

# Foreign Area Officers for Soft Logistics

In “A Case for ‘Soft Logistics,’” by Dr. Christopher R. Papanone and George L. Topic Jr., in the May–June 2013 issue of *Army Sustainment*, the authors argue that the Army is not preparing logisticians to effectively use noncoercive means when it comes to international relations. It is a great idea and a great article. However, the Army has logisticians with the qualifications that the authors desire, and the authors even mention them in their article: foreign area officers (FAOs).

FAOs do not forsake their basic branches upon entering into their functional areas, and they are expected to maintain some level of proficiency and professional knowledge

in their basic branches. I suspect that one reason FAOs are chosen from all branches of the Army (aside from the fact that the Military Intelligence branch could not possibly fill all the FAO requirements by itself) is that a variety of backgrounds provides an assortment of experts and experience downrange. FAOs undergo rigorous training, including language, regional training (a form of immersion into the area’s cultures and the State Department), and Advanced Civil Schooling.

I am sure I am not the only FAO logistician who has sought guidance from senior logisticians about how I can use my position as an FAO to benefit my fellow Army logisticians.

Unfortunately, I have yet to receive much feedback, either from mentors or from the professional military education entities at the Army Logistics University.

Maybe there is a way the Logistics branch can better use logisticians assigned as FAOs. Perhaps it is possible to assign FAO logisticians to positions in which “soft logistics” plays a key role. I admit I offer no concrete solutions, but in this time of budget cuts and furloughs, it is hard to argue for more of anything besides doing more with what you already have.

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