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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).

Title 10, Chapter 16, of the *U.S. Code, Security Cooperation*, governs the Department of Defense’s (DOD’s) SFA activities. Each year, the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) modifies, eliminates, or creates new SFA authorities and authorizes funding for Geographic Combatant Commands (GCCs) to conduct SFA activities.

Background

In the past, Special Forces units handled the majority of SFA missions, but the growing requirement for SFA over time resulted in conventional forces assuming a more active role in conducting SFA 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, while most junior NCOs and soldiers remained at their home station. This situation, while practical from a resource perspective, created a number of readiness concerns for the nondeployed BCT soldiers remaining at home station, as well as the home station units who were responsible for these junior soldiers while their leadership was deployed on SFA missions. One such concern was with leadership stripped out of the BCTs for SFAB mission, the remaining soldiers were limited to training at individual and squad level only, resulting in a lower level of unit readiness.

Establishment of SFABs

As originally designed, SFABs are to be capable of conducting SFA from the strategic (such as Ministry of Defense) to 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. SFABs were originally intended to consist of about 500 soldiers (*BCTs consist of between 4,400 to 4,700 soldiers depending on type*), primarily in senior grades and encompassing a range of Military Operational Specialties (MOSs). The Army also planned to establish a Military Advisor Training Academy (MATA) at Fort Benning, GA, to conduct a six-week course on relevant topics and skills.

The 3-353rd Regiment stationed at Fort Johnson (formerly Fort Polk), LA, provides customized advisor and advisor team training for regionally aligned forces tasked to conduct or support Security Cooperation and SFA operations. According to the 2024 *SFAC Factbook*, the 3-353rd Regiment is to inactivate in FY2025.

The Army 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. The SFAC is commanded by a Major General.

SFAB Organization

According to the *SFAC Information Book, Volume Seven, 2021*, provided to CRS by the SFAC, SFAC Headquarters consists of 82 soldiers and Department of the Army Civilians. Each SFAB is commanded by either a Colonel or a Brigadier General (some Colonels are promoted to Brigadier Generals while serving as SFAB Commanders and remain in command) and is composed of approximately 816 soldiers. SFABs are broken down into 60 multifunctional teams consisting of four to eight soldiers each, with teams categorized as either

- Maneuver Advising Teams;
- Field Artillery Advising Teams;
- Engineer Advising Teams; or
- Logistics Advising Teams.

The SFAC noted SFAB soldiers are volunteers recruited from other Army units, much in the manner Army Special Forces recruits personnel. Individuals designated for key SFAB leadership and staff positions must have previously successfully commanded or served at the level they are being recruited for. Those recruited for SFAB leadership positions are also subject to a Selection and Assessment evaluation to determine if they are suitable for SFAB service.

Equipping SFABs

Soldiers in SFABs are 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, computers, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (C4ISR) capabilities. The SFAC noted that the SFAC and the SFABs are incorporated into the Army’s Modernization program and are modernized in the same manner as BCTs and other Army combat formations.

SFAB Stationing

According to the Army, SFABs are based at

- 1st SFAB—Fort Benning, GA;

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

Current SFAB Mission and Role in Operations

According to the Army and discussions with the SFAC, 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.

Presently, SFABs are operating across all GCCs. SFABs serve to professionalize security assistance and cooperation missions. As permanent organizations with a standing mission, SFABs focus on the advise, support, liaise, and assess aspects of SFA, which frees up Army Special Forces, BCTs, and other conventional units from conducting these operations on an ad-hoc basis.

SFAB Regional Alignment

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

- 1st SFAB—U.S. Southern Command;
- 2nd SFAB—U.S. Africa Command;
- 3rd SFAB—U.S. Central Command;
- 4th SFAB—U.S. European Command;
- 5th SFAB—U.S. Indo-Pacific Command; and
- 54th SFAB (Army National Guard)—globally focused.

Selected SFAB Activities

According to the 2024 *SFAC Factbook*, selected activities in 2023 and 2024 include the following:

1st SFAB

The 1st SFAB partnerships have spanned seven foreign armies within the U.S. Southern Command area of responsibility. The 1st SFAB teams deployed to Colombia, Honduras, Panama, Guyana, Peru, Ecuador, and Paraguay in the past year.

2nd SFAB

The 2nd SFAB partnerships have spanned 12 different countries on the African continent to include an inaugural mission in Benin and Sierra Leone. The 2nd SFAB participated in Exercise African Lion 23 with the SFAB's main effort in Tunisia, with supporting efforts in Ghana and Morocco.

3rd SFAB

The 3rd SFAB advanced advisor operations in U.S. Central Command with five persistent-partner nations (Kuwait, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Iraq). Third SFAB advisors deployed in support of exercises and

expert exchanges to 13 additional countries, including Egypt, Oman, Tajikistan, Bahrain, Pakistan, and Israel.

4th SFAB

The 4th SFAB deployed advisor teams in 19 European nations, including Poland, Romania, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Finland, Ireland, Hungary, Georgia, Moldova, Bulgaria, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Slovakia, Croatia, Montenegro, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Albania. Since Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine, advisor teams have enhanced deterrence across Eastern Europe by working with allied forces and NATO Battle Groups.

5th SFAB

The 5th SFAB deployed advisors into eight countries in support of 44 operations, activities and investments. The 5th SFAB participated in combined interoperability training with numerous strategic allies and partners to include Japan, Thailand, Malaysia, the Philippines, the Republic of Korea, Mongolia, and Indonesia.

54th SFAB

The 54th SFAB mobilized 16 team force packages this past year in support of GCC requirements. Advisors provided critical capabilities to foreign security forces and sister DOD partners. Fifty Fourth SFAB advisors currently operate in five overseas GCCs, with forces in Honduras, Columbia, Panama, Kenya Tunisia, Latvia, Philippines, and the United Arab Emirates.

Elimination of Active Duty SFAB Positions

On February 26, 2024, the Secretary of the Army announced a “significant force structure transformation that will build on the modernization and organizational shifts of recent years.” Among other things, this transformation plans to eliminate “some positions across Regular Army security force assistance brigades representing a decrement to capacity at minimal risk.” No additional information was provided on what “representing a decrement to capacity at minimal risk” actually means in practical terms.

Potential Considerations for Congress

- The Army's February 2024 announcement eliminating certain Active Duty SFAB positions provides little context or detail. Potential questions could include, What specific positions will be eliminated and how many soldiers are associated with the reductions? How will eliminations affect the SFAB's ability to perform its mission? Will eliminations have a negative impact on SFAB operational tempo (OPTEMPO) and place undue stress on Active Duty SFABs?
- Are SFABs able to meet current and predicted GCC SFA-related operational demands, and are GCCs sufficiently funded to conduct SFA operations?
- Based on previous SFAB deployments and associated lessons learned, what types of modifications have been made to the SFAB's organization, equipment, and training?

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