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# International Military Student Program

By

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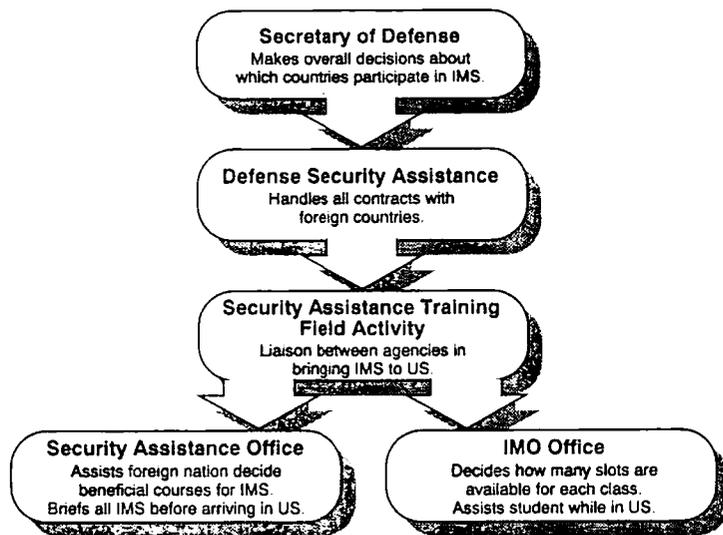
Security Assistance Training (SAT) is one of the Army's most important and cost effective means to enhance our interactions with the armed forces, government, and industries of foreign nations. Its major objectives are as follows:

- To further foreign policy objectives and U.S. security interests.
- To develop the technical skill, management expertise, and training capability of other countries.
- To promote military rapport and understanding.
- To promote better understanding of the U.S., its people, political system, institutions, and way of life.

SAT has a long and proud history. In 1961, the U.S. government realized the need to standardize a training program for International Military Students (IMS) coming to the U.S. The SAT program as we know it today is authorized by the U.S. Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 and the Arms Export Control Act. Additionally, the International Military Education and Training (IMET) program was established in 1976 as a grant program for providing professional, leadership, and management training for senior military leaders and selected junior and middle-grade officers.

Since 1950, IMET trained over 544,000 students from more than 125 different countries. The U.S. military offers more than 2000 courses at over 150 military schools throughout the U.S. and abroad. The Army trains over half of the total number of students. The impact of this training cannot be measured in numbers or counted in students. It serves to help bridge the gap of culture between ourselves and other nations. There is no better example of the SAT program, than the International Military Student Office at Fort Benjamin Harrison.

The selection process for IMS is complex. It begins with the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) making broad decisions, based upon the political climate, as to which countries will participate in SAT (see Figure 1). Next, the Defense Security Assistance Agency (DSAA) begins to make contracts with the participating countries. The U.S. Security Assistance Offices (SAO) overseas assist foreign governments in deciding which courses would be beneficial to their military training. Foreign countries often desire more slots than will be available to them. At the same time, the International Military Student Office (IMSO) receives approval from the schoolhouse for how many slots are available to IMS. The Security Assistance Training Field Activity (SATFA) is the U.S. Army link between the DSAA, SAO, and IMSO. SATFA ensures that the agencies communicate with one another, that the plan is executed properly, and also decides how many U.S. Army slots will go to which nation.



**Figure 1**

After all of those steps are completed, the country must select the military personnel who will attend the U.S. courses. The selection process varies from country to country, often taking up to two years. The IMS starts out in a field of hundreds of applicants and is only selected after numerous tests and evaluations. Students must understand and speak English. Most countries have English programs, but about 8% of the students attend English language training at the U.S. Defense Language School before proceeding to functional/technical courses. They are selected because of their outstanding records and potential. Many will hold positions of significant authority within their government or military. Since the program began, 30 IMS became heads of state or presidents of their country and approximately 2000 reached the rank of general. The training they receive is not considered to be a reward, but rather an important step within their career . . . .

Once International Military Students are selected and their courses are approved, how do they get to the U.S.? The SAO and IMSO work hand-in-hand to prepare the students. The following is a brief overview of each of their roles. It is by no means a complete list of all their responsibilities. Their job is a complicated one, because each of the 125 participating countries has different needs and problems.

### **ROLE OF THE SAO**

- Briefs the IMS on the organization of the military department they will be working within.
- Ensures that the IMS has obtained the proper passports and visas.
- Makes all of the IMS's travel arrangements.
- Ensures that the IMS has received all appropriate immunizations and knows what items can be brought through customs.
- Briefs IMS on reporting procedures at the U.S. installation.
- Gives the IMS a packing list and a briefing on the climate at the installation.
- Arranges IMS pay.

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- Explains appropriate standards of conduct.
  - Covers available medical care.
  - Briefs IMS on courtesy and protocol within the U.S. military.
  - Explains what cultural differences to expect.

### **ROLE OF THE IMSO**

- Sends information packet to appropriate SAOs (e.g. school brochures, maps, clothing requirements, cost of living).
- Provides a list of military acronyms that will be used within the course.
- Maintains IMS biographical information.
- Picks up the IMS from the airport; briefs the student on basic cultural differences.
- Assists the IMS with installation in processing.
- Maintains course evaluations.
- Sets up IMS military and civilian sponsors.
- Takes IMS on informational trips to learn about U.S. culture and way of life.
- Assists the IMS with any problem that may arise.
- Coordinates IMS return travel.

The IMSO of each installation must establish an Informational Program (IP). The purpose of the IP is to assist the students in acquiring a balanced understanding of U.S. society and institutions, in addition to their training and military experience. The activities for the IP are oriented around the following twelve objectives:

- U.S. Government institutions
- Judicial System
- Political Parties
- Press
- Diversity of American Life
- Women and Minorities
- Agriculture
- Economy
- Labor and Labor/Management Relations

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- Education
  - Public and Social Welfare
  - Human Rights

As an example of how the IP is conducted, the IMSO at Ft. Benjamin Harrison maximizes the use of local civic groups, organizations, agencies, facilities, and historical attractions. Students visit the city government, speak to the mayor, watch a court in session, talk to the judge, and tour the county jail. During election time they walk through the voting process, go to the election headquarters, and meet a senator or congressman. They visit the local elementary, middle, and high schools where they give presentations about their country, as well as provide the students with a chance to meet and speak with someone from a foreign country. The students often prepare skits and presentations for the visiting IMS. The IMSO also arranges tours of the public library, hospital, parks, zoo, museums, Indianapolis newspaper, local radio and TV stations, local farmers, banks, and private businesses. Finally, the students participating in the Advanced Course meet in Washington, D.C. with IMS from other Army Schools. They tour the capital and attend a session of Congress, etc. Overall, the trips to the community show the IMS a glimpse of American life that is much different than what is seen in the media. They meet and talk with U.S. citizens from all walks of life. Their participation in these programs does not go without sacrifice. The classes or examinations they miss must be made up and they can not fall behind in their work. They must still complete all course requirements and participate side-by-side with their U.S. counterparts in all course activities (to include all field training).

The IMSO coordinates military and civilian sponsors for the IMS. This is a vital part of the program that often goes unnoticed. The military sponsor's role is to explain any unfamiliar terms used in class, to help explain training procedures, to discuss differences between the U.S. Army and foreign armies, and to assist the IMS with understanding spoken English in class. At the beginning of each course, the AG School Commandant presents each IMS with a special staff badge. The IMS are introduced to the class and a brief biographical sketch is presented about each of them. The badging ceremony serves to make the IMS feel that they are a part of the course and to welcome them in the AG school.

The civilian sponsor's role is to give the IMS a view of American family life in the broadest sense and help the IMS to feel welcome. It is not a program that requires the sponsor family to plan elaborate events. It is actually preferred that the sponsor family simply include the IMS in some of their normal activities. Often the family will take the IMS on a picnic to a local recreational area, take the officer sightseeing in the local area, go to school plays and sporting events, see a movie, enjoy a concert, or even just work around the yard on a Saturday afternoon. The IMS wants to learn about American life and what Americans are really like. The best way to accomplish this is to simply interact with an American family.

The IMS faces a number of difficulties while in the U.S. There are cultural barriers to cross, as well as language barriers. Often the IMS is unable to find restaurants or grocery stores that sell the food that is customary in their country. Typically, the IMS has no transportation, so he cannot easily go out into the community on his own. They are away from their family for long periods of time. They do not get paid a great deal of money while on these trips. There is little opportunity to take a break from American culture and be themselves. They are faced with people on a daily basis who, because of the language barrier, find it difficult to understand the ideas they try to convey. Finally, the highest barrier of all is cultural unfamiliarity. They are often surrounded by people who know little about their customs and culture. Somehow they manage to deal with all of these barriers and come away with a positive attitude. They do not let it interfere with their learning experience, and they find the overall experience rewarding.

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In conclusion, the SAT is a very positive program. Both IMS and Americans receive a great deal from this program. At Ft. Benjamin Harrison we have established an annual "International Night." It is an opportunity for the IMS to give something back to our community. The audience is greeted with sights and sounds from around the world and displays from the students' homelands. There is a buffet of delicacies from every student's country and the students perform some of their traditional music and dances. It is a way to open the door to better understanding by showing our rich cultural divinity. In the classroom, the exchange of professional military knowledge and expertise contributes to the American officer's military education as much as the IMS' training. As U.S. Army officers we must realize the importance of IMS and take full advantage of this wonderful opportunity.

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:**

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