



DoD INSTRUCTION 1315.20

MANAGEMENT OF THE DoD FOREIGN AREA OFFICER PROGRAM

Originating Component: Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness

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Purpose: In accordance with the authority in DoD Directive (DoDD) 5124.02 and consistent with DoDD 5160.41E, this issuance establishes policy, assigns responsibilities, and provides procedures for Military Service programs to access, develop, retain, and provide administrative control of all DoD foreign area officers (FAOs).

TABLE OF CONTENTS

SECTION 1: GENERAL ISSUANCE INFORMATION	3
1.1. Applicability.	3
1.2. Policy.	3
SECTION 2: RESPONSIBILITIES	4
2.1. Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness (USD(P&R)).	4
2.2. DoD Senior Language Authority.	4
2.3. USD(P).	5
2.4. Director, DSCA.	5
2.5. USD(I&S).	6
2.6. Director, Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA).	6
2.7. Director, Defense Threat Reduction Agency (DTRA).	6
2.8. Secretaries of the MILDEPs.	6
2.9. CJCS.	9
SECTION 3: FAOS	11
3.1. What is a FAO?.....	11
3.2. Roles and Responsibilities.	11
GLOSSARY	13
G.1. Acronyms.	13
G.2. Definitions.....	13
REFERENCES	15

SECTION 1: GENERAL ISSUANCE INFORMATION

1.1. APPLICABILITY.

This issuance applies to the OSD, the Military Departments (MILDEPs) (including the Coast Guard at all times, including when it is a Service in the Department of Homeland Security by agreement with that Department), the Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS) and the Joint Staff, the Combatant Commands (CCMDs), the Office of Inspector General of the Department of Defense, the Defense Agencies, the DoD Field Activities, and all other organizational entities within the DoD (referred to collectively in this issuance as the “DoD Components”).

1.2. POLICY.

a. The DoD, through the respective MILDEPs:

(1) Establishes and standardizes FAO training and sustainment requirements and provides oversight procedures and clarification for all FAO policies, to ensure the continuity and cross-compatibility of the FAO corps. It is critical to the nation’s defense policy that the MILDEPs strengthen and attract mutually beneficial alliances and partnerships by evolving them into an extended network able to deter aggression or act decisively when addressing shared challenges.

(2) And in accordance with DoDD 5160.41E and this issuance, oversees the DoD FAO Program to include the development of DoD processes to ensure the tracking and readiness of FAOs in support of the national security and DoD global mission. FAOs provide critical linkages to the broader interagency, leveraging a Whole-of-Government Approach to provide common solutions to problems or issues.

(3) Maintains a FAO corps comprising policy professionals proficient in one or more of the predominant foreign languages of the country or region assigned with the goal of attaining the Interagency Language Roundtable (ILR) Level 3 in the listening, reading, and speaking modalities (L3, R3, and S3, respectively).

(4) Oversees CCMDs, Organizations, and Combat Support Agencies, the utilization of FAO expertise in a manner commensurate with their unique qualifications and the training/education provided by their MILDEP.

b. The DoD, through the Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA), will provide education and ensure current security cooperation (SC) certification of FAOs assigned to security cooperation organizations and Senior Defense Official/Defense Attaché (SDO/DATT) positions prior to assignment in accordance with DoD Instruction 5132.14.

SECTION 2: RESPONSIBILITIES

2.1. UNDER SECRETARY OF DEFENSE FOR PERSONNEL AND READINESS (USD(P&R)).

The USD(P&R):

- a. Ensures that MILDEP FAO policies and programs result in the accession, training, use, and retention of FAOs to support DoD-wide missions.
- b. Coordinates with the Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller)/Chief Financial Officer of the Department of Defense, to ensure that DoD Component FAO programs are resourced appropriately.
- c. Coordinates with MILDEPs and establishes processes to track the individual language, regional expertise, and culture (LREC) capabilities of potential FAOs during pre-commissioning training and during their time as junior officers in their MILDEP Components.
- d. Oversees:
 - (1) The development of FAO program metrics and the incorporation of FAO capabilities into regional force readiness assessments.
 - (2) The Secretary of the Army's execution of the joint FAO orientation course and the Secretary of the Navy's execution of the Regional Skills Sustainment Program.
 - (3) Evaluates a phased, long-term language proficiency enhancement program that includes applicable training, education, and sustainment to enable FAOs to remain current in one of the languages in the primary region of assignment; achieve foreign language L3, R3, and S3 proficiency; and enable additional language acquisition training, education, and sustainment to meet evolving individual language requirements.
- e. Incorporates, as required and in coordination with the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy (USD(P)), the Under Secretary of Defense for Intelligence and Security (USD(I&S)), the CJCS, and the MILDEPs, any needed changes into DoD FAO Joint Staff and MILDEP issuances concerning managing the DoD FAO Program.

2.2. DOD SENIOR LANGUAGE AUTHORITY.

Under the authority, direction, and control of the USD(P&R) and through the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Readiness, the DoD Senior Language Authority:

- a. In accordance with DoDD 5160.41E, serves as the principal OSD staff advisor, as appointed by the USD(P&R) to the Secretary of Defense, for the DoD FAO Program.

b. Oversees efforts to ensure the strategic relevance of DoD FAO capabilities through the alignment of doctrine, policies, and planning guidance. Coordinates capabilities with the CJCS and the MILDEPs.

c. Oversees the MILDEPs' accession, education, and use policies to ensure that they meet DoD-wide requirements. Coordinates and receives input from the CJCS, the CCMDs, the Defense Agencies, and the MILDEPs.

d. Advises the USD(P&R) on current and projected MILDEP FAO plans, programs, and budgets for emerging regions and languages where future DoD FAO support is projected to be required.

e. Coordinates a monthly FAO council meeting.

2.3. USD(P).

The USD(P):

a. Oversees FAO capabilities, needs, and use as they apply to the USD(P).

b. Provides policy oversight of SC training as it impacts FAOs and collaborates with the DSCA to ensure strategic alignment.

c. Oversees all staff policy work and work with developing policy and curriculums for FAOs.

2.4. DIRECTOR, DSCA.

Under the authority, direction, and control of the USD(P), the Director, DSCA:

a. Oversees FAO SC competencies, needs, and use within the DSCA headquarters and within SC organizations in accordance with DoD Instruction 5132.13.

b. Establishes SC certification and training requirements for key positions that FAOs are assigned to within the SC enterprise.

c. Provides FAOs access to Defense Security Cooperation University courses to educate the FAO corps on SC principles and processes and provide continuing education resources.

d. Ensures FAOs assigned to security cooperation organizations and SDO/DATT positions are certified in SC competencies before serving in SC positions in accordance with DoD Instruction 5132.14.

e. Provides a representative to the FAO council.

f. In coordination with the MILDEPs, affords all FAOs assigned to DSCA, regardless of billet, the opportunity to receive the necessary annual LREC sustainment training (between 40

and 80 hours) as part of their normal duties. Distance learning or waivers, when dictated by operational requirements, are authorized when in-house training is unavailable or the individual is deployed.

2.5. USD(I&S).

The USD(I&S):

- a. Oversees FAO capabilities, needs, and use as they apply to the Defense Intelligence Components as defined in DoDD 5143.01.
- b. Oversees Defense Attaché training as it applies to cultural awareness and foreign language in accordance with DoDD 5205.75.

2.6. DIRECTOR, DEFENSE INTELLIGENCE AGENCY (DIA).

Under the authority, direction, and control of the USD(I&S), the Director, DIA:

- a. Oversees FAO capabilities, needs, and use within the DIA.
- b. Provides a representative to the FAO council.
- c. In coordination with the MILDEPs, affords all FAOs assigned to DIA, regardless of billet, the opportunity to receive the necessary annual LREC sustainment training (between 40 and 80 hours) as part of their normal duties. Distance learning or waivers, when dictated by operational requirements, are authorized when in-house training is unavailable or the individual is deployed.

2.7. DIRECTOR, DEFENSE THREAT REDUCTION AGENCY (DTRA).

Under the authority, direction, and control of the Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition and Sustainment, the Director, DTRA:

- a. Oversees FAO capabilities, needs, and use within DTRA and provides a representative to the FAO council.
- b. In coordination with the MILDEPs, affords all FAOs assigned to DTRA, regardless of billet, the opportunity to receive the necessary annual LREC sustainment training (between 40 and 80 hours) as part of their normal duties. Distance learning or waivers, when dictated by operational requirements, are authorized when in-house training is unavailable or the individual is deployed.

2.8. SECRETARIES OF THE MILDEPS.

The Secretaries of the MILDEPs:

a. Develop and maintain FAO management programs that meet the DoD's needs.

(1) Develop, resource, and sustain MILDEP FAO programs designed to access, train, motivate, promote, and retain a cadre of officers to meet present and future Defense needs, including service on Joint, MILDEP, and CCMD staff; Defense Agencies; and other DoD Component staff, and in combined headquarters or standing joint task forces.

(2) In conjunction with the USD(P&R), establish processes to track the individual LREC capabilities of the potential FAO community during pre-commissioning training and during their time as junior officers in their MILDEP Components.

b. Certify officers as FAOs in accordance with these minimum standards:

(1) Fully qualified in a primary military occupations specialty or designator. This qualification should happen prior to entrance into the respective FAO program. FAOs who do not meet or maintain the qualification standards may be returned to their military occupational specialty of origin at the discretion of the MILDEP.

(2) Graduate-level education resulting in a master's or doctoral degree focused on, but not limited to, the historical, political, military or security, cultural, sociological, scientific or technical, economic, and geographic factors of specific foreign countries and regions. Completing an intermediate or senior foreign war college curriculum that provides a Joint Professional Military Education Phase I or II credit is sufficient to meet this requirement if authorized by the MILDEP Component in writing.

(a) The MILDEP may waive the graduate degree requirement for officers with equivalent regional expertise gained through significant in-region experience or regionally focused assignments.

(b) This authority is to be used on a case-by-case basis and may be delegated in writing to the respective Service FAO proponent at not lower than the general officer/flag officer/Senior Executive Service level.

(3) Duty experience (in-region training) of at least 6 months in the region of specialty. This training involves significant interaction with host-nation nationals and host-nation entities in the regions in which the FAO specializes.

(a) Significant interaction requires working directly with host-nation entities as a military exchange officer, SC officer, foreign war college student, or DoD foreign fellowship participant or other training and familiarization as directed by DoD Components that provide an in-depth understanding of the language and culture of the relevant country or region.

(b) Modify in-region training requirements on a case-by-case basis to adjust for individual FAO circumstances such as regional, environmental, or health considerations beyond the FAO's control to avoid unnecessarily impacting the FAO's career path.

(4) Minimum language expertise in a primary language spoken in their area of specialization, which is equivalent to the current Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center basic course graduation standard.

(5) Ensure FAOs maintain a valid eligibility to occupy a critical sensitive position, as designated in Section 1400 of Title 5, Code of Federal Regulations. Ensure that FAOs complete security clearance background investigation and medical screening requirements. FAOs are assignable worldwide and must maintain active eligibility to occupy critical or special sensitive positions, which includes eligibility to access Top Secret or sensitive compartmented information, regardless of utilization tour requirements. FAOs must also maintain current medical screenings for foreign assignments as necessary.

c. Maintain and develop the current FAO population.

(1) Provide access to maintenance and enhancement training programs that develop strategic thinking, operational planning, and language and regional expertise throughout the FAO's career, including faculty and staff assignments to or participation at the DoD regional centers for security studies and other partner capacity building programs.

(2) If a FAO candidate begins the accessions process with an ILR compliant tested minimum language standard, that FAO may be afforded, based on the MILDEP's needs, advanced language training to help the FAO achieve L3, R3, and S3 on the ILR scale as assessed under DoD language testing standards or training in an additional language of their area of concentration.

(3) Coordinate MILDEP efforts in LREC sustainment training with the other MILDEPs and USD(P) to take advantage of partner capability-building education and training programs and initiatives, including regional centers for security studies and partner language training centers, to achieve mutual benefits and resource efficiency.

(4) In coordination with assigned CCMDs or Defense Agencies, ensure that all FAOs, regardless of billet, receive the necessary annual LREC sustainment training (between 40 and 80 hours) as part of their normal duties. Distance learning or waivers, when dictated by operational requirements, are authorized when in-house training is unavailable or the individual is deployed. FAOs, in coordination with their respective chains of command, should be able to explore innovative concepts to expand foreign language capabilities.

(5) Ensure that FAOs certify their language skills via testing on a regular basis.

(a) FAOs certify in their assigned language annually in a minimum of two modalities. FAOs may be authorized to take alternative testing that uses the ILR scale in accordance with guidance from the Defense Language and National Security Education Office and the Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center.

(b) FAOs who certify through the authorized testing procedures at or above the ILR proficiency level of 3/3 in a foreign language recertify every 2 years.

(c) To facilitate tracking of speaking ability within the FAO community, all FAOs take an oral proficiency interview at least every 2 years.

(d) FAOs may be authorized to take any applicable training course for refresher language training as approved by their MILDEP FAO proponent offices.

(6) Provide for FAO career progression.

(a) Provide the USD(P&R), through the Defense Language Steering Committee (DLSC), an annual review of the MILDEP FAO programs to include any significant changes to existing or new officer positions requiring FAO-related skills.

(b) Review organizational staffing documents to identify general officer/flag officer positions requiring FAO-related skills.

(c) Determine the appropriate language skill and regional expertise level, in accordance with DoD Instruction 5160.70, for each FAO position specific to MILDEPs, and develop strategies to ensure that qualified FAOs fill these positions in accordance with CJCS-established procedures and in coordination with the USD(P&R), the CCMD, and the Defense Agencies. This system of language skill and regional expertise requirements for FAO positions apply, to the maximum extent possible, standardized criteria to determine language skill and regional expertise requirements for positions such as attachés, security assistance officers, CCMD and Joint Staff country desk officers, and Defense Agency analysts.

(d) To the extent possible, ensure that FAO-designated billets are filled by qualified personnel with FAO military occupation skill, specialty code, and designations. FAO use ensures the maintenance of regional and perishable language skills while providing a return on MILDEP investment in the FAO program.

(7) Ensure that MILDEP policy and programs for Reserve Component FAOs result in the accession, training, use, and retention of Reserve Component FAOs sufficient to support DoD missions.

2.9. CJCS.

The CJCS:

a. Oversees FAO program matters in the CCMDs, pursuant to Section 163(b)(1) of Title 10, United States Code. This does not grant any command authority on the CJCS and does not change the Combatant Commanders' responsibility provided in Section 164(b)(2) of Title 10, United States Code.

b. Develops use policies and planning guidance and oversees the planning process to ensure appropriate consideration of FAO requirements on the Joint Staff and within the CCMDs in support of daily operational requirements and contingency plans.

c. Provides USD(P&R), through the DLSC, an annual program review of the DoD FAO program to include any significant changes to existing or new officer positions requiring FAO-related skills.

SECTION 3: FAOS

3.1. WHAT IS A FAO?

a. FAOs are joint force strategic effects operators who advance U.S. military objectives in foreign theaters. FAOs provide the necessary regional expertise that can enhance U.S. preparedness to face crises and contingencies that are transregional (cutting across multiple CCMDs, multi-domain (cutting across land, sea, air, space, and cyberspace), and multifunctional (involving conventional, special operations, ballistic missile, strike, cyber, and space capabilities).

b. FAOs increase joint force understanding and awareness of human, diplomatic, military, and environmental factors in global theaters; develop synchronized MILDEP, joint, and interagency plans, policies, and proposals; and implement operations, actions, and investments to advance joint force objectives in foreign countries and regions and deliver a superior geostrategic position.

c. FAOs possess a unique combination of strategic focus; regional expertise, including cultural awareness and foreign language proficiency; and professional military skills and experiences that are critical competencies essential to the DoD mission. This combination of skillsets enables the FAO corps to function as strategic effects operators within the DoD and positions the corps uniquely to serve at the highest levels of strategic decision-making and operational warfighters within the DoD.

d. In support of their mission, FAOs provide critical competencies as regional and country experts well versed in working with other U.S. Government agencies and foreign governments and security forces. As such, the FAO corps increases the DoD's awareness and understanding of human, diplomatic, military, and environmental factors in foreign theaters; advances DoD access, influence, and posture in foreign countries and theaters, and advances partner capability, capacity, interoperability, and the will to conduct operations aligned with U.S. interests.

3.2. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES.

a. The MILDEPs provide their FAO communities opportunity for professional military education that develops strategic thinking and operational planning expertise. They are managed to maximize their service in the DoD, including on joint, CCMD, and MILDEP staff; Defense Agencies; and DoD Field Activities. They are the primary candidates to serve as the DoD, joint, and MILDEP military representative to foreign militaries, U.S. Embassies and diplomatic posts, and in other foreign settings.

b. FAOs assist the DoD by:

(1) Serving as military attachés; SC officers; and MILDEP, joint, and interagency staff officers.

(2) Incorporating strategic understanding, SC knowledge, operational planning and regional expertise, and cultural awareness to serve as strategic effects operators.

(3) Collaborating with other U.S. Government agencies and with foreign governments, non-governmental organizations, and intergovernmental organizations in coordination with the embassy staff and as required by their individual MILDEP-specific chains of command.

(4) Advancing U.S. strategic security interests through the development of professional competencies acquired and shared over the course of their careers and through collaborations with foreign partners in the performance of their duties.

GLOSSARY

G.1. ACRONYMS.

ACRONYM	MEANING
CCMD	Combatant Command
CJCS	Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff
DIA	Defense Intelligence Agency
DLSC	Defense Language Steering Committee
DoDD	DoD directive
DSCA	Defense Security Cooperation Agency
DTRA	Defense Threat Reduction Agency
FAO	foreign area officer
ILR	interagency language roundtable
LREC	language, regional expertise, and culture
MILDEP	Military Department
SC	security cooperation
SDO/DATT	Senior Defense Official/Defense Attaché
USD(I&S)	Under Secretary of Defense for Intelligence and Security
USD(P&R)	Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness
USD(P)	Under Secretary of Defense for Policy

G.2. DEFINITIONS.

Unless otherwise noted, these terms and their definitions are for the purpose of this issuance.

TERM	DEFINITION
DLSC	The body that recommends and coordinates language policy; identifies present and emerging foreign language and regional expertise needs for military and civilian personnel; identifies language training, education, personnel, and financial requirements; and serves as an advisory board to the USD(P&R) for the Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center and Defense Language Institute English Language Center.

TERM	DEFINITION
FAO	A commissioned officer from any of the six Military Services (Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, Space Force, and Coast Guard) who serves as a joint force strategic effects operator increasing awareness and understanding of human, diplomatic, military, and environmental factors in foreign theaters; advances DoD access, influence, and posture in foreign countries and theaters; and builds partner capability, capacity, interoperability, and the will to conduct operations aligned with U.S. interests. Foreign language proficiency is required in at least one of the dominant languages in their specified region.
FAO council	A monthly meeting where MILDEP and Defense Agency representatives meet under the guidance of the DoD Senior Language Authority.
SDO/DATT	The principal DoD official in a U.S. embassy, as designated by the Secretary of Defense. The SDO or DATT is the Chief of Mission's principal military advisor on defense and national security issues, the senior diplomatically accredited DoD military officer assigned to a diplomatic mission, and the single point of contact for all DoD matters involving the embassy or DoD elements assigned to or working from the embassy. The SDO or DATT is considered the dual-hatted chief of both the security cooperation organizations and defense attaché office in the embassy.

REFERENCES

Code of Federal Regulations, Title 5

DoD Directive 5124.02, “Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness (USD(P&R)),” June 23, 2008

DoD Directive 5143.01, “Under Secretary of Defense for Intelligence and Security (USD(I&S)),” October 24, 2014, as amended

DoD Directive 5160.41E, “Defense Language, Regional Expertise, and Culture (LREC) Program,” August 21, 2015, as amended

DoD Directive 5205.75, “DoD Operations at U.S. Embassies,” December 4, 2013, as amended

DoD Instruction 5132.13, “Staffing of Security Cooperation Organizations (SCOs) and the Selection and Training of Security Cooperation Personnel,” January 1, 2009, as amended

DoD Instruction 5160.70, “Management of the Defense Language, Regional Expertise, and Culture (LREC) Program,” December 30, 2016

United States Code, Title 10