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# 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 “current 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. Currently, conventional forces SFA missions are 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 non-commissioned officers (NCOs)—are typically deployed to conduct SFA missions, whereas most junior NCOs and soldiers remain at their home station. This situation, while practical from a resource perspective, creates 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, remaining soldiers are limited to training to individual and squad level only.

## 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)—with the first SFAB to be activated at Ft. Benning, GA, in October 2017. SFABs will consist of 529 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 plans to establish a Military Advisor Training Academy at Ft. Benning, GA, to conduct a six-week course on relevant topics and skills. Each SFAB is to be aligned with a Geographical Combatant Command, with the first SFAB established being aligned to U.S. Central Command.

The Army also plans for SFABs to be expanded, if the need arises, into fully operational ABCTs or IBCTs 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 either an ABCT or IBCT. These newly manned and equipped BCTs would then be trained up to conduct their respective combat missions.

## Current Activities

The Army’s Ft. Benning-based 1<sup>st</sup> SFAB was deployed to Afghanistan in March 2018 and is scheduled to return home in early 2019. The Ft. Bragg, NC-based 2<sup>nd</sup> SFAB is currently in training and is scheduled to replace the 1<sup>st</sup> SFAB in Afghanistan in the spring of 2019. The Army National Guard’s 54<sup>th</sup> SFAB is beginning to recruit qualified Army National Guard soldiers to create subordinate units in Indiana, Georgia, Florida, Texas, Ohio, and Illinois.

## SFAB Personnel Considerations

Initially, the Army plans 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 a SFAB. The Army also wants officers and NCOs who have previously served as company commanders and first sergeants for SFAB duty. About 70% of SFAB soldiers will receive extensive training detailed in the next section and be coded as advisors. The rest of the soldiers will be mission command personnel to run the brigades.

## SFAB Training

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

## Equipping SFABs

Soldiers in SFABs will 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. Additional equipment needed to build an ABCT or IBCT would be provided during the SFAB’s regeneration.

## Potential Issues for Congress

- Are SFABs, with their limited presence, the right solution for SFA?
- What are the equipment, vehicular, and military construction (MILCON) requirements associated with the SFABs?

- Will SFABs be associated with Army divisions as are most BCTs, or will they be separate independent entities?
  - If not associated with standing Army divisions, will a separate division-level headquarters be established for the Army's six SFABs?
  - In the event SFABs are to be regenerated into ABCTs or IBCTs, how long will it take to man, equip, and train them so they are capable of performing their combat mission?
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