



## Army Security Force Assistance Brigades (SFABs)

### What Is Security Force Assistance (SFA)?

Security Force Assistance (SFA) is defined as “unified action to generate, employ, and sustain local, host nation or regional security forces in support of a legitimate authority.” By definition “security forces include not only military forces, but also police, border forces, and other paramilitary organizations, as well as other local and regional forces.” SFA involves organizing, training, equipping, rebuilding, and advising foreign security forces (FSF).

### Background

The Department of Defense notes “military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan and many future operations will center on developing capability and capacity of host nation (HN) or other FSFs.” SFA activities have and are occurring in Africa, Europe, Asia, and South America. In the past, Special Forces units handled the majority of SFA missions, but the growing requirement for SFA over time has resulted in conventional forces assuming a more active role in conducting these missions. Conventional forces SFA missions were normally assigned to a Brigade Combat Team (BCT), the Army’s principal warfighting organization. Because of the nature of SFA missions, BCT leadership—officers and senior and mid-grade noncommissioned officers (NCOs)—were typically deployed to conduct SFA missions, with most junior NCOs and soldiers remaining at their home station. This situation, while practical from a resource perspective, created a number of readiness concerns for the BCT soldiers remaining at home station. One such concern is with leadership stripped out of the BCTs for the SFAB mission, the remaining soldiers were limited to training at individual and squad level only, resulting in a low level of unit readiness.

### The Army’s Plan to Establish SFABs

SFABs are to be capable of conducting SFA at the tactical (brigade and below) level. In May 2018, the Army announced it would establish six SFABs—five in the Active Component and one in the Army National Guard (ARNG). SFABs were originally planned to consist of about 500 soldiers (*BCTs consist of between 4,400 to 4,700 soldiers depending on type: Armored BCT [ABCT], Infantry BCT [IBCT], or Stryker BCT [SBCT]*), primarily in senior grades and encompassing a range of Military Operational Specialties (MOSs). The Army also planned to establish a Military Advisor Training Academy at Fort Benning, GA, to conduct a six-week course on relevant topics and skills.

The Army also plans for SFABs to be expanded, if the need arises, into fully operational BCTs capable of conducting major combat operations. In this case, SFAB personnel would serve as cadres who would accept the expansion of

personnel and equipment required to transform the SFAB into a BCT. These newly manned and equipped BCTs would then be trained up to conduct their respective combat missions.

### SFAB Stationing

According to the Army, SFABs are stationed at

- 1<sup>st</sup> SFAB—Fort Benning, GA;
- 2<sup>nd</sup> SFAB—Fort Bragg, NC;
- 3<sup>rd</sup> SFAB—Fort Hood, TX;
- 4<sup>th</sup> SFAB—Fort Carson, CO;
- 5<sup>th</sup> SFAB—Joint Base Lewis –McChord, WA; and
- 54<sup>th</sup> SFAB (Army National Guard)—battalions in Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, Texas.

The Army has also established a command element—the Security Force Assistance Command (SFAC)—within U.S. Army Forces Command (FORSCOM) at Fort Bragg, NC, to conduct training and readiness oversight of the SFABs.

### SFAB Organization

According to the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction:

SFABs consist of about 800 personnel organized in 36 multifunctional advisor teams each composed of 12 advisors and eight security personnel assigned to support the development of a partner nation’s military. According to the U.S. Army, each advisor team would be staffed with a commander, NCO in charge, two maneuver advisors, a medic, a joint force operator, a communications officer, a mechanic, an intelligence analyst, and specialists in logistics, operations, and explosives—all tasked with advising their Afghan counterparts while also providing sustainment for the SFAB. An SFAB can also employ 18 functional advising teams specializing in logistics, engineering, or field artillery. Each SFAB is led by a one-star general responsible for coordinating all SFAB operations in a partner nation.

### Current SFAB Mission and Role in Operations

According to the Army:

SFABs are uniquely capable of advancing America’s relationships across the globe. During competition, SFABs build trust, interoperability, and partner capacity. In crisis, SFABs enable the Joint Force and interagency team to quickly respond by enhancing coordination efforts. In

conflict, SFABs enhance coordination with partners and can expand to full mission capable brigades.

Today, SFABs are operating across Africa and Asia. In the future, SFABs will rotate smaller teams, as small as 12-members, into different countries and replace them as needed to establish a sustained military to military presence.

SFABs professionalize security assistance and cooperation missions. As permanent organizations with a standing mission, the units demonstrate a more concerted commitment than previous ad-hoc “advise and assist” formations, while also freeing up conventional brigade combat teams and Special Forces units. SFABs enable the Joint Force’s presence, to build trust and generate the ability to react to future crises.

### SFAB Regional Alignment

According to the Army, SFABs are to be regionally aligned as follows:

- 1<sup>st</sup> SFAB—U.S. Southern Command;
- 2<sup>nd</sup> SFAB—U.S. Africa Command;
- 3<sup>rd</sup> SFAB—U.S. Central Command;
- 4<sup>th</sup> SFAB—U.S. European Command;
- 5<sup>th</sup> SFAB—U.S. Indo-Pacific Command; and
- 54<sup>th</sup> SFAB (Army National Guard)—to be determined.

The Army notes that even though SFABs are regionally aligned, they can be deployed outside their assigned regions if required.

### SFAB Personnel Considerations

Initially, the Army planned to man SFABs with volunteers only, with the Army paying a \$5,000 incentive for enlisted SFAB volunteers. Leaders at brigade and battalion levels must have already successfully served in a commensurate position in a BCT before being selected to serve in an SFAB. The Army also wants officers and NCOs who have previously served as company commanders and first sergeants for SFAB duty as well.

### Early Recruiting and Retention Problems

The 1<sup>st</sup> SFAB’s 2018 deployment to Afghanistan reportedly revealed a number of personnel-related shortfalls. According to the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR):

Staffing of the SFABs is based on recruiting active-duty Army and National Guard volunteers, but while advisory experience is preferred, about 20 percent of the 1<sup>st</sup> SFAB had never previously deployed. Even though the Army offered a number of incentives for volunteers, the 1<sup>st</sup> SFAB was filling billets right up to the day that they departed.

In addition:

The 1<sup>st</sup> SFAB didn’t just suffer from recruitment challenges, but retention issues as well. The reason is simple ... advisor roles continue to be seen as not career enhancing in the military, which contributes to high attrition rates—up to 70 percent for the 1<sup>st</sup> SFAB.

It is not known if subsequent SFAB activations and deployments have had similar personnel-related experiences.

### SFAB Training

In addition to training at the Military Advisor Training Academy, many SFAB members are to receive language training—as much as 16 weeks in some cases. Soldiers are to also receive training on foreign weapons, advanced medical training, driver training, and survival, evasion, resistance, and escape (SERE) techniques.

### Equipping SFABs

Soldiers in SFABs are to be issued standard personal equipment (weapons, protective masks, etc.) and a variety of tactical wheeled vehicles armed with crew-served weapons (.50 caliber and 7.62 mm machine guns) for force protection. In addition, SFABs are to have command, control, communications, computer, and intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (C4ISR) capabilities.

### Potential Issues for Congress

- Are SFABs, with their limited presence, the right solution for SFA in highly contested regions?
- What is the organization and mission of the Security Force Assistance Command (SFAC)?
- What are the equipment, vehicular, and military construction (MILCON) requirements associated with activating six SFABs and the SFAC?
- Are there enough qualified volunteers for the SFABs or are soldiers being assigned to these units in a similar manner as soldiers are routinely assigned to conventional Army units?
- What steps has the Army taken to address SFAB personnel-related issues?
- Based on previous SFAB deployments and associated lessons learned, what types of modifications have been made to SFAB organization, equipment, and training?
- In the event SFABs are to be regenerated into BCTs, how long would it take to man, equip, and train them so they are capable of performing combat mission?

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