



CHIEF's Sight Picture

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Officer Force Development: International Affairs Specialists

We are an expeditionary Air Force. To continue our success far from home, we must deliberately develop a cadre of Air Force professionals with international insight, foreign language proficiency, and cultural understanding – Airmen who have the right skill sets to understand the specific regional context in which air and space power may be applied.

In the past, we used the Foreign Area Officer (FAO) program to identify officers who possessed the cultural and linguistic skills necessary for our expeditionary operations. However, we only identified those who had acquired such skills on their own. We did not deliberately select or train officers to develop the regional skills the Air Force needs. Furthermore, few FAOs were actually assigned to international duties and there was a perception that doing so would harm an officer's career. We did not actively develop this important capability or create a career path.

Today's security environment demands officers with international skills. The FAO program is no longer sufficient to meet our requirement, so we are replacing it with a program that selects, develops, and deliberately employs officers as International Affairs Specialists (IAS).

Beginning this summer/fall, our functional Development Teams and IAS functional managers will identify mid-career line officers with potential to excel as IASs and select them for development. They will attend comprehensive Developmental Education programs aimed at developing a strong foundation in international affairs, while remaining fully proficient and competitive in their primary AFSCs. They will be chosen for one of two tracks:

- ***Regional Affairs Strategists (RAS)*** will earn a regionally oriented graduate degree followed by basic and advanced language training (three years total). They will then alternate assignments between their primary AFSC and RAS duty.
- ***Political-Military Affairs Strategists (PAS)*** will earn an international affairs-related degree (one year only). They will develop broader, less specialized skills that will be used in career broadening assignments; the goal of this part of the program is to develop officers in line specialties with an advanced awareness of the international context in which we will apply air and space power.

The IAS program will be important to all Airmen, not only those selected for this training. All of you are part of an expeditionary Air Force, and will benefit from the expertise brought by IASs to AEF deployments and overseas assignments.

Over the next few months, the Assignment Teams, led by the guidance provided by the Development Teams, will be able to provide officers with the details on how their specific AFSC will manage IAS selection, senior rater involvement, as well as how to volunteer.

This is a Force Development culture change that will develop a global cadre for international affairs. The goal is clear – develop professional Airmen with international insight, foreign language proficiency, and cultural understanding. This is a crucial force multiplier that will significantly increase the effectiveness of air and space power.



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