

Foreign Area Officer Community Information Paper

Navy FAO Mission:

Deliver a global geo-strategic advantage for the U.S. Navy, Joint Force, and our Allies & Partners so that together we can deter, disrupt, deny or defeat our adversaries and provide security & stability that enables prosperity.

Who We Are:

Foreign Area Officers are a community of all-domain strategic operators who leverage waterfront leadership, strategic thinking and human connections to deliver outcomes. Keeping the fight forward in today's increasingly complex global security environment requires persistent forward presence, and FAOs are an indispensable human element of the Navy's global posture. We do our work across all levels of the integrated fleet, the joint force, and the inter-agency as accredited naval diplomats, as the Navy's certified uniformed security cooperation professionals, and as the Navy's community of experts in regional political-military affairs, foreign languages, strategy, plans, and policy.

What Distinguishes the FAO Community:

FAOs develop global geo-strategic advantage for our country by delivering information advantage, access advantage, and building ready, capable and willing global naval lethality. The Navy recognizes that our network of allies and partners is nothing less than a strategic center of gravity, along with being one of our most enduring advantages over our adversaries. These relationships yield assured global access and basing for the fleet, along with alignment, interoperability, and combined lethality for our fleet commanders and the joint force. FAOs are the Navy's only community of professionals who dedicate a career towards advancing objectives in this complex arena of international players. In his Guidance to the Force, CNO Gilday emphasized that "We must also succeed in sustained, day-to-day competition, winning future fights before they become kinetic." Much of great power competition occurs short of armed conflict and FAOs are on the front lines countering malign influences across geography and across domains. All of this requires regional expertise, local contact, and unity of effort among our worldwide network of maritime partnerships.

Our Proud Heritage:

Alliances and partnerships have always been central to our nation's security, and transnational threats make these relationships indispensable in any future fight. The Navy FAO community reached full operational capability (FOC) in 2020, and we are the embodiment of our nation's powerful network of maritime partnerships, an enduring part of our naval heritage. Since the end of World War II, the United States - through shared commitments and sacrifices with our allies and partners - has built, led, and defended a rules-based international system that has benefitted all nations. Naval Officers conversant in foreign cultures, cognizant of foreign political-military developments, and fluent in foreign languages have historically been a critical ingredient in winning our nation's wars.

The Fully Qualified FAO

Once accepted for lateral transfer to FAO, the FAO-in-training's first set of orders is typically a PCS to Monterey, CA, Newport, RI or Washington D.C. to commence the training track which will give the officer the academic, cultural and linguistic tools to build on the strong foundation in leadership, naval strategy and operational principles learned in the officer's source community. All new FAOs should aspire to gain full qualification as soon as possible in his or her career so that he/she can put those skills to use as fully qualified Foreign Area Officer and to continue to promote through the ranks as a FAO. Full qualification is conferred through the Additional Qualification Designation (AQD) FA1, FA2, FA3, FA4 or FA5, each of which corresponds to one of the five AORs. Full qualification is achieved through the attainment of the following three milestones:

- a. A regionally focused Master's degree.
- b. Score of 2 in at least two of the three modalities (i.e. listening, reading, and speaking) on the Defense Language Proficiency Test (DLPT) or Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) in a foreign language of the FAO's assigned region. Following initial qualification, FAOs strive to reach 3/3/3 proficiency for their assigned language.
- c. One-year experience in a FAO billet in his or her assigned region.

FAO Regional Assignments and Work

FAOs are organized into five geographic regions that correspond to the Geographic Combatant Command (CENTCOM, INDOPACOM, SOUTHCOM, EUCOM, and AFRICOM) Areas of Responsibility (AOR). FAOs are assigned to an AOR after selection for lateral transfer, based on the FAO's preferences, career timing, qualifications, and community needs. FAOs must be prepared to go to hard jobs, many times back-to-back overseas assignments, where the community and the Navy requirements are. Approximately 2/3 of FAO billets are overseas. Typical in-region billets are in Security Cooperation Offices, Defense Attaché Offices, and on OCONUS-based Joint and Navy staffs. When not in-region, FAOs serve on staff assignments at CONUS-headquartered Geographic Combatant Commands, Navy Component Commands, OPNAV, Office of the Secretary of Defense, Joint Staff, Department of State as well as in other interagency appointments.

Our Culture of Resilience:

Navy FAOs are found near every important maritime reach of the globe. We often do our job from remote but strategically important nodes. At times we live and work in non-permissive and oppressive environments. Multiple overseas postings in such settings require individual and family resilience, high states of readiness, iron-clad ethical behavior, and leadership skills well-suited to lead teams of high-impact inter-agency and multinational partners.