conduct language training *and* IRT in the language, then that FAO should not receive language training. Non-language trained FAOs will not be limited in future assignments. If the FAO is nominated to serve in a country where language is required, the FAO will be sent to language training at that time. The “just in time” language training model proposed above is not unique; it is the way the Department of State trains its Foreign Service Officers, and its similar to how language training is currently provided to European FAOs.⁵⁸ If implemented, this change will reduce both TTHS time and the cost of initial FAO training, with little to no impact on a FAO’s effectiveness. Resistance to this proposal will be couched in “fairness”. But becoming more efficient in how we provide FAO training while retaining FAO effectiveness requires difficult decisions. This change is in the best interest of the Army.

Recommendation #2. Increase Efforts to Ensure IRT Provides a Language Immersion Opportunity

To build life-long language capability for those selected for language training, immersion training must reinforce initial language training. If it is not possible to conduct IRT in a target language, mandate that the new FAO conduct a long-term internship in an immersion environment sometime during IRT. FAO Proponent must define what qualifies as an “immersion environment” for this program to be effective, i.e., working in the Embassy of a country that speaks the target language is not necessarily an

immersion environment. This recommendation will be expensive, but is worth the cost in order to retain the recently learned language skills.

Recommendation #3. Do Not Teach a FAO More Than One Language at a Time

Do not teach a second language until an officer has mastered his target language. This simple change will reduce TTHS and improve language skills in the FAO's target language.

In-Region Training (IRT)

During IRT FAOs are expected to conduct extensive familiarization travel throughout their assigned region in order to attain first-hand knowledge of national and regional cultures, geography, political-military environments, economies, and societal differences. IRT is normally 12 months in duration, and during this time period FAOs are expected to improve their language capabilities to the general professional proficiency level (level 3).⁵⁹ The purpose of IRT has changed little over the years.⁶⁰

The Army continues to exceed DoD's expectation for IRT. Most Army FAOs receive 12 months of IRT, which is six months more than the DoD directed minimum standard. However, in many cases IRT does not meet the Army standards set out in AR 600-3. AR 600-3 states that, "IRT is designed to immerse the officer... in the local language and culture of their assigned AOC.... (IRT) is designed to provide advanced language studies and develop in-depth knowledge of the region through a program of travel, research, and self-study." While IRT succeeds in providing FAOs with the opportunity to travel extensively in their region- and this is important- for reasons explained earlier it often falls short in providing advanced language training. Furthermore, most IRT FAOs conduct little research, and "self-study", when conducted, normally equates to professional readings on their region.

The variation in the IRT experience between and within AOCs partially accounts for these failures. For example, a Eurasian (48E) FAO may spend 18 months at the George C. Marshall Regional Center in Garmisch, Germany, while a Sub-Sahara Africa (48J) IRT FAO could spend a year working for a Defense Attaché in a country in Africa, assigned to the Security Cooperation Division at the ASCC, or as an intern at the Africa Center for Strategic Studies (ACSS) in Washington, DC. Another factor is that the IRT FAO often works for an already overwhelmed SDO/DATT or OSC Chief, and thus gets less supervision, guidance and mentorship than expected. The end result is that while IRT provides an invaluable experience in exposing junior FAOs to their region and preparing them for future assignments, in practice IRT is more like on-the-job (OJT) training than formal training.

The 2011 FAO Review illustrates this dynamic within the “cornerstone of the FAO Basic Leader Development Program.”⁶¹ The review identified a gap in FAO training-information from the field indicated that new FAOs were not familiar with security cooperation planning and activities.⁶² In response, the FAO Review recommended that IRT priorities include language proficiency and three directed internships of two to three months in duration. The internships will be conducted in the Defense Attaché Office (DAO), the Office of Security Cooperation (OSC), and at the Army Service Component Command (ASCC). The purpose of the internship at the ASCC is to better understand security cooperation.⁶³ But because IRT is conducted in so many different locations and under the tutelage of different FAOs, in reality the FAO Review’s “directive” to conduct three internships during IRT is more like a recommendation. Furthermore, time and budget constraints mean these recommendations are rarely followed.

Recommendation #4. Make the Senior Army FAO at Each Army Service Component Command (ASCC) Responsible for IRT Oversight Within the ASCC's Region

FAO Proponent provides good guidance, direction and support to IRT FAOs. However, the IRT program would benefit from more structure and oversight from a senior FAO from each AOC. The ASCC provides the perfect venue to provide this oversight. Assign the senior FAO at each ASCC, by doctrine the Chief of the Security Cooperation Directorate (SCD), responsibility for oversight of IRT training as part of his official duty description. This change provides four benefits. First, it further standardizes and formalizes the IRT experience within each region. Second, it adds an additional layer of oversight and assistance to the already overburdened DAOs and OSCs currently responsible for assisting the IRT FAO. Third, it provides a forum for a senior FAO within the AOC to serve as a mentor for newly assessed FAOs. Finally, it directly involves the ASCC in the development of future Army FAOs. This latter benefit is significant as it will raise awareness within the Army of the importance of the IRT program to the development of the younger generation of Army FAOs, as well as showcasing the quality of our young FAOs to Army senior leaders. (The term "senior leaders" refers to officers of the grade O-6 and higher.) U.S. Army Africa and U.S. Army Pacific are implementing a modified version of this proposal at this time.

An argument against this proposal is that it is only as good as the senior FAO at each ASCC. This is a fair criticism. But this is no worse than the current system which relies on numerous different officers in the same manner, many of whom lack the time and experience to effectively manage and mentor an IRT FAO. The senior FAO at the ASCC likely has multiple tours in region, and by the nature of his current position has

planning experience at either the Combatant Command or ASCC level. This broad range of experiences enables a holistic approach to FAO development.

Advanced Civil Schooling

One reason the Army's FAO program is seen as the Gold-standard among service FAO programs is that since the 1985 FAO Enhancement Plan, the Army has consistently devoted the time and money to send FAOs to 18-month graduate degree producing institutions. As a result, the DoD Directives to the Services in the late 1990s and subsequent decade did not impact graduate school training for Army FAOs. Approved graduate studies programs for FAOs include: international relations, area studies, international economics, international security studies, geography, geopolitics, government, regional history, military arts and sciences, national security studies, political science, and social science.⁶⁴

The 20% increase in FAO accessions over the next several years coupled with the more austere fiscal environment puts pressure on the FAO ACS program. The increase in FAO assessments to make up for the lean years in the mid-2000's led to more FAOs requiring graduate school training in 2012. Faced with a lack of funds to pay for the cost of additional graduate degrees and the requirement to fill FAO billets in the field, the Army made the unusual decision to delay graduate school for a portion of the new FAOs until *after* they completed their initial FAO assignment. However, with the Army's ACS budget projected to be halved within the next three to five years, this temporary move may appear more like robbing Peter to pay Paul when the FAOs who deferred graduate school are scheduled to attend along with the normal annual assessment of FAOs in 2014.⁶⁵

The Army made two significant changes to the FAO ACS program within the past two years in an effort to manage the fiscal challenges addressed above and to reduce FAO TTTH time. First, the 2011 FAO Review reduced FAO ACS programs to 12 months starting in FY 2012, citing “little to no empirical data that suggests that FAOs are at a disadvantage if they attend a 12 month graduate program”.⁶⁶ A more subtle change occurred in February 2013 when FAO ACS requirements were changed to only require FAOs to possess “a graduate degree from an accredited university.”⁶⁷ The justification for the more general ACS requirements was that it “allows FAO Proponent and HRC the flexibility to ensure new FAOs are trained to an appropriate standard while providing leverage in the fiscal environment.”⁶⁸ The elimination of specific graduate degrees to meet the FAO ACS requirement and the phrase “providing (the Army) leverage in the fiscal environment” implies that the Army may access officers into the FAO program with an advanced degree in any field of study from any accredited institution, to include an on-line degree-producing program.

These two changes lessen the amount of time Army FAOs spend in graduate education programs and broaden the types of graduate degrees officers must possess to become a FAO. Furthermore, the reduction of graduate school from 18 to 12 months will make it difficult for a FAO to maintain their language skills during graduate school, as the decreased timeline for obtaining their degree requires an increased academic workload. (AR 600-3 states that FAOs are required to maintain or improve their language capabilities while attending ACS.⁶⁹)

While these changes broke some glass, both target making FAO training more efficient, not developing more effective FAOs. In fact, both changes will likely diminish

the effectiveness of FAOs. While the Army technically remains in compliance with current DoD requirements for FAO graduate level education, the Army FAO graduate program is less than what it once was and likely faces more challenges in the future.

Recommendation #5. Conduct More Detailed Study on the Efficacy of 18 Month Verse 12 Month ACS Programs

Reducing ACS from 18 months to 12 months reduces time spent in TTHS and saves the Army ACS dollars. The Army is justified in looking into gaining efficiencies in FAO training time and dollars through reducing the amount of time a FAO spends in graduate school. However, the 2011 FAO review was a broad, general review which calls into question the depth and scope of the study that determined that long-term FAO effectiveness will not be diminished by reducing ACS to 12 months.

What is indisputable is that the Army is reducing the amount of time FAOs spend in graduate school at the same time both the Army and DoD recognize the increasing importance of having more officers with language skills and cross-cultural competencies. Experience and training prepare us for what we know; education prepares us for what we do not. Army FAOs are the senior U.S. Defense officials in 71 countries across the world, and in this capacity are required to understand numerous nuanced, strategic issues on an almost daily basis.⁷⁰ The proper type of Advanced Civil Schooling is an invaluable tool for preparing FAOs to meet the challenges associated with working in the increasingly complex JIIM environment. This issue requires more focused study before it is accepted as permanent Army policy. In the interim, when possible the best FAOs from within each AOC should attend an 18-month program. (Note. This reinforces the advantages of the senior FAO at the ASCC being

responsible for IRT oversight. The senior FAO at the ASCC should be able to identify the best young FAOs and target them for 18-month ACS programs.)

Recommendation #6. Judiciously Access Officers into the FAO Program Who do not Possess Graduate Degrees from Traditionally Accepted Areas and Programs.

FAOs are required to operate independently in a JIIM environment, often in a foreign language. The FAO ACS program requires certain graduate degrees specifically listed in DA PAM 600-3 in order to ensure that the FAO possesses the right skills to operate effectively in any environment. Waiving the FAO graduate degree standard in order to reduce either the time and/or cost required to train a new FAO could have long-term impacts on the quality of the FAO program.

Intermediate Level Education (ILE)

FAO Proponent considers ILE a training pillar because it provides FAOs the opportunity to “re-green” in the profession of arms. Since ILE training is not specific to FAOs, this paper will not address it further.

Sustainment

Sustainment is the last of the six pillars of FAO training, and comprises three distinct components- language sustainment, advanced FAO skills sustainment, and ensuring a breadth and depth of assignment. The first five training pillars are completed at around an officer’s 10th year of service, and usually prior to a FAO’s first assignment as a FAO. The Army provided no additional FAO-specific training beyond initial training until 2012.

The only additional FAO-specific training provided to FAOs prior to 2012 was conducted at the Joint level in conjunction with preparation for a specific assignment. The Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) conducts a mandatory four-month long Joint

Military Attaché School (JMAS) for all FAOs prior to assignment as an attaché, and provides FAOs with initial and refresher language training as required. The Defense Institute of Security Assistance Management (DISAM) provides two to three weeks of security assistance training to all FAOs assigned to a security assistance billet. Outside of this additional training, a FAO was expected to maintain and improve his craft through self-study and on-the-job training. However, DoD recognized the need for some type of formal FAO skill sustainment program and recently initiated FAO skills and language sustainment programs.

Language

It is difficult for an individual to sustain a foreign language capability. The 2005 DoD Directive 1315.17 identified a training gap in the Services FAO programs- the Army and other Services did not provide language or skill sustainment training to its FAOs.⁷¹ In support of the Directive's assessment, a 2011 joint service report to DoD showed that only 45% of DoD's over 2000 FAOs possess the Defense Intelligence Agency's (DIA) required language ILR proficiency of 3/3/3.⁷² The Defense Language and National Security Education Office (DLNSEO) is in the second year of providing direct funding to the services for language sustainment. The first tranche of these funds were provided late in FY 2012 and as a result were not widely used. 190 Army FAOs are expected to use slightly over \$1 million for a wide variety of language sustainment programs in FY 2013. The training will range from long term programs (once per week for a year), intensive one-on-one training in CONUS, and up to four weeks of training in immersion programs in region. Major Commands will administer individual budgets and approve individual training programs.

Recommendation #7. Garner Senior Army Leader Support for FAO Language Sustainment

Language maintenance training for Army FAOs should be looked at as pilot refresher training is for Army aviators. However, most senior Army leaders do not speak a foreign language, and many do not appreciate the importance of speaking a language or of the difficulty in maintaining it. This was evident during the rollout of the language sustainment program in 2012. The FAO language sustainment training required no additional funding- it required only that the officers' assigned units provide them the opportunity to participate in the program. However, examples abound of senior leaders resisting or not allowing FAOs to participate in what the senior leaders perceived as a "boondoggle." FAO Proponent should formalize the importance of supporting the language sustainment program by having the Army G-3 annually send a letter to the Major Army Commanders informing them of the importance of the program, and asking for their support in its implementation.

Joint FAO Course Phase II

DoD established the Joint FAO Skills Sustainment Pilot Program (JFSSPP) in 2010. The JFSSPP provided two weeks of region specific FAO refresher training to senior FAOs (O-5s and O-6s) from each AOC. The first week provided an academic perspective and addressed region-specific current events and issues, while the second week revolved around field study in a chosen country within each region. The training was offered annually to around 20 FAOs from within the DoD community, with the Army receiving approximately ten slots to each iteration of the course.

However, implementation of the two-week JFSSPP was problematic. First, it was unclear what FAO skills the JFSSPP was designed to sustain. More importantly, the

length of the course (two weeks) coupled with the voluntary nature of the program made it difficult to attract the senior FAOs the JFSSPP targeted. The Army was unable to fill its seat quota for several iterations of the JFSSPP, and in many instances those who did attend were more junior FAOs. The pilot program ran for three years, and in 2013 it became an official DoD program and was renamed the Joint FAO Course Phase II. The Joint FAO Course Phase II is now a one week course designed to provide a “deep dive” on a regional issue to senior (LTC and COL) FAOs. FAO Proponent will select officers to attend on a volunteer basis.⁷³ Due to funding concerns, the Joint Phase Course Phase II is on hold until at least April 2013 pending funding.⁷⁴

Recommendation 8. Select FAOs to Attend the Joint FAO Course Phase II Instead of Asking for Volunteers

The Joint FAO Course Phase II should be mandatory training for senior Army FAOs. The Army provides no FAO-specific training to its FAOs after initial FAO training, so this training should be important. FAO Proponent should develop a timeline that identifies at what point in a FAO’s career they should receive the FAO skills sustainment training, and then direct FAOs to attend by name. Formalizing the selection process ensures that the right officers attend, which improves the quality of the training. Second, an order to attend elevates the importance of the training, which again raises awareness among senior Army leadership of the importance of maintaining FAO skills. Allowing FAOs to attend the Joint FAO Course Phase II on a volunteer basis sends the message that the training is not important.

Recommendation 9. Better Define the Advanced FAO Skills the Joint FAO Course Phase II is Designed to Sustain and/or Develop

The Joint FAO Course Phase II provides an important opportunity to focus on advanced FAO skills sustainment. However, DoD must first identify the skills senior

FAOs need to sustain and/or develop. While helpful, a one week “deep dive” in a region is not skill sustainment; at the O-6 level, most FAOs are capable of teaching a one-week regional course. Although the Army does not own the Joint FAO course, the Army provides the most FAOs to the joint community and is recognized as having the premier FAO program. FAO Proponent can and should influence the content of the Joint FAO Course to ensure it meets the needs of the Army FAO. Since FAOs are strategists with little formal training in the field, focusing this one-week course on strategy development for senior leaders is one possibility.

FAO Developmental Experience

Experience matters- and the only way to get experience is to get experience. Experience is the primary tool the Army relies on to develop its FAOs after the 10th year of service. Accordingly, DA PAM 600-3 states that FAO field grade officers at the rank of Major and Lieutenant Colonel focus “on their technical competencies through breadth and depth of FAO assignments.... FAOs should complete at least one assignment from three of (the following) five categories before promotion to colonel.”⁷⁵ The five categories of assignments are described as: U.S. country team, Army operational, Political-military, Institutional and Broadening.

While the Army expends a considerable amount of time and money in initial FAO training, the 2011 FAO Review identified that only 60% of FAOs meet DA PAM 600-3 guidance of working in three of the five assignment categories prior to their O-6 primary zone.⁷⁶ The report goes on to say that, “there is no empirical evidence that not meeting the guidelines as outlined in DA PAM 600-3 affects FAO *promotions* or *assignments*.”⁷⁷ The FAO Review recommended that HRC analyze past promotion boards to further study whether breadth or depth of assignments played an important role in FAO

promotions. If not, disturbingly the FAO Review recommended FAO Proponent consider removing the requirement from DA PAM 600-3.⁷⁸

The FAO Review's proposed solution is a remedy for the wrong problem. The reason DA PAM 600-3 encourages FAOs to have a broad range of assignments is not to ensure individual officers are more competitive for promotion to O-6, but as a means to ensure the FAOs promoted to O-6 possess the depth and breadth of experiences to perform successfully at the more demanding and strategic level required of a colonel. A broad range of FAO assignments is not the endstate, but the means for FAOs to gain the experiential learning required to perform in successively more demanding positions.

Two recently retired senior Army officers, GEN Kip Ward and LTG Michael Vane, both argued in separate articles for *broader* and *more general* assignments for senior FAOs, not less.⁷⁹ By virtue of their education and experiences, FAOs are among the Army's best strategic thinkers, and the assignment process must position them to link their regional experience to shape broader U.S. strategic goals.⁸⁰ FAO Proponent's stated goal of the FAO training cycle is to produce a fully qualified FAO Colonel- and they are succeeding.⁸¹ However, the product- a FAO colonel- is not employed as effectively as it should be.

If the end goal of the FAO training cycle is to produce a fully qualified FAO colonel for the Army, one would expect the Army to have a plan for how to best utilize and retain this asset. Unfortunately, that is not the case. DA PAM 600-3 is conspicuously quiet on the subject of colonels, referring to colonels only once in stating that their FAO skills are "refined as the officer moves into the senior leader level at the rank of colonel."⁸² The lack of a plan for employment of FAO colonels is compounded

by the legacy manner in which FAO colonel billets are allocated. FAO billets allocated at a time when the U.S. strategic imperative was to contain the spread of communism no longer meet the U.S. strategic objectives of today.

But FAO talent management is conducted poorly at the O-6 level primarily for three reasons: a Cold War billet structure, an inordinate emphasis on regionalism, and a timing-based assignment policy. A closer look at each area will show why this occurs.

1.) Cold War billet structure. There are 162 FAO colonel billets in the Army, of which 159 are coded by AOC. (Only three colonel billets are classified as 48x, i.e., can be performed by any FAO colonel regardless of region.) Historically growing additional FAO billets, particularly at the O-6 level, is difficult because it requires either Congressional approval (adding additional structure to the Army) or the recoding of an existing O-6 Army billet to a FAO position. Since neither of these options is easily achieved, creating “new” FAO billets is normally a zero sum game: if one AOC gains a FAO O-6 billet, another must lose a FAO O-6 billet. The creation of AFRICA Command (AFRICOM) in 2007 highlights the problem. The creation of AFRICOM led to the establishment of a new Combatant Command and ASCC, both of which required FAO O-6s to man their headquarters. Furthermore, the increased importance of Africa as evidenced by the decision to establish AFRICOM warranted the establishment of several new O-6 positions at Embassies in Africa. To create these “new” O-6 billets, existing O-6 FAO billets were moved from other AOCs.⁸³

A FAO force structure developed during the Cold War and years of adjustments conducted in this manner resulted in a legacy O-6 billet structure that does not best allocate FAO colonels. The 2011 FAO review recognized this problem, and considered

whether Army FAOs are where they need to be in sufficient quantities and qualities (quality defined as by AOC).⁸⁴ The FAO Review found that there are only three FAO colonel billets on the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), and only nine in the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD).⁸⁵ These 12 billets are comprised of only five of the nine FAO AOCs, meaning four AOCs have no FAO representation on either the JCS or OSD staffs. FAO representation on Army staffs is similarly lacking. The Army staff only has three FAO colonel billets, and five AOCs are not represented at the O-6 level on a theater Army staff.⁸⁶

To remedy the problem, the FAO Review recommended another review conducted in conjunction with JCS and OSD to ensure full coverage of all regions by Army FAOs. But this is not a new problem, and further study is unlikely to find a solution. The problem will only be solved when senior Army leadership identifies it as a problem and takes action to implement change. In this instance, the FAO Review properly identified a problem, but did not break the glass required to fix it.

2.) Inordinate emphasis on regionalism. FAOs are promoted to colonel on the “best athlete” model- rightly so in the author’s mind- but are subsequently assigned according to their designated AOC. The discrepancy between the difference in FAO requirements at the O-5 and O-6 level creates a problem that is best illustrated using the 48E (Eurasia) AOC. 48E has the highest number of FAO O-5 billets (68), but only has 15 billets at the O-6 level. As a result, 48Es are disproportionately promoted to colonel; 48Es are currently over 300% strength at the colonel level (47 officers for 15 billets).⁸⁷

The rigid manner in which the Army assigns FAOs by region exacerbates the problem. GEN Ward recognized this when he commanded Africa Command, and advocated vocally for more generalism among FAOs. A FAO doctrine that promotes generalism at the O-6 level allows the DoD to leverage the skills FAOs learned during previous assignments to where they are most needed.⁸⁸ GEN Ward felt that a regional focus, “has the disadvantage of both constraining career paths of officers.... and limiting the ability of realigning FAOs as the strategic environment changes.”⁸⁹ *Regional expertise is just one of the six FAO core competencies, not the raison d’etre for a FAO.* Senior FAOs agree; the 2011 FAO Review showed that almost 70% of FAO colonels felt qualified to serve in any AOC, and that there had been minimal impact from officers serving outside their AOR at the O-6 level.⁹⁰

Yet the Army continues to strictly enforce assignments by AOC, even at the colonel level. The issue is particularly acute for SDO/DATT positions; even when language is not a factor, the Army prioritizes assigning FAOs to SDO/DATT positions by AOC. For example, in the 48J AOC (Sub-Saharan Africa) there are five FAO colonel billets coming open this summer, but only two FAO 48J colonels are available for assignment. Three of the billets are SDO/DATT positions, two of which are in English speaking countries, and there is one billet at Africa Command and the other at OSD. Prioritizing filling the SDO/DATT billets means that the Combatant Command and OSD billets will be filled by FAOs from a different region. This is not the first year this situation occurred. The cumulative result is that despite the allocation of three 48J O-6 billets at OSD and at the Combatant Command, all six of these billets will be filled by FAOs from different AOCs in 2013. Despite the 2011 FAO review that identified the

importance of creating and manning senior colonel positions by AOC at OSD and the Combatant Commands, guidance to man SDO/DATT positions by AOC regardless of language requirements limits the Army's ability to best fill the positions.

3.) Timing based assignment policy. FAO colonels are assigned to billets based primarily on timing and their AOC, not based on their experiences or the importance of the billet. A promotable lieutenant colonel is on par with a senior colonel when it comes to assignments. An example best illustrates the type of problems that can occur with the combination of an AOC and timing-based assignment process. Within the past year a FAO colonel approaching the 28-year mark of his career contacted SLD about available positions. The officer had been an SDO/DATT for the previous four years, and wanted to find a position that would allow him to best use his previous skills and experiences. The officer was told that he worked in a shortage AOR, and had to accept a job within his AOR. However, in his AOR the only position available other than another SDO/DATT job required him to replace an officer on his first tour as a colonel. The officer retired instead.

While anecdotal and relatively minor, this example highlights the manner in which FAOs are utilized and assigned at the O-6 level also affects retention. Since FY04, FAO O-6 average years of service has dropped an entire year, from 28.1 to 27.1. During the same time period, the Army Active Component (ACC) average O-6 retirement age has risen from 26.7 to 26.9 years. Furthermore, both trends appear to be moving in the opposite direction; for the last three years the FAO O-6 retirement age has been trending down, while the ACC retirement age has been trending up.⁹¹ If the goal of the FAO training cycle is to produce FAO colonels for the Army, it follows that

the Army should want to retain FAO colonels as long as possible. This makes sound economic sense given the high start up costs of training a young FAO and the value of an experienced, well-trained senior FAO to the Army. Diverse FAO assignments at the O-4 and O-5 level are not an ends in themselves, but rather the means to develop FAO Colonels with the depth and breadth of experiences required to perform at the strategic level. However, the Army does not manage FAO Colonels in a manner that maximizes their skills and experience.

Recommendation #10. Make More O-6 FAO Billets Non-Region Specific

More 48X positions will create more flexibility in assigning FAO colonels and allow for the development of generalism among senior FAOs. All FAO O-6 billets should be reviewed, and where possible re-coded as 48X positions. Coding the three positions on the Army staff 48X should be an easy place to start.⁹² SDO/DATT billets in English speaking countries should also be coded 48X. While this may appear counter-intuitive, at the senior leader level regional experience is more important on higher level staffs than it is on a bilateral level. Where language is not a factor, a FAO colonel possesses the required skill set and experiences to quickly understand the bilateral relationship. This does not mean that regional expertise is unimportant. Regional expertise remains one of the FAO core competencies, and should be an important factor in the assignment process. But it should not be the *dominant* factor at the O-6 level.

Recommendation #11. Develop a Hierarchy of Important FAO Positions and Assign Officers Accordingly

The Army needs to identify, and create where necessary, key senior FAO billets. These billets should be identified in AR 600-3, and SLD should have specific

requirements that must be met by officers who wish to be assigned to these positions. This change will have three positive effects. First, it will ensure we have identified the most important jobs for a FAO. Second, it will ensure the most important job is filled by the most qualified FAO. Third, it provides FAOs the opportunity to aspire to the highest positions within their career field short of promotion to General Officer.

Finally, developing more generalist FAOs at the senior level, then assigning the best among them to the most important FAO positions is the best way to develop a career path to General Officer for FAOs. The Army will select FAOs to become General Officers not because of a DoD Directive, but because senior Army leaders have seen and worked with individual FAO senior leaders who merit being promoted to General Officer.

A Recurring Theme with Implications for the FAO Training Life Cycle

The accession process is arguably the single most important factor in ensuring the long-term quality of the Army FAO program. While researching this paper, FAO accessions emerged as a theme that did not fit nicely inside the six pillars of the FAO training cycle, but must be addressed as it has implications for FAO training. Since inception, the Army FAO program has succeeded largely by accessing the best officers possible, providing them with language training, ACS and IRT, and then turning them loose in the field where through OJT, experiential learning and self-development these officers developed into the Army senior FAOs of today.

The Voluntary Transfer Incentive Program (VTIP) used to access FAOs today alters the way in which officers become FAOs. The intent behind VTIP is two-fold: to access officers into the program sooner, and to allow FAO Proponent a larger role in determining who becomes a FAO. Both are worthwhile objectives, and both have

potentially nefarious side effects. This perhaps explains why a recent study shows that senior FAOs are concerned that “it (VTIP) is inherently problematic for maintaining high quality FAOs.”⁹³

Surveyed FAOs felt VTIP accessed FAOs too early in their career (5-7 years of service), and that this might lead to future FAOs lacking a grounding in the profession of arms. Another concern is that under VTIP the pressures to reduce both FAO TTHS time and the cost of initial FAO training will lead to a scenario where the “best” officers are identified not based on military records, but on who already possesses a language skill and/or a graduate degree. A January 2013 FAO update to the field from HRC eluded to as much. When referring to VTIP it said, “Further, many of these officers enter (FAO career field) with existing language proficiency, requisite regional experience and/or a qualifying FAO-related Masters degree which already renders them partially complete of Army G-3 requirements as a FAO.”⁹⁴

FAO Proponent should pursue ways to leverage changes occurring in today’s society. Young officers today are raised in a much more globally integrated world than were previous FAOs. Many college students have travelled abroad prior to entering college, and many more experience “semester abroad programs” while in college. Similarly, the Army is making efforts to integrate language and cultural training into the curriculums at the United States Military Academy and in ROTC programs.⁹⁵ VTIP is an example of where the Army “broke some glass”, and it should be continued. But steps should be taken to assess and review VTIP to ensure that it is doing more good than harm, and to counter any potential negative side effects of the changes to how the Army recruits future FAOs.

Conclusion

The Army FAO program remains the gold-standard by which the other Services measure their FAO programs, primarily because since inception, the Army recognized the importance of allocating the time and money to develop the ideal FAO- a military officer grounded in the profession of arms, with a graduate degree in regional studies, a fluent grasp of a regional language, and a background of personal experiences in their assigned region. The esteemed Army FAO corps of today is a result of changes made to the program in the past 25 years. When senior Army leaders work with outstanding FAOs operating in the field, they say to themselves and others, “We need more of those.”

The Army is responding by increasing FAO billets at a time when the Army is decreasing in size. In an era of declining resources, it is imperative that the FAO training cycle efficiently produces an effective product - the Army FAO. MG Bayer challenged FAO Proponent to “break some glass” in the 2011 FAO Review. And in some areas they did. But the tension created by a desire for more FAOs in an era of decreasing resources has chipped away at the traditional Army FAO training program. In the past three years FAO Proponent made significant changes in the ways they access (VTIP) and train (reduction of graduate schooling from 18 months to 12, and the elimination of specific degree requirements) FAOs. These changes made the FAO training program more efficient by reducing TTHS and the cost of initial FAO training. These changes should be monitored to ensure FAO Proponent broke the right glass. Further efficiencies can be gained by not providing initial language training to all FAOs, and instead providing targeted language training when required throughout a FAO’s career.

But the FAO Survey did not produce any changes that made FAOs more effective. FAO Proponent can and should break some more glass in this area. Language training should be provided to fewer FAOs in fewer languages, and once taught, the language skills must be reinforced through successive sustainment training opportunities. IRT should be centralized under the leadership of the senior FAO at each ASCC, and more formalized rigor should be added to the IRT requirement. Formalized Security Cooperation training must be added to the IRT program. More generalism should be created among FAOs at the O-6 level. Diminishing a colonel's regional focus by creating more 48X positions will allow more flexibility in assignments and enable the development of more senior FAO generalists. Similarly, senior FAO billets and assignments need to be better managed to maximize the utilization of FAO talents and experiences to ensure the right officer is placed in the right job at the right time. Senior leaders value effectiveness- and an effective FAO is what senior leaders want when they say, "We need more of that." It's up to the Army FAO training cycle to provide them.

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