

Redefining the Foreign Area Officer's Role

**Brigadier General Michael A. Vane, U.S. Army, and
Lieutenant Colonel Daniel Fagundes, U.S. Army**

LONG BEFORE 11 September 2001 brought the reality of asymmetric warfare to the American homeland, statesmen, military theorists, and others were grappling with what the end of the Cold War would mean for U.S. security interests around the world. New theories of external threats to the United States (such as wars of civilizations, resurgent Chinese or Russian nationalism, rogue or failed states, and international crime) were postulated.¹ President George H.W. Bush called this state of affairs "a New World Order."

A firm belief was that America's containment strategy, backed by forward-deployed, heavily armored and mechanized forces poised to fight and win a future East-West confrontation in Europe and, to a lesser extent, a conflict in Korea, was obsolete. Operations in Kuwait, Haiti, Somalia, Bosnia, and Kosovo, with their immature infrastructures, exposed U.S. forces' limitations in deployability and sustainment. Technologically sophisticated nonstate threats with asymmetric capabilities further exposed U.S. vulnerabilities and heightened a sense of urgency.

Believing that the United States would face no global or regional peer competitors for 20 years, the George W. Bush Administration seized this window of opportunity to initiate a transformation effort throughout the Department of Defense (DOD).² Army Transformation calls for institutional and operational change across all doctrine, organizations, training, materiel, leader development, people, and facilities domains.³

Although technology is important to Transformation, soldiers remain the centerpiece of the future force.⁴ Transforming the way the Army recruits, trains, and fields soldiers is vital to achieving this vision. Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld summed this up best: "All the high-tech weapons in the world won't transform our Armed Forces unless we also transform the way we think, train, exercise, and fight."⁵

In *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*, Thomas Friedman argues that globalization is the new dominant international system whose defining feature is the

interaction between politics, culture, finance, national security, technology, and ecology.⁶ He believes that to understand international relations, foreign-policy practitioners must think globally and traverse all six areas seamlessly. He states, "Unfortunately, . . . there is a deeply ingrained tendency to think in terms of highly segmented, narrow areas of expertise, which ignores the fact that the real world is not divided up into such neat little beats, and that the boundaries between domestic, international, political and technological affairs are collapsing."⁷

The foreign area officer (FAO) career field must also adapt to the new paradigms. Officer Professional Management 3 provided this opportunity by establishing a separate career field with its own promotion- and school-selection process. However, several changes must be made in FAO career development, assignment, and utilization to ensure FAO provides the necessary capabilities and skills to meet the Nation's current and future needs.

The Army needs to address strategic studies as a core skill. Language, while important, must be viewed as an enabler. The Army should enforce a broader assignment set and change its FAO personnel policy to overcome its Cold War bias and address new regional priorities. The central question facing the FAO career field over the next few years is whether FAO can overcome its own Cold War paradigm to become a more effective instrument of national policy during the 21st Century.

Adapting to Change

In the wake of the Soviet Union's collapse, U.S. military engagements intensified across a wide operational spectrum, including humanitarian assistance, nationbuilding, and major theaters of war.⁸ Globalization; the reduction of time-distance factors brought on by advances in transport and information technology; and the spread of nongovernmental organizations and other transnational players forced the United States to operate in a more complex security environment. U.S. leaders discovered that tactical decisions had immediate strategic ramifications, and states found it increasingly difficult to



US Army

The Chief of the Military Cooperation Office at the U.S. Embassy in Sierra Leone takes an inventory of medical supplies and equipment at Freetown International Airport, 2001.

deal with transnational, global issues.⁹ In such an environment, America found it too costly, in terms of lives, prestige, or finance, to achieve all its policy goals by acting unilaterally.

FAOs, as joint officers trained to operate within interagency and multinational structures, provide ideal instruments to deal with the complexities of the new security environment.¹⁰ While FAOs must be expert political-military advisers at the regional level, they must also be able to function strategically because transnational security issues transcend regional boundaries. FAOs must link their regional expertise to the broader international geopolitical arena to execute U.S. national security policy and military strategy, and more important, to influence and help formulate U.S. policy by grasping the effects and implications of other nations' interests on U.S. policy. FAOs will only learn these essential skills through educational and developmental assignments.

FAO professional development takes from 2-1/2 to 4 years, depending on the region, and normally consists of language training, graduate schooling in international relations, and familiarization with a region through in-country training. In the regionally based graduate program, students spend 60 percent of their time in regionally oriented classes. Most master's degree programs require students to take certain core classes such as international relations theory and U.S. foreign policy. A knowledge of his-

tory complements the study of international relations.

Although the FAO proponent directs that each program must have a regional language component, an emphasis on electives in strategic studies courses would strengthen this critical skill set. Typical FAO trainees complete 6 to 15 months of language training at the Defense Language Institute and do not experience much language skills degradation before in-country training. Sending FAO trainees to graduate school after language school and in-country training is another option.

The Army career field most closely associated with strategic thinking and policy is the Strategic Plans and Policy Officer Functional Area (FA) 59. The Army's FAO and FA 59 fields are quite similar. For example, the strategic plans and policy officer's skills include—

- Being highly adept at understanding other societies, their values, and national interests.
- Being attuned to the complexities of the international environment.
- Being able to implement national strategic plans and policy.¹¹

Education, including undergraduate and graduate study, is remarkably similar.¹² The officers in the two fields fill the same types of duty positions: staff officers in theater staffs; joint and Army Staff policy positions; and intergovernmental agencies such as the Department of State.

FAO positions tend to have a regional focus, however, in terms of both function and physical location. Around three-quarters of FAOs are deployed outside the Continental United States (OCONUS) as opposed to a third of strategists. Nearly 10 percent of FAOs (approximately 100 officers) hold the 6Z Strategist Advanced Application Program additional skill identifier, while the strategist career field numbers approximately 185. A full review of FAO records would likely reveal that many more FAOs could be awarded this skill identifier.

As the Army transitions intermediate-level education requirements and the 6Z Program ceases to exist, FAOs should complete a modified version of the Basic Strategic Art Course through distance learning. The course stresses strategic theory and art, national security decisionmaking, and contemporary security challenges, instead of joint planning, force management, and resource management.

Functional Area 59 officers tend to focus on national plans and policies, while FAOs focus on regional policy. This distinction is not always clear, and in reality, an effective regional policy requires a larger geopolitical and strategic context.

Language as an enabler. The FAO proponent should de-emphasize the FAO as a linguist and define language ability for what it really is, an enabler.¹³ A soldier might speak a language, but unless he has solid political, military, and strategic knowledge, he is useless as an adviser. The reverse is not necessarily true, however. Of course, in an ideal situation the officer would have both, but this is not always achievable; more than a dozen languages are spoken in Europe.

FAO proficiency in just one or two languages is not really cost effective, although knowing French, Portuguese, and Spanish might have cross-regional utility. A language-centric view might build cultural and national stovepipes, which would be bad enough if the FAO tries to be a regional expert but potentially disastrous if he needs to think strategically. Can Japanese and Korean FAOs afford to be uninformed about what happens in China or Russia? What of the European FAO whose region consists of numerous countries, each with its own language, customs, and mores? The predictability of the bipolar Cold War made a country-centric or regional view possible, but the Cold War is over. Global and transnational issues, such as terrorism, crime, illegal arms trading, and mass immigration, transcend state and regional boundaries and require the FAO to think strategically.

Twenty percent of FAOs fill critical Continental United States (CONUS) or OCONUS assignments in English-speaking countries where their political-military expertise and analytical ability is paramount. Yet we must guard against the attitude that such

postings are less desirable because they require no foreign language skills or because any officer can perform them.

The Army seems to see language ability as more than an FAO enabler; it sees it as the FAO's *raison d'être*. When viewing the world from a geopolitical perspective instead of a language-centric one, this idea is even more suspect. For example, as the United States builds a new security framework in Asia to enhance stability and to prosecute the war on terror, actively engaging the Philippines, India, Pakistan, and Australia—all countries in which English is the official language or a second language—will be critical to achieving U.S. strategic interests. In terms of interoperability and warfighting, the English-speaking United Kingdom, Australia, and Canada are the nations most likely to fight alongside the United States beyond regional security pacts. In Western Europe, language is less of a factor than in any other geographic area because English is the official language of NATO.

Finally, the FAO field is not the only career field to require foreign language skills. When thinking of a Special Forces (SF) soldier, many images come to mind, but yet the first is not that of a linguist. Yet language is an important skill in the SF soldier's tool kit. The same holds true for civil affairs and psychological operations officers, whose primary role is to interface with target populations and influence them to behave in a manner favorable to friendly forces. Linguists specialize in languages and can serve only as translators, but for FAOs, language is only an enabler.

Building a broader assignment base. First and foremost, a FAO is a soldier. Being a soldier is his core skill. The FAO's Army training and experience add value to his exchanges with foreign militaries, U.S. agencies, and the joint force. FAOs are often present in areas of conflict and execute U.S. policy. Two attachés in Yemen, for example, were the first U.S. on-site respondents during the USS *Cole* incident, and a third, the security assistant officer, coordinated with the French for air casualty evacuation support. FAOs, forward-deployed to Kuwait, provide valuable interface with foreign or allied armies and advise U.S. commanders.

Still, FAOs are all too often seen as "cocktail circuit riders" out of touch with the real Army. FAO policy has contributed to this image in several ways:

- The FAO development model, which is incompatible with the Army policy of dual-tracking, requires FAOs to spend too much time in training and as much as 7 years away from troop assignments.

- FAO positions are over-billed within plush assignments in European capital cities and are considered to be equivalent to battalion command, while senior U.S. Army or DOD representatives in the



SRA Industries / JCCC

The Defense and Army Attaché, U.S. Embassy and U.S. Ambassador to Ethiopia (center and center right) discuss the airlift of Ethiopian troops to support UN relief operations in Rwanda, 1994.

developing world hold the rank of major or lieutenant colonel.

□ The Army attaché in-country is responsible for training FAOs. This narrows a FAO's perspective and predisposes them to serve in attaché positions.

□ The policy of considering the attaché position as equivalent to battalion command leads FAOs to spend the rest of their careers in such positions, thereby losing touch with the "green" Army.

A new track to success would enforce FAO rotation from attaché positions to major Army commands, combatant commands, and Department of the Army (DA), joint staff, and foreign military headquarters. FAOs should not serve in two consecutive attaché positions unless they are promoted or the Army has a critical need for the service. These changes would develop FAOs well grounded in the tactical, operational, and strategic arts and who are force multipliers, not just bureaucrats.

What the military brings to the international environment is a professional soldier's knowledge. The FAO is an expert in his field, trained to engage effectively with foreign militaries and statesmen. His military perspective, central to both the study and practice of geopolitics and political-military operations, is essential to national security strategy.

Addressing regional imbalance. During the Cold War, Europe occupied center stage in U.S. foreign policy, which deemed Europe's security of vital national interest. America's commitment to NATO, backed by credible military force, was a vis-

ible U.S. guarantee of security to its European allies. A free, democratic Europe remains of vital interest, but the international security environment has changed. NATO and the European Union have expanded to include former Warsaw Pact states; the United States and Russia have reached a rapprochement; and asymmetric threats have focused U.S. attention on other areas of the world. Yet, FAO manning remains mired in Cold War constructs.

Consider the distribution of FAO colonel billets among nine regional FAO areas: Latin America, Europe, South Asia, Eurasia (Russia), China, the Middle East and North Africa, Northeast Asia, Southeast Asia, and Sub-Saharan Africa. European FAOs account for 38 billets—more than the combined total of all four Asian regions that are important to U.S. national interests and a locus of present and future conflict.¹⁴ The disparity is even more pronounced if we include the 13 billets assigned to Russia and its "near abroad."¹⁵ Perhaps the disproportionate numbers of European FAOs would be justified if they were weighted toward Eastern Europe, which is also an area of geopolitical importance. The truth is quite different, however. Most FAO positions remain in Germany, a country with limited force-projection capability, a declining defense budget, and an apparent unwillingness to use force outside Europe. Germany accounts for six colonel billets, three lieutenant colonel billets, and two major billets, while some Eastern European countries have no representation at all.

Of the 32 billets in the 4 Asian regions, 10 are in Japan and Korea, a legacy from the Cold War. In view of North Korea's aggressive policies, these FAOs remain well placed. But what of America's larger regional objectives and stated national interest in preventing the rise of a regional hegemon in Asia, especially in light of the U.S. policy of containment or engagement with China?¹⁶ China receives only four billets, one of which is located in the region. India receives one billet; Pakistan, two. The picture is much the same in the Middle East and Africa. On the other hand, Latin America has 31 colonel billets. As in Europe and Northeast Asia, this is the result of a Cold War construct. The billets were designed in part to contain the spread of communism. While countering communism is no longer the basis for such a robust presence, geographic proximity, economic potential, the changing international security environment, and historical linkages first promulgated in the Monroe Doctrine of 1823, argue for a continuing presence. In view of the changed international security environment, a redistribution of FAO positions is necessary to ensure that the pointed end of the spear points in the right direction.

Recommendations

The FAO program must adapt to the present international environment and move beyond Cold War constructs. The Army must position FAOs to provide regional political-military experts who understand strategic arts and are trained to operate in joint, interagency, and multinational arenas to support U.S. strategic goals and objectives. With the downsized Army relying more on force-projection capabilities,

a FAO will often be the sole DOD or Army representative in-country. To maximize FAO capabilities, the Army must change the way it assigns and develops FAOs.

FAOs should develop their strategist skills through formal education and self-study, and when possible, the Army should require FAO trainees to take electives in strategic studies and national policy areas while attending graduate school. The Army also should give FAOs the opportunity to complete a modified version of the Army War College (AWC) Basic Strategic Art program through the Army Distance-Learning Program. Selected FAOs, especially those serving in policy-related positions within DA or joint staff or in-theater commands, should complete the course before being posted to new assignments.

The Army also should consolidate strategist and FAO training into the Operational Support Career Field, mirroring the policy of the Strategic Leadership Division. The Army should update DA Pamphlet 600-3, *Commissioned Officer Development and Career Development*, to reflect a career development path that ensures FAOs rotate through various types of duties to ensure broad contact with the Army as a whole and to develop the broadest skill sets possible.¹⁷

Also, theater commanders and the director of operations of the Defense Intelligence Agency should review FAO personnel policy to redress the imbalance of FAO billets and align them with national and DOD guidance and policy.¹⁸ Finally, when possible, the Army should expose FAO in-country trainees to the full spectrum of FA 48 positions to prevent them from developing an attaché-centric point of view. **MR**

NOTES

1. Samuel P. Huntington, *Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996).
2. William Pfaff, "The Question of Hegemony," *Foreign Affairs* (January-February 2001): 221-32; Donald Rumsfeld, "Transforming the Military," *Foreign Affairs* (May-June 2002): 20-32.
3. The Objective Force aims to provide the Nation with a joint, interagency, and multinational precision-maneuver instrument at tactical and operational levels in support of U.S. national interests.
4. Department of the Army (DA), *The Objective Force in 2015*, white paper, final draft (Washington DC: U.S. Government Printing Office [GPO], 8 December 2002), ii, online at <www.amsc.belvoir.army.mil/ecampus/transformation/Laurie/Transformation/Documents/Objective%20Force%202015.pdf>, accessed 15 April 2004.
5. Rumsfeld, 29.
6. Thomas Friedman, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree* (New York: HarperCollins, 1999), 24.
7. *Ibid.*
8. David Jablonsky, "The State of the National Security State," *Parameters* (Winter 2002-2003): 10-11.
9. Joseph S. Nye, Jr., *The Paradox of American Power* (England: Oxford University Press, 2002), 1-40.
10. Seventy-five percent of FAOs serve in joint billets, while over 80 percent serve in

assignments outside the continental United States.

11. In other core FA 59 skills, such as developing concepts and doctrine for employing military forces and force requirements development, there is no correlation.

12. Although FA 59 does not usually send officers to advanced civil schooling, the majority of accessed officers already possess a graduate degree in an appropriate field.

13. The DA Management Office-Regional Integration and Assessments FAO proponent web site (unofficial) states that the FAO vision is to create Army officers who are soldier-statesmen, linguists, and regional experts.

14. Carl E. Haselden, Jr., "The Effects of Korean Unification on the U.S. Military Presence in Northeast Asia," *Parameters* (Winter 2002-2003): 120-27.

15. Approximately one-half of the Eurasian FAO 04-06 population (24) is actually in-country; 22 are in Germany, Belgium, or the United Kingdom. Several Eurasian FAOs are in the continental United States as well.

16. David Shambaugh, "Facing Reality in China Policy," *Foreign Affairs* (January-February 2001): 50-64.

17. DA Pamphlet 600-3, *Commissioned Officer Development and Career Development* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1 October 1998).

18. Because 75 percent of FAO authorizations are joint billets and fall within the purview of combatant commanders and the Defense Intelligence Agency, no effective FAO regional realignment is feasible without close coordination between them and the Army G3, overseen by the Office of the Secretary of Defense.

Brigadier General Michael A. Vane, U.S. Army, is Deputy Chief of Staff for Doctrine, Concepts, and Strategy at U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command headquarters. He received a B.S. from the U.S. Military Academy, West Point and an M.S. from the Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey.

Lieutenant Colonel Daniel J. Fagundes, U.S. Army, is an Army War College Fellow at the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Tufts University, Boston. He received a B.A. from California State University and an M.A. from Johns Hopkins University, School of Advanced International Studies. He was previously the U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command Liaison Officer to the Ministry of Defence of the United Kingdom and Great Britain.