

a critique

foreign area officer program...

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The Foreign Area Officer (FAO) program is one of the most effective programs sponsored by the United States Army. It has contributed immeasurably to the Army's multi-faceted requirement to deal with and understand foreign military individuals and systems. While the value of the FAO program is beyond question, we believe it is still useful to periodically review and constructively critique such a long-standing program to insure that it keeps pace with the changing environment. The purpose of this article is to stimulate thinking about the program and to offer suggestions as to how it can be improved to better meet the Army's increasingly complex needs. We set out to address the following questions:

1. What qualifications does an FAO need?
2. How effective is the current program in developing those qualifications?
3. What can be done to improve the effectiveness of the program?

We write this article from the perspective of China FAO's and

recognize that some of the generalizations may not be valid for other country specialties.

QUALIFICATIONS

The language and area knowledge required by Army officers varies widely with the type of assignment. In most cases area expertise is far more important than language capability. A national level analyst, for example, requires in-depth area knowledge and an understanding of modern analytical methods, but minimal language capability. An attache or an intelligence operative, on the other hand, needs a stronger language base. We believe that the current concept of an FAO is too broad, expecting as it does that each FAO be capable of filling all types of FAO assignments. Linguists, in particular, should be considered to be sub-specialists with training requirements which differ from those of analysts.

Twenty years ago, an analyst could function adequately with a relatively superficial understanding of the area for which he was responsible. He had to be concerned with geography, fundamental cultural differences, and power factors which were generally concrete and to a degree quantifiable. Recent history, however, clearly shows a need for defense analysts who can examine infinitely more complex and less tangible factors of

national power. The analyst must now understand modern social sciences methodologies in order to take advantage of and communicate with specialists outside the official community. The FAO must be able to deal with the terminology and methods of academic disciplines such as geography, economics, sociology, international law, and political science merely to understand what he reads about his area. In other words, analytical skill has become more important than area knowledge. Intuitive or superficial understanding of the unique customs and habits of a people is no longer sufficient, yet that seems to be the objective and result of most of the current training.

Perhaps most important in the future will be the ability of the FAO's to understand the political complexities of topics such as arms control negotiations, national intent indicators, or the potential political, social, and economic consequences, intended or unintended, of the application of military power in a given area. Superficial knowledge in these areas will not suffice.

EFFECTIVENESS

Most FAO's take only broad survey courses in the academic phase of the program and do not develop an analytical capability. While taking a smattering of

shallow area courses, they miss the methodological courses which would contribute to making them better analysts. There are exceptions, of course, but these have resulted from personal initiative, not guidance by the system.

Language capability is a different skill. It often requires intuitive knowledge of foreign customs and habits; however, it is important for FAO linguists to be able to go beyond the manipulation of words and phrases. It is important to understand the concepts behind the words. Too often, FAO's have learned only the basics of a language and must use imprecise and simple language to discuss subjects requiring precise terminology. The result is that they "talk around" more complex subjects, often causing "misunderstandings" when dealing with foreign officials.

In the case of Chinese, the written language is, in effect, separate and distinct from the spoken language. An intelligent student would require several years to become relatively capable in either, but to mix the study of both the spoken and written language requires an even longer period of intensive application to reach a minimum level of operational capability. The complexity of the language is such that most China FAO graduates must still use an interpreter in substantive discussions. There is clearly a weakness in the development of language capability.

It is our judgement that there are four major interrelated systemic weaknesses in the current FAO program. The first of these is the failure to match FAO training with Army requirements, i.e., the individual's utilization assignment. The increased complexity of the specialty no longer permits the luxury of a philosophy which suggests an officer can spend three or four years in training and then be used in any foreign-area related position. The jobs are different and require

different types of educational development. Furthermore, regulations require that those officers who receive civil schooling as part of their training be placed immediately in a graduate-degree-validated position, most of which do not use language skills developed during training. There is an implicit (and erroneous) assumption in the present FAO training that the language skill once attained can be stockpiled and tapped at will. If the language is not used immediately and regularly that language capability soon vanishes.

The second weakness is shallowness in academic study. This is not completely the fault of the officer involved but must be attributed to a lack of guidance as to what to study during the university phase of the program. This is in turn related to the first weakness; without some knowledge of the officer's utilization tour or at least its type, it is difficult for anyone to furnish such guidance. The officer himself is hardly in a position to focus attention on his areas of future utilization since he usually has no idea, except in the most general terms, as to what FAO's do. This is especially true of combat arms officers who, when they begin FAO training, have never seen an FAO in his natural habitat. Thus, the conscientious FAO scholar flounders between a shotgun approach, either attempting to learn everything or so narrowly focusing his studies on the basis of personal interest that his training may be irrelevant.

The third weakness is the problem of language study motivation. The intensive yet narrow study of a language over a long period of time (two years in the case of Chinese) causes the student to "burn himself out" before his language courses end. Knowing that his utilization tour will probably not require use of the language and that he will thus inevitably lose that capability further attenuates his motivation. Finally, in advanced language

study the student reaches a point when he must choose a focus for his continued study, a choice he is not prepared to make if he does not know the requirements of his subsequent utilization assignment.

A fourth weakness is in the selection of FAO candidates. Officers entering the program may be running away from bad experiences in their basic branch rather than toward a genuine area of interest. Some are seeking a less structured life style and others, because of family problems or personal hang-ups, are never able to submerge themselves in the culture of their specialty area. As a result, their knowledge upon graduation is superficial. These FAO's are failures of the selection system. More important are the "good ones who got away;" the combat arms officers who do not even consider the program because the training requires too many years away from the smell of gunpowder.

For the MI officer, an FAO utilization tour can be branch-related. For the combat arms officer it too often is not; this is a weakness of the program as it relates to the OPMS primary-alternate specialty career progression. The full training program, plus a three-year utilization assignment will take the combat arms officer away from his basic branch for six to seven years. And we can add another year for attendance at Command and General Staff College (C&GSC) for a total of seven or eight years away from troop duty. It is unrealistic to contend that such an officer will be competitive with his contemporaries for choice assignments in his combat arms specialty. Both selection process and the integration of the FAO training with OPMS need serious reconsideration.

In summary, the current program has several weaknesses which cause it to fall short of its potential and the needs of the Army. The length and inefficiency of the training program

frighten many potentially outstanding FAO's away, while the lack of focus and guidance of FAO training produces more dilettantism than expertise. We believe that the future FAO must be better schooled in analysis and that those whose assignments require language must be better trained in language study. We also believe that since these weaknesses are systemic, they can be handled only through imaginative management of the FAO program.

PROPOSED REVISION OF THE FAO PROGRAM

No critique is complete without offering solutions to the problems it presents. Perhaps most importantly, the FAO program needs intensive and individualized management of the total development of each FAO, closely tied to his abilities and potential assignments. Such a program would produce officers who are more qualified for their immediate utilization assignments and who retain the educa-

tional basis for future professional development and subsequent FAO assignments. We believe that the program and management structure outlined below will accomplish this more efficiently in terms of time and money. Chart 1 summarizes the changes proposed and their advantages.

To reduce the length of the initial FAO training and to reduce the motivational and "burn out" problems in language training, we advocate deleting ad-

| | Present program | Proposed Program | Benefits from Change |
|---|--|--|--|
| 1. Academic study & basic language | 1 yr. graduate school PCS to Monterey 1 yr. DLI | 2 yrs mixed language & area studies curriculum at DLI & NPGS | a. Eliminates 1 PCS b. Lower tuition at NPGS c. Better control & guidance of academic program. d. Less intensive lang. reducing "burn out." |
| 2. Advanced language & area orientation | PCS overseas (accompanied) 12-18 mo. language and/or travel in host country area | TDY overseas (22 wks) Approx. 6 mos. travel & area orientation (unaccompanied) | a. Eliminates overseas PCS w/ dependents. b. Saves costs of overseas language tng (FSI tuitions, etc.) for most FAO's |
| 3. Utilization | 3 yrs. grad. degree validated position | 3 yrs. grad. degree validated position | W/2 above, eliminates problem of loss of language skill due to non-use by delaying advanced language tng. |
| 4. Subsequent tng for linguist positions (selected off. only) | DLI refresher | DLI refresher PCS overseas 12 mos. overseas adv. language tng. | a. Better lang. skill when it is needed b. Permits better selectivity for linguists. |
| 5. Management | Staff supervision by ACSI, DAMI-ISI | 5-man FAO Tng Det at NPGS, Monterey | Closer and more substantive management of all phases of training. Managers represent all major specialty areas. |

*18 month overseas training includes one year of attendance at language school or host country military school, usually C&GSC. 12 month programs are mostly travel and orientation. Proposed change would eliminate the one year of schooling from the 18 month programs and reduce travel to approximately 6 months TDY for all FAO's in the basic program.

**Chart 1
SUMMARY OF PROPOSED FAO PROGRAM REVISION**

vanced in-country language training from the initial training program except in those rare instances where the officer's immediate utilization tour requires daily use of the language. Under our proposed program, the FAO trainee would undergo two years of academic and language training. For most trainees, this would be accomplished in Monterey, California, under the combined auspices of the Defense Language Institute (DLI) and the Naval Postgraduate School (NPGS). This would be followed by at least six months of unaccompanied in-country and area travel within the specialty area. Following this two and one-half year training period the FAO would be assigned to an initial utilization tour which would be a graduate degree-validated position.

For many, if not most, FAO's, the initial training period would constitute the full extent of their training. Their FAO assignments would all be non-language positions. FAO's selected for a subsequent language utilization assignment would return to DLI for a refresher course and then be sent overseas for advanced language training, followed immediately by an assignment requiring the language. Performance at DLI and language proficiency at graduation would provide the major bases of selection for advanced language training and utilization.

On the academic side, the primary purpose of the university phase is to develop the officer's analytical ability and to lay the foundation for subsequent self-study. The university phase should produce an officer/analyst who can be made into an area specialist (for any area) in a short period of time. Empirical data about most areas can be acquired relatively quickly but conceptual notions and methods of analysis require detailed, guided study. It is most important to insure that FAO's understand what they read of complex military concepts or of their spe-

cialty area. This is not to deny that specific area knowledge should also be obtained, but to emphasize that the focus of a FAO's graduate study should be to acquire the social sciences vocabulary and analytical concepts which enable him to read and assimilate area data and to analyze what he learns about his specialty area.

The program thus envisioned would overcome several of the weaknesses discussed above and enjoy additional advantages. Most importantly, it recognizes that the Army requires more analysts than linguists for each area and it provides a point at which those best qualified for linguist positions can be identified and selected for advanced language training and utilization. Since this selection would take place after completion of the basic FAO training, it would spare otherwise competent officers the stigma of "flunking out" due to insufficient language ability. Those selected for advanced language training would be aware of the language requirements of their projected assignments and could focus their training accordingly. Immediate utilization would reinforce long-range language retention. The break between periods of intensive language training combined with an awareness that the language will be used in an upcoming assignment would overcome the problem of "burn out."

The officer not selected for subsequent advanced language training would still have sufficient training to obtain maximum benefit from overseas travel and a deeper understanding of the culture and thought processes of the people of his specialty area. Finally, FAO's as a group would still remain a pool of potential linguists who, with refresher training, could be mobilized to meet unforeseen linguistic requirements.

IMPLEMENTATION

We propose to implement this program with a two-year mixed language and academic curri-

culum similar to that outlined in Chart 2. This would be the basic FAO training program for those officers who have not previously attained a graduate degree. The course of study would be conducted jointly by DLI and NPGS at Monterey, California.

The intensive management of this program should be accomplished by the establishment of a special FAO Training Detachment to include five FAO graduates with solid academic degrees. The Detachment Commander and his principal assistant should hold PhD's from reputable universities. The five officers should represent the five key geographic areas: Asia, Africa, Latin America, Europe (to include the Soviet Union), and the Middle East. These officers would counsel FAO's enrolled in their specialty areas, teach courses at NPGS and monitor all phases of each FAO's educational development including the overseas phase. This group should also act as a screening board for FAO applicants. The FAO Training Detachment should eventually be inter-service and attached to the Social Sciences Department of the Naval Post Graduate School.

The detachment would also be responsible for guidance of refresher or advanced training for previously trained FAO's who, having served utilization tours, are scheduled for new assignments requiring additional training. Special area courses could also be arranged for attaches or other officers who are not FAO's, but are proceeding to sensitive foreign assignments.

The NPGS is recommended for a number of reasons: it would save money on PCS moves; it would allow for more control over the core curriculum; it is a recognized degree-granting institution; there is good access to scholars from Stanford and Berkeley; and FAO manager/teachers could be integrated into the teaching staff. It is possible that a center for Advanced Military Studies could be developed there to specialize in the strategies

- I. Duration: Two and one-half years
- II. Location: Phase I (Two Years) — Monterey, California
Phase II (1/2 Year) — Overseas
- III. Divided into Quarters as follows:
 - First Quarter
 1. Comparative Politics/Methods
 2. Modernization process
 3. Quantitative Methods
 - Second Quarter
 1. Theories of International Relations
 2. National Security Policy
 3. Comparative Military System
 - Third Quarter
Language
 - Fourth Quarter
Language Only
 - Fifth Quarter
 1. National History (Early)
 2. Language
 - Sixth Quarter
 1. National History (Pre-Modern)
 2. Language
 - Seventh Quarter
 1. Modern History
 2. Language
 - Eighth Quarter
 1. National Military System
 2. Language
 - Ninth Quarter
 1. Modern Problems Seminar
 2. Language

**Chart 2
RECOMMENDED BASIC FAO CURRICULUM**

and military systems of foreign nations from an academic perspective.

It is neither cost-effective nor necessary for FAO's to attend civilian universities. At present, few FAO's (or other graduate students) take courses from the most eminent scholars in their field. Instead, they take courses taught by less well known assistant professors. With carefully selected FAO Training Detachment manager/teachers supplementing the NPGS teaching staff, courses at NPGS would be at least as good as those now attended by FAO's at most civilian universities. By inviting well

known scholars to Monterey to lecture and to conduct seminars, and by having students and faculty attend area study seminars at civilian universities on a TDY basis, interface with the civilian academic would be maintained. The result could very well be a program of academic study better than that now provided at the Masters Degree level, even at prestigious universities.

SUMMARY

Although the FAO program is one of the Army's best, there is room for improvement. The inherent flexibility, cost savings, and increased selectivity of above suggested revisions

should make it equally attractive to those responsible for training, budget, and personnel management. The reduced length of the program should make it more attractive to combat arms officers since it will produce a better fit with OPMS. The proposed academic program can be better controlled and kept responsive to the Army's needs while saving the cost of a PCS move and maintaining a quality commensurate with that of the present civilian university program. By deferring the advanced language study for most FAO's, tying it to specific language utilization assignments, and basing selection for advanced language on demonstrated aptitude, the program provides incentives for maximum effort during training without stigmatizing those not selected for further study. This in turn will encourage honest appraisal of each officers' linguistic ability and thereby give personnel managers better data from which to match capabilities with assignments. Money and time will not be wasted training the untrainable and, since the best linguists will be selected to attend advanced language training and foreign military schools, their average performance will be higher in those areas where performance is judged in large measure by linguistic ability. This will tend to enhance US Army prestige with both host country nationals and with fellow students from other government agencies.

With the improvements proposed above, the FAO program could be better organized around the Army's requirements in order to even more effectively provide the essential foreign area expertise for the future.

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