



CHIEF's Sight Picture

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Adjusting to the New Steady State -- NCO Retraining Program

As we continue to adjust to the demands of fighting the global war on terrorism, defending the homeland, and fulfilling our global security requirements, we must adapt to the new steady state that has stressed so many of the career fields in our Air Force. With the force reductions of the 1990s and the skill level imbalances we've experienced in some career fields, the stage was set for a challenging human resources environment. Over many months, we've expended considerable effort studying our "stressed career fields." We are now taking action, and are taking a variety of steps to increase manning in undermanned specialties and balance skills across the force. This "Sight Picture" will explain one of the tools we are using -- the Noncommissioned Officer Retraining Program (NCORP).

While certain career fields are experiencing more pain than others, the results of each study yield similar conclusions -- every skill and most of our people are experiencing stress of some kind. We must step out aggressively to balance the skills and reduce the stress level across the force within current resources and constraints. We are engaged in a number of complementary efforts, including a fundamental reassessment of the basic structure, assignment, and training policies for our most stressed career fields. We are reviewing who should fill, how we fill, how we can best fix undermanned career fields, and how to stabilize our force. The NCO Retraining Program will help correct imbalances while still providing NCOs a voice in their own Air Force career.

The NCORP consists of both voluntary and involuntary phases. Phase I, the voluntary phase, encourages eligible airmen to retrain into selected shortage career fields. If goals are not met through the voluntary phase, Phase II, or the involuntary phase, is implemented in select shortage specialties. A formal NCORP has not been active since FY99. Reintroducing the annual program is necessary to help balance skills mixes across AFSCs, pull more manpower into stressed career fields, and help reshape the force to meet current and future operational needs. We have established an initial programmed target of 1,400 NCO quotas.

We have also taken steps to move authorizations (spaces) which will drive movement of people (faces) from less stressed to more stressed career fields. We will begin by moving approximately 3,700 spaces, adjusting accession requirements to get them in the door, and reallocating training seats to produce more personnel in stressed skills. The retraining program will help us fill in NCO shortages in undermanned skills.

The realignment of authorizations will begin immediately and will be evaluated periodically to determine if additional adjustments are needed. We will also aggressively look at corresponding programs such as bonus programs, assignment policy, and the chronic critical skills list to ensure they complement our objectives. Although the timing of this initiative might appear to conflict with current operations, these changes are vital to ensure we are postured correctly to meet our long-term mission demands.

As with any initiative of this magnitude, many of you will be concerned with how this will affect your career. We need to address these concerns at the outset to ensure we take care of our people through this process. Supervisors and leaders at all levels must take time to learn how this program will work and then clearly communicate the specifics to their people. AFPC will provide detailed implementation instructions through local MPFs via message within the next few days.

Despite the challenges associated with this effort, it is clear we must reshape our force now if we hope to retain our status as the best-trained, equipped, and motivated air and space force in the world. Our expeditionary force continues to provide world-class capabilities to joint operations around the world. With this initiative, we reinforce this capability, and begin the process of balancing our force without breaking career fields, individual careers, or our mission capabilities.

We hold to our principle that developing airmen is the first and foremost of our core competencies, and taking care of our people is the most important thing we do. While we take these actions to meet the mission needs of our Air Force, we do them with the best interests of our airmen in mind.



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