

Life after the International Affairs Officer Program

While the goal of most Marine Corps officers is indeed to serve as commanders within their respective Military Occupational Specialties (MOS), the Marine Corps likewise needs individuals with the requisite skills in foreign language and cultural expertise to advise those very same senior-level leaders on the political, economic, and cultural dimensions that one needs to understand in order to prevail in a particular conflict – especially in the Counterinsurgency (COIN) fight. In many cases, those highly qualified cultural advisors are generated through a variety of sub-programs associated with the Marine Corps' International Affairs Officer Program¹. Furthermore, and in keeping with the current CMC's adage that *there's no such thing as a former Marine* and that “each of you – from Private to General, Civilian Marines, Families and those who support our Corps – will contribute to our success²”, those who receive this high-quality training during their active and reserve-duty years, can serve and meet the needs of the Corps, its operational forces, and frankly the much larger Combatant Commands, long after they have changed over to civilian attire.

My purpose in writing this article is three-fold: (1) to make a recommendation to the Marine Corps – and possibly to the greater DoD – to build a cadre of world-wide deployable civilians to operate in the *shape, clear, hold*, and the early stages of *the build* phases alongside their uniformed colleagues, (2) to leverage former and retired Foreign Area Officers (FAOs) and Regional Affairs Officers (RAOs) to fill out the ranks of these positions, or even to create a standing DoD organization manned by them, and (3) to provide recommendations to former and retired FAOs and RAOs about opportunities that are open to them after separation or retirement from the active-duty forces to continue to serve the operational forces – both as part of the Marine Corps as well as Combatant Commands; and some of the skills that they

¹ The IAOP is governed by Marine Corps Order (MCO) 1520.11E and includes the formal study-track Foreign Area Officer (FAO) and Regional Affairs Officer (RAO) sub-programs, as well as officers who have been awarded the FAO/RAO Additional MOSs through the “experience-track” and their involvement in closely associated programs such as the Personnel Exchange Program (PEP), the Olmsted Scholarship Program, Foreign Professional Military Education (PME), et al.

² Excerpt from 35th *Commandant of the Marine Corps, Commandant's Planning Guidance 2010*.

should aim to acquire before, during, and after their own active-duty service in order to bolster their utility to the military commander.

Retirement or separation from the active-duty Marine Corps does not mean that a Marine is no longer of utility to the operational forces. In fact, in a COIN environment, it is critically important to have civilians working next to their uniformed colleagues. From my own personal experience in and out of uniform, it is my belief that U.S. or Coalition civilians often have better access to foreign civilian communities: local governance institutions, religious leaders, women's groups, etc. When a civilian population observes only foreign uniformed military personnel involved in their communities, they tend to focus on the negative: that their communities are in tumult, and that they are subject to occupation – whether true or not. On the other hand, when these same people see foreign civilians working alongside their uniformed partners, there is arguably a greater sense of normalcy, and potentially even the perspective that things are improving; i.e., that the foreign country (the United States or her Coalition allies) feels confident and comfortable enough to send their civilians to work in the environment. One might then conjecture, why not send U.S. Department of State, U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), or other government agencies and departments civilian personnel to fill that gap? Well, that is actually the case in some respects...or at least what is ideally desired. The problem, though, is that these agencies typically maintain greater restrictions on where their personnel can be deployed (i.e., force protection and quality of life), and there are also times when there are disagreements between DoD organizations and their civilian agency counterparts as to where the civilian presence should be located, and exactly what they are willing to do on the ground. Personnel *contracted* to support DoD, as well as DoD civilians³, though, are much easier to align with military priorities and activities, and force protection requirements – and retired FAOs and RAOs based on their background are therefore ideally

³ This runs the gamut from former and retired FAOs and RAOs who are serving as Marine Corps and DoD civilians and providing their expertise to the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD), Joint Staff, and Service Headquarters staffs (PP&O, for instance); providing cultural & regional expertise at Geographic Combatant (COCOM), Marine Forces (MARFOR), and Marine Expeditionary Force (MEF) Commands; serving in information operations, culture learning, and security cooperation-oriented organizations like MCIOC, CAOCL, CSW, and SCETC; and employed overseas in contingency operations as cultural advisors, *Afghan Hands*, and Human Terrain Team (HTT) members supporting Regional Commands in Afghanistan and beyond.

suited to fill this niche requirement. Furthermore, while former and retired FAOs and RAOs have plenty of interagency experience, they may likewise prefer to work with and for DoD, rather than for DoS or USAID...and their prior military experience ensures that their expectations are in line with military commanders. They also tend to assimilate well within the military culture. As I have observed in the G-9 Civil Military Operations (CMO) Section and the C-9 Stability Operations Division in Regional Command (Southwest) over the past 2 years, having civilians who work directly for the military command is extremely beneficial, particularly during the shape, clear, hold, and early build phases. During the *build* phase, many of those activities that are originally spearheaded by either the military or the military's civilian capacity could then be transitioned to the purely civilian agencies as security improves and the *build* phase takes center stage. While the *Afghan Pakistan Hands Program (APH)*⁴, for instance, provides some of this expertise to support our military in Afghanistan, and does include some DoD civilians, it is primarily geared as an active-duty initiative. Its long-term lifespan is also not assured by any means, nor is it built to support other contingencies around the globe. What I suggest is that the Marine Corps, and possibly DoD as a whole (or the operationally-oriented Geographic Combatant Commands at a minimum), determine if there is a standing requirement for a cadre of cultural advisors to support these future conflicts. If there is, then the Corps or DoD may want to invest in creating a permanent organization of Department of Defense civilians (i.e., Government Service/GS) who bring this culturally-attuned expertise to the fight; if the requirement is not solid, however, then the Corps or DoD should look to the public sector and the contracting world to attract the requisite personnel on a case-by-case basis. Either way, retired and former FAOs and RAOs can be recruited as either DoD civilians or as contractors to support their fellow uniformed personnel. There are numerous civilian companies that attract highly qualified former FAOs and RAOs, and then contract them out to the Marine Corps for

⁴ The Afghan Pakistan Hands Program (APH) was created at the direction of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS), Admiral Mullah, in 2009. The objective of the APH is to identify, select, train, and manage a cohort of experts to bring greater unity and cohesion to the fight in Afghanistan.

specific periods of time. This is obviously the easiest route in the near-term as DoD debates the validity of establishing a permanent DoD civilian organization to support the active-duty component⁵.

FAOs and RAOs definitely gain skills that many of their fellow service personnel do not typically acquire during their active-duty careers: foreign language expertise, independent operations in a foreign environment, and a great deal of interaction and coordination with a variety of government civilian organizations and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). Nevertheless, based on the United States' collective experiences in Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan, there are dozens of other vocations that a FAO and RAO should try to target during their pre-military work experience, during undergraduate studies, during their active-duty service (either enlisted or officer), and finally after their separation or retirement from the active-duty military: basic development skills, civil affairs, civil or architectural engineering, agricultural and animal husbandry training, police training, local governance development, religious-based conflict resolution skills, et al. With a fundamental shift in terms of how the Marine Corps views its work-wide deployable "civilian Marines" – and aimed at the retention of a highly-trained segment of that population – the IAOP can be greatly improved, as dedicated and highly skilled officers (and possibly future NCOs) discover suitable outlets to continue to contribute to the Corps' battlefield success for years to come as civilian cultural advisors.

Author: *LtCol Patrick J. Carroll, USMC (Ret.) is an infantry & Middle East Foreign Area Officer (FAO) who served as the IAOP Coordinator at HQMC International Issues Branch from 1999-2002. He is currently serving as a Cultural & Governance Advisor with the C-9 Stability Operations Section, Regional Command (Southwest); and is employed by L-3 Communications Expeditionary Operations Branch.*

⁵ While the U.S. Department of State has attempted to create something akin to this in the form of the Civilian Response Corps, the author has never met a member of the CRC in southern Afghanistan. The better paradigm is the United Kingdom's Stabilisation Unit (www.stabilisationunit.gov.uk) which has provided dozens of advisors to Regional Command (South) and (Southwest). The Stabilisation Unit is the U.K. Government's centre of expertise and best practice in stabilisation, and the home of the Civilian Stabilisation Group (CSG). The Unit was set up to respond to the complex challenges of fragile and conflict-afflicted states, and works with countries to enhance their capacity for self-governance. The Unit reports to the Ministry of Defence, Foreign and Commonwealth Office and Department for International Development, and includes staff from each parent Department.