



SUMMER 2025

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS PROGRAM NEWSLETTER

IAPMARINE@USMC.MIL



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(The 39th Commandant of the U.S. Marine Corps, Gen. Eric M. Smith, is greeted by Captain Sydney Murkins, a Foreign Area Officer conducting her in-region training upon his arrival to U.S. Embassy, Oslo, Norway on Oct. 25, 2024. (U.S. Marine Corps photo by Staff Sgt. Kelsey Dornfeld).

Message from the Program Manager

By: **LtCol Brett McCormick**

IAP Community,

I hope you and your families are well. During the first half of the year, PLU-8 encountered numerous, unplanned changes and direction that are outside of the control of PLU and concurrently impact other service branches. DoD-level working groups that discussed changes to DLI and how students could learn languages outside of Monterey, a proposed closure to the National Security Affairs department at NPS, and significant funding reductions influence how we manage and plan to manage the community. As of mid-July 2025, the current timelines and locations associated with IAP personnel studying at DLI and NPS are still occurring as planned and we continue to advocate for USMC interests and monitor developments. I want to highlight some of the topics and discussions that vector a large portion time, focus, and planning required by PLU-8 to sustain the programs managed for the Marine Corps.

Disclaimer: The articles published in this newsletter are for information purposes only. Featured articles and “IAP Marines In Action” announcements are for information only. Views and opinions expressed are those of the authors alone and do not represent official Marine Corps policy or endorsement by the HQMC IAP Office.

Message from the Program Manager, Continued

Website Modernization

Knowing there was room for improvement for how PLU-8 processed the large amount of submissions across the service for IAP-specific programs, courses, and training opportunities we changed how Marines will submit information to PLU-8. We will no longer be using inefficient back and forth emails and associated attachments for registrations and/or submissions. Instead, <https://www.ppo.marines.mil/Units/Strategy-and-Plans-Division/International-Affairs-Branch/International-Affairs-Program/> will be the medium used to submit information for more accurate tracking while ensuring we have the most current submission information for respective applications. The IAP website will be the main source of posting information and communicating with the 600+ Marines in the community. In lieu of periodic newsletters, the IAP website will serve as the main messaging platform to relay information and post material authored by and relating to IAP matters. IAP Marines can actively visit and reference the website to ensure they are aware of current information, opportunities, training options, and timelines.

FY26 Utilization Tours

Slating for 82XX utilization tours is prioritized for Marines who complete study track programs and require utilization tours to fulfill their respective program requirements. In coordination with MMOA-3, we are incorporating the roughly 26 Marines annually selected via the experience track panels (occurring semiannually the first week of **May** and **November**) who obtain 82XX MOSs. To ensure 82XX billets are staffed at the highest levels, Marines who have 82XX MOSs will be included in the eligible population screening for FY26 vacancies. Discussions between MMOA-3, PMOS monitors, and PLU-8 will identify Marines with both the 82XX MOS and career timing to support IAP tours. Marines seeking FY26 82XX assignments will use the **IAP Marine Utilization Tour Data Sheet** found under the IAP SUBMISSIONS AND REGISTRATIONS section of the IAP website, vacancies are found after clicking on the tour data sheet link.

MOS Consolidation

We are consolidating 82XX MOSs to reduce the number sub-specialties and directly align areas of focus to Geographic Combatant Commands, per the Unified Campaign Plan. This will be done in two phases: first, the FAO 824X MOS will see these changes reflected in the FY26 MOS Manual per para 2.b. of [MARADMIN 167/25](#). Subsequent changes for the RAO 822X and FAS 823X MOSs will reflect in the FY27 MOS manual. The long-term plan eliminates the 82X6 & 82X8 (falling under 82X3) and 82X7 (falling under 82X2). The new subspecialties will reflect:

82X1 MOS: Western Hemisphere

82X2 MOS: Europe

82X3 MOS: Indo-Pacific

82X4 MOS: Middle East

82X5 MOS: Africa

MGySgt Moffett is actively working with TFSD and DC I personnel to ensure there is a transparent transition and individual Marines are ***not*** contacting their respective IPACs to make associated changes, which should occur without individual actions.

The Omnipresent F-word: Funding

IAP funding in FY26 will be reduced by at least -\$345k to support higher priority USMC initiatives, mainly the Barracks 2030 initiative. Subsequent years should return to previous levels; however, it needs to be known, understood, and recognized the fiscal climate limits what is in the realm of possible: FY26 will be significantly impacted by what can be supported from a financial aspect. Math, not emotions, drives respective planning, opportunities, and activities that may or may not be supported in FY26. Come to PLU-8 with prioritized COAs in a timely manner, understanding the limiting factors we face in FY26.

Any Clime or Place: Why Foreign Area Officers Are Tools in Marine Corps Success

U.S. EMBASSY OSLO, NORWAY

Marine Corps FAOs play a pivotal role on the success of the Marine Corps beyond U.S. borders. In addition to fluency in at least one foreign language, FAOs are adept in the languages of diplomacy, military strategy, and tactical communication. This unique skillset makes them ideal liaisons between host nations, senior military leaders, and the interagency. This versatility allows FAOs to both enable the individual warfighter to seamlessly integrate with Allied forces in host nations and to provide Service Chiefs critical information needed to inform decisions.

On 25 October 2024, Captain Sydney Murkins, an in-region training (IRT) FAO based out of U.S. Embassy Oslo demonstrated the critical capabilities of FAOs during the 39th Commandant of the U.S. Marine Corps, General Eric M. Smith's visit to the Embassy. General Smith's trip centered around engagements with his Norwegian counterparts as well as dedicated time to meet with and recognize the Marines stationed in Norway. As part of this visit to U.S. Embassy Oslo, he was scheduled to meet with key members of the Embassy and receive a Country Team brief, which provide overview of current of U.S.- Norwegian relations.

However, a delayed flight forced rapid changes to the schedule, resulting in General Smith missing the Country Team brief, instead directly moving to meet and recognize Marines stationed in Norway directly. As such, Captain Murkins' role shifted. She was no longer only providing General Smith with the ODC mission portfolio. She was now charged with also greeting General Smith upon his arrival to the Embassy and then escorting him to the Marine House, while simultaneously providing the ODC mission set brief.

Despite her IRT status, Captain Murkins was afforded the opportunity to serve as the Marine representative at U.S. Embassy Oslo, reflecting the ODC Chief, LtCol Christopher Shore's commitment to prioritizing FAO development. Having overseen four IRT FAOs, LtCol Shore emphasizes that preparing for and conducting executive communication events builds confidence that will enhance FAO proficiency at any future organization.

Following General Smith's visit, LtCol Shore remarked, "When the current Commandant of the Marine Corps visited Norway in October 2024, it only made sense to give Capt Murkins the opportunity to excel and brief our most senior Marine leader in uniform. All of the officers in US Embassy Oslo supported the idea and enabled the engagement, making in-stride adjustments and decisions to ensure she would have the time to brief the defense cooperation portfolio. Best of all, Capt Murkins executed it outstandingly."

The FAO Contribution: Insights from a EUCOM Desk Officer

Following the engagement with Commandant of the Marine Corps, Captain Murkins had an opportunity to speak with one of the experts in General Smith's traveling party. Major Mike Kristek, the European Command (EUCOM) Desk Officer assigned to the Strategy and Plans Division at Headquarters Marine Corps provided a behind the scenes insight into the busy everyday life of a Service Chief and why FAOs are an essential tool them.

Any Clime or Place: Why Foreign Area Officers Are Tools in Marine Corps Success, Continued

Maj Kristek explained that throughout General Smith's travel—whether in aircraft, motorcades, or even between engagements—he is continuously briefed on global updates related to his Title 10 responsibilities. As such, he must make and communicate decisions to a broad audience including the Department of the Navy, Joint Chiefs, Congress, deputy commandants, and subordinate Marine Commanders. Given their broad responsibilities, Service Chiefs like General Smith understandably have limited opportunities to delve into the complex details necessary to fully understand the bilateral military and political dynamics of each Allied nation or partner.

Having observed many interactions between FAOs and Service Chiefs, Maj Kristek explains that FAOs help bridge this gap—quickly providing Service Chiefs like General Smith the comprehensive information on a host nation to develop, maintain, and enhance the relationship with U.S. Allies and partners. In addition to supporting Service Chiefs like General Smith, FAOs contribute to accomplishing national security objectives. Mak Kristek states, “Captain Murkins’ ability to succinctly communicate both the U.S. Country Team’s priorities as well as unique insights into the allied relationship was mission critical to ensuring the Commandant had successful engagements and accomplished service objectives. Furthermore, the fact that a FAO in training was chosen to represent the embassy and its defense offices during the Commandant’s limited time on the ground speaks volumes to the level of access and trust FAOs enjoy and the responsibility that trust carries.”

Conclusion: A Critical Enabler of the U.S. Marine Corps

FAOs are vital to the Marine Corps’ ability to operate effectively in any environment, ensuring that relations with Allies and partners are nurtured and sustained. Regardless of the host nation or key leader engagement, FAOs should be viewed as an enabler to the Marine Corps and a tool to senior leaders. They are the Marine representative on the ground in a host nation who have unique established relationships with Allied forces and because of this, are able to provide the comprehensive and reliable information necessary for Service Chiefs and senior leaders who are expected to make quick decisions. The Marine Corps legacy is rooted in its ability to operate effectively in any clime or place; however, maintaining its expeditionary capability depends significantly on collaboration with Allies and partners abroad. FAOs stationed in host nations play a critical role in sustaining the Marine Corps as an expeditionary force in readiness.

FAS Insights Abroad

U.S. Embassy Cotonou, Benin

During my time on In-Region Training (IRT), GySgt Stephanie Martinez had a unique opportunity to serve as the first Operations SNCO for the Office of Security Cooperation (OSC) at U.S. Embassy Cotonou, Benin. The OSC is a still a new office being introduced to the U.S. Embassy in Benin, consisting of a U.S. Army Major and an Operations NCO. The OSC Operations NCO billet was being filled as a TAD position but has been approved to be filled by permanent staff starting April 2025. During her tour in Cotnou, Benin, she participated in various events that reflect the United States' particular interest in Benin and the broader West African region. During her time, she also created the Standard Operation Procedures (SOP) and set the standard work procedures for this billet.

Upon arrival, the OSC prepared for a visit from AFRICOM Commander, General Langley, and the visit consisted of organizing multiple meetings and events with the host nation's President, Chief of Defense, and Minister of Defense to discuss counterterrorism efforts and regional security. The Commander's visit was extremely successful and underscored the strong relationship between both countries. The U.S. partnership with Benin spans over six decades, dating back to the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1960. The U.S. remains steadfast in its support for Benin's efforts to promote democracy, enhance security, and improve the prosperity of its citizens.

Throughout her time in Benin, she assisted with multiple VIP visits consisting of Deputy Commander of U.S. AFRICOM, Lieutenant General John Brennan, Africa Special Operations Commander Rear Admiral Foy, and U.S. AFRICOM Command Major General Kenneth Ekman. During these high visibility visits, she was responsible for coordinating the logistics and meeting with host nation's leadership to continue developing relations between Benin and the United States.

The OSC participated in various events with the host nation's military. One notable event was a donation ceremony where equipment was presented to Benin's Armed Forces, aimed at strengthening relations between the United States and Benin. The OSC played a key role in assisting and coordinating the event, during which U.S. Ambassador Brian Shukan transferred 1.8 billion CFA worth of equipment to the FAB. This included four fuel trucks, spare parts, and additional supplies. Additionally, the OSC collaborated with the U.S. Army Civil Affairs Team and the Spirit of America Organization to organize a donation for Parakou's Tchaourou All-Girls School. During the ceremony, 10 laptops were donated to the school.

Another significant event during her time in Benin was the organization of the country's first-time hosting of the USAFRICOM Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) Conference. This was a large-scale event that required extensive planning, including coordinating the event logistics and recruiting women in high military positions, not only from Benin but also from neighboring countries such as Togo and Ghana. This was a successful event not only for USAFRICOM, but also U.S. Embassy Cotonou, as it was a team effort in ensuring the conference was a successful collaborate event between the DoD and Department of State efforts.

Her time in Cotonou, Benin, is a prime example of how Marines in the Foreign Area SNCO Program impact DoD activities. Despite her regional focus as an INDOPACOM FAS, the ability to adapt and remain versatile in the MOS demonstrated how the core principles of a FAS can be successfully applied, regardless of the region.



Professional Development Opportunities

FAOA Membership

It is highly recommended to become a member of the FAOA (<https://www.faoa.org/>) to read, network, and take part of the various forums and opportunities offered to FAOs. From the website: “FAOA serves as a vibrant hub for Foreign Area Officers and international specialists who have diverse experiences serving across the globe. Here, professionals connect and bond over shared backgrounds and expertise, fostering a supportive environment for networking and building lasting relationships. Members benefit from collaborating with like-minded individuals, exchanging insights, and assisting each other in their personal and professional development journeys. A vibrant hub for FAOs who have diverse experiences serving across the globe. Here, professionals connect and bond over shared backgrounds and expertise, fostering a supportive environment for networking and building lasting relationships. Members benefit from collaborating with like-minded individuals, exchanging insights, and assisting each other in their personal and professional development journeys.

There will be an inaugural FAOA Virtual Job Fair, in partnership with Hiring Our Heroes, taking place on **Wednesday, July 24 from 1:00 to 4:00 PM ET** (registration is done via FAOA website). This is a first-of-its-kind opportunity designed specifically for FAOs, international specialists, and FAO spouses to connect directly with companies seeking global talent and international expertise.

📍 Why You Should Attend:

- **Targeted hiring:** All participating employers understand & value the FAO/International Specialist skill sets— not just another job fair.
- **Diverse industries:** From defense and aerospace to policy, consulting, tech, and beyond—meet employers who are actively hiring for roles that match your background.

DoD Libraries

If you do not currently take advantage of the for free access to sound content (WSJ, Foreign Policy, Economist, PressReader, Audiobooks, etc.), you can register to access material using the following link: (<https://marines.dodmwrlibraries.org>).

Sunsetting JFAO Sustainment Courses

As part of the funding reductions, JFAO Sustainment Courses hosted by George Washington University and coordinated by Defense Language National Security Education Office will no longer be funded. The overall grant program was significantly cut, forcing the early termination of the contract vehicle. After 10 years of partnership, the GWU Team's last day with the program will be July 31, 2025. Beverly Rouse Department of Defense Foreign Area Program Manager, DLNSEO is also on the move and wanted to share the following message. “I am retiring after 41 years of service with the Department of Defense. It has been my pleasure to serve the FAO community for the past 13 years with DLNSEO. I would like to thank each of you for trusting us with providing you with opportunities to expand your regional knowledge. You bring a unique strategic advantage to the Department. I wish you much success in your careers and please stay connected via LinkedIn.”

DLNSEO is working closely with the FAO Proponents on ways to continue JFAOC Phase 2 going forward. We are looking at an alternative menu of options to ensure critical Regional Training remains part of FAO development. Subsequent information will be posted to the IAP website

Articles of Interest pertaining to IAP

DLI Reductions: https://www.montereycountynow.com/news/local_news/facing-a-30-million-budget-reduction-dli-is-offering-more-early-retirement-and-resignations/article_7f58b20a-7c82-43e4-aa50-6fcca4a2dd7f.html

Barracks 2030 Delay: https://www.stripes.com/branches/marine_corps/2025-05-01/marine-corps-barracks-improvements-17646718.html

PCS Cost Reductions: <https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/article/4202043/dod-makes-plans-to-reduce-discretionary-pcs-budget-by-half-over-next-5-years/>

2026 Budget Request: <https://www.defenseone.com/policy/2025/06/dods-budget-request-finally-drops-combining-real-decrease-one-time-boost/406345/>

Unfunded Priority Lists: <https://breakingdefense.com/2025/07/a-look-at-the-wish-lists-for-centcom-northcom-southcom-indopacom-and-stratcom/>

Language Sustainment Resources

DLNSEO - Language Training Centers

The Language Training Center (LTC) Program provides language and culture training for Department of Defense (DoD) personnel. LTCs leverage existing university and college language and culture programs to meet the needs of DoD organizations and units. The Institute of International Education administers the Language Training Centers program on behalf of the Defense Language and National Security Education Office. Additional information can be found: <https://www.dodlhc.org/>

DLIFLC - Continuing Education

DLIFLC Continuing Education Directorate provides superior post-basic foreign language instruction via resident and non-resident programs. Online instruction is conducted using the Broadband Language Training System (BLTS) platform and allows for more flexible scheduling and instruction tailored to individual student needs. Students receive both synchronous (same time, anyplace) and asynchronous (any time, any place) lessons and self-study assignments. Distance Learning also provides professional military linguists with access to a myriad of online foreign language materials to enhance cultural knowledge. Submit your BLTS Request Form, found [HERE](#) to Madison Hughes at madison.hughes@dliflc.edu.

DLIFLC - Foreign Area Officer Language Program

FLP Background

In 2009 the Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center (DLIFLC), School of Distance Learning created what is now known as the FAO Language Program, and in coordination with Defense Language and Security Education Office (DLNSEO), 24 MOS-specific domains were adopted for our online Advanced Language Enhancement Courses (ALEC) which also serve as the core topics for our online facilitated FAO courses.

Since then, ALEC courses have continued to evolve and engage learners with cutting-edge online lesson content ranging from Interagency Language Roundtable (ILR) levels 2 to 3+. We are driven to provide authentic materials and training to meet the needs of the greater FAO community.

Our facilitated courses are tailored to the FAO's MOS, reported DLPT scores and working ILR level(s). We are here to help you prepare for your next field assignment, upgrade your DLPT record, and meet your annual language training requirements – all which support FLPP pay and professional development gains.

Scheduling

For facilitated courses we need a minimum 2-week lead time to arrange faculty assets. These courses are provided free-of-charge and scheduling is based upon faculty availability. Course request forms are available online at the FAO mISuite page and can be provided directly from us via email:

FAO.language.program@dliflc.edu



For all inquiries, please contact us at FAO.language.program@dliflc.edu

Directorate of Continuing Education
School of Distance Learning
Defense Language Institute
Foreign Language Center

Foreign Area Officer Language Program

Advanced Language Enhancement Courses

Providing DoD Military Branches and Agencies with advanced online language courses designed to meet mission goals at the point of need.



Advanced Language Enhancement Courses (ALEC)

- COURSE I**
- Humanitarian Assistance/ Disaster Response
 - Border Security/ National Sovereignty
 - Peacekeeping Operations
 - Energy Issues
 - Privacy and Maritime Security Issues
 - Health Issues

- COURSE II**
- Security Assistance Issues
 - Multilateral Organizations
 - Aviation Issues
 - Environmental Issues
 - Foreign Aid and Investment
 - Popular Culture

- COURSE III**
- Trafficking in Persons
 - WMD Proliferation Issues
 - Crime, Narcotics, & the Black Market
 - Combating Terrorism
 - Corruption & Ethics
 - Strategy & Policy Engagement

- COURSE IV**
- Military Modernization
 - Mass Media & Communications
 - Space Issues
 - Non-Traditional Comms (SMS/Web 2.0, etc.)
 - Non-Governmental Organizations
 - Formal Presentations

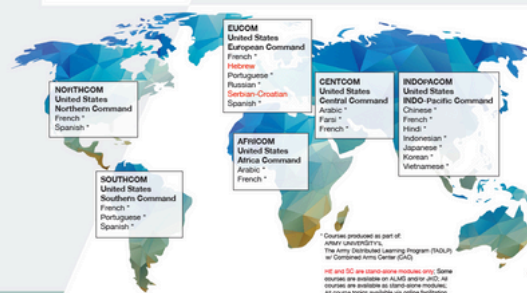
SELF-STUDY & e-MENTORED

All FAOs & related DoD U.S.G. Agency personnel are encouraged to utilize our Advanced Language Enhancement Courses (ALEC) which support target language sustainment and expansion.

ALEC self-study and e-Mentored online courses are designed to drive language proficiency and cultural competency with regionally targeted content highlighting MOS-specific terminology.

Self-study courses incorporate authentic scenario-based practical exercises that emphasize analytical language use grounded in the host country or region target language and culture.

Our online facilitated courses are flexible and offer tailored content and length. DL's highly trained faculty have the expertise to drive results via online, non-resident courses that range from 2-week refreshers to 7-week skill enhancers.



Special Operations Forces Teletraining System

[SOFTS Online - Register](#)

[SOFTS Online - FAQ](#)

Joint Knowledge Online

FAO Language Sustainment Packs:

Arabic, Chinese, French, Hindi, Indonesian, Korean, Persian Farsi, Portuguese, Spanish, Russian

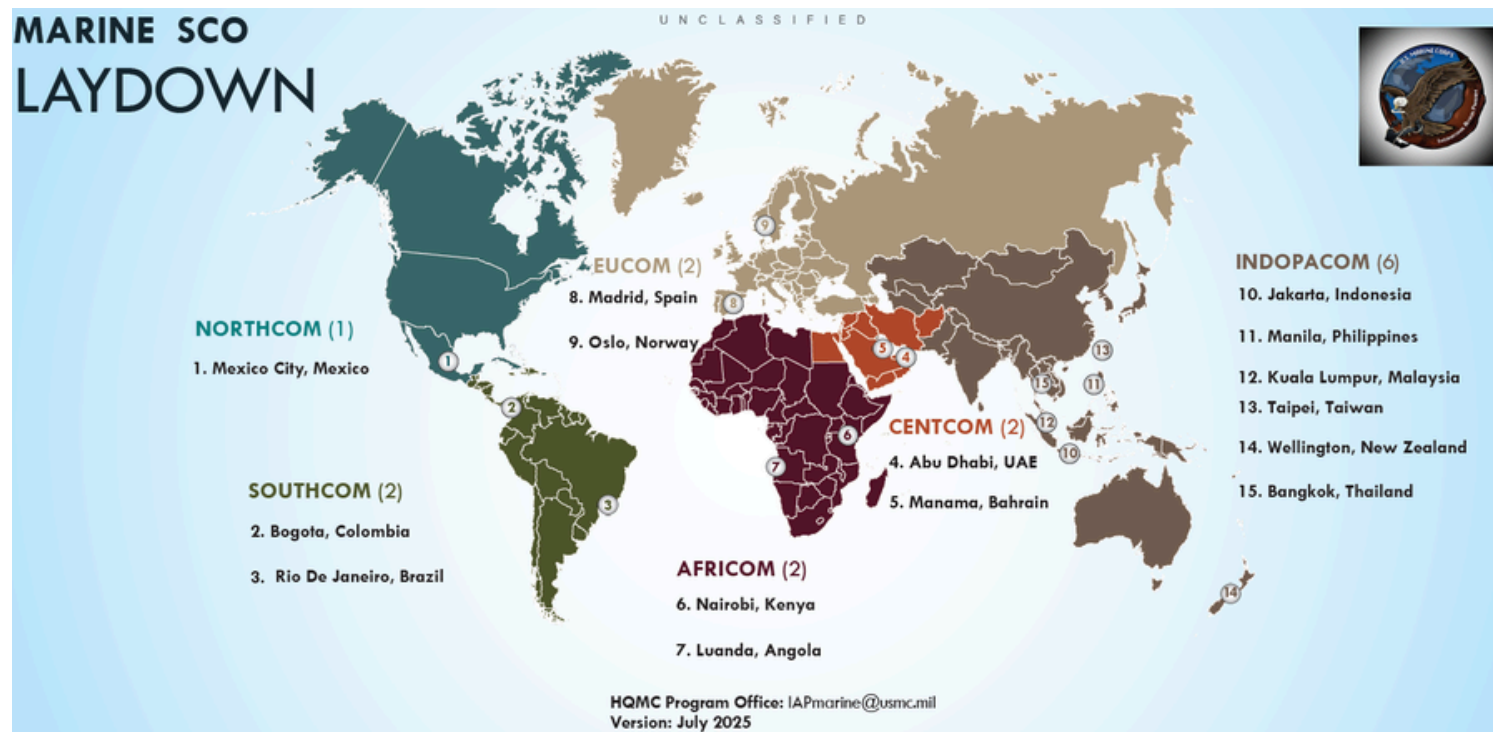
[JKO.LCMS\(jten.mil\)](http://JKO.LCMS(jten.mil))



PEP, SCO, and MARA Assignments

If you seek to serve in an Embassy billet, it is recommended you apply for both the SCO and MARA programs. Currently, MMOA releases the SCO solicitation message around **January** to support the selection board that convenes in **May** to select MARAs/SCOs/PEPs. PLU-8 oversees the SCO and PEP billets while MCIA oversees the MARA billets. SCO and PEP vacancies for FY28/29 will be forthcoming, posted on the IAP website in the fall of 2025.

MARA countries (subject to change) can be reviewed on the MCIA website: <https://www.intelligence.marines.mil/OCC-Field-Foreign-Language-Defense-Attache-Program/#tab#countries-of-assignment>.



PEP Billets

INDOPACOM

Australia (12)

EUROM

France (1)
Netherlands (2)
Norway (2)
UK (20)

SOUTHCOM

Argentina (1)
Brazil (1)
Chile (3)
Colombia (2)
Peru (1)

NORTHCOM

Canada (6)

MPEP Marine Billet Locations

