



## Advising Lethality: *What the SFAB Brings to the Fight*

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*“It’s clear that the faint clouds of a coming storm are on the horizon. It’s our duty to be ready today, more lethal tomorrow.”<sup>1</sup>*

— **GEN Mark Milley**  
Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff

**L**ethal units that rapidly adapt to the operational environment and integrate capabilities to achieve overmatch are essential to winning large-scale combat operations (LSCO). In this fight, leadership, experience, and unit proficiency are the most valuable attributes.

Realistic training requires seasoned leaders to provide purpose, direction, and motivation. Security force assistance brigades (SFABs) are a newly employable capability that can enhance realistic training by providing additional leadership and experience to help develop proficient, adaptable, and lethal Soldiers and units. Moreover, the SFABs apply their skillsets by, with, and through their partner force, which is essential to their success, both in combat and in training. This is a two-fold gain: As the SFAB teams advise lethality in training, they further develop advisor core competencies, preparing themselves for deployment. The 3rd SFAB tested the advisor-enabled training model in preparation for its deployment to Afghanistan in support of Operation Freedom’s Sentinel (OFS). The concept of advisor-enabled training between SFABs should be habitually leveraged and improved upon in the future. This article will identify how and why the advisor-enabled training model is important for future readiness, with particular focus on the SFAB infantry battalions and what they bring to the fight.

In late May 2019, during unit training leading up to a deployment in support of OFS, Bowie Company, 1st Battalion, 3rd SFAB, supported the training and certification of 1st Battalion, 128th Infantry Regiment, Wisconsin Army National Guard (WIARNG). The 1-128 IN WIARNG was preparing to deploy as the 7th Battalion Guardian Angel (GA) force for 3rd SFAB. The 3rd SFAB leveraged the opportunity to both practice advisor skillsets and enhance the realistic training and lethality for 7th Battalion. What both formations found was mutual value in leveraging the experience, embedded



capabilities, and human-centric approach of the SFAB in developing unit readiness and lethality. To understand why this experience was so valuable, it is essential to understand what the SFAB does, what it is composed of, and how the SFAB accomplishes its mission.

### What is an SFAB?

“The U.S. Army SFAB is the Army’s dedicated conventional organization for conducting SFA

(security force assistance) around the world. While each SFAB has a regional focus, its unique capabilities enable it to perform wherever it is needed with minimal cultural and regional orientation.”<sup>2</sup>

The SFAB is a force dedicated to improving partner capability and capacity by leveraging unique skillsets and attributes to assess, train, advise, and assist foreign security forces (FSF) in coordination with joint, interagency, and multinational forces.<sup>3</sup> SFABs are uniquely manned with capabilities across warfighting functions (WfFs) and trained to develop FSF to synchronize capabilities and mass the effects of combat power, both direct and indirect, to achieve overmatch.<sup>4</sup> The Army designed SFABs to understand the operational environment, coordinate across WfFs, develop intelligence-operations fusion, and improve enabler integration. The SFAB accomplishes these tasks by, with, and through our partner force to ensure solutions are organically sustainable and FSF formations are institutionally viable.

The SFAB employs advising teams as the primary means to develop FSF lethality, survivability, and institutional viability. In the SFAB maneuver battalions, the company advisory teams (CATs) and subordinate advisory teams (ATs) are rapidly deployable 12-person elements with a core of five operational advisors, augmented with five support advisors, and an experienced officer and NCO lead the teams (see Figure 1).<sup>5</sup> Advisors are selected, specially trained, and further developed through unit training and access to relevant schools like SERE (survival, evasion, resistance, and escape), Joint Fires Observer (JFO), and Battle Staff

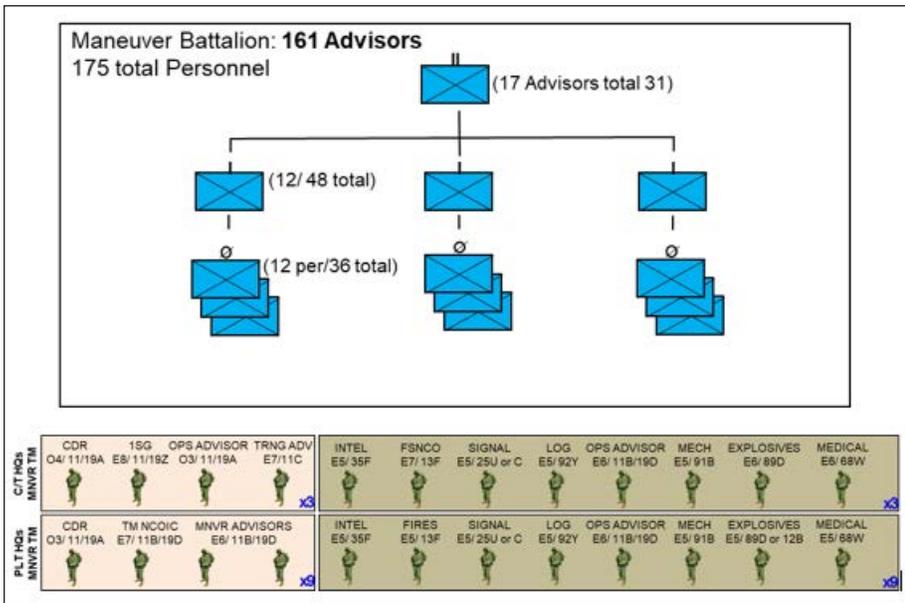


Figure 1 — Task Organization of SFAB Maneuver Battalion, Company, and Advisory Teams

courses. The Army designed the SFAB advising teams to operate at echelon and up to two levels higher. This means the CAT executes brigade-level advising and the AT executes battalion-level advising.<sup>6</sup> The SFAB tailors its advising efforts to the operational environment and the capabilities of the partner force. For example, during a recent deployment to Afghanistan, Bowie Company advised the Afghan National Army (ANA) at the corps and brigade levels. In contrast, Bowie Company advised at the battalion and company levels when advising U.S. forces during pre-deployment training. Regardless of the operational environment, the SFAB operates by, with, and through its partner force, with particular regard to the human aspects of military operations.

The Joint Concept for Human Aspects of Military Operations (JC-HAMO) provides a foundational understanding of how SFABs approach their mission (see Figure 2).<sup>7</sup> SFAB advisors consistently seek to understand the human dimension, identify key and relevant actors, evaluate their behavior, anticipate their perspective, and influence their decisions. This is all in an effort to work themselves out of a job and advance to the next level by developing their partner forces' capability and will to become

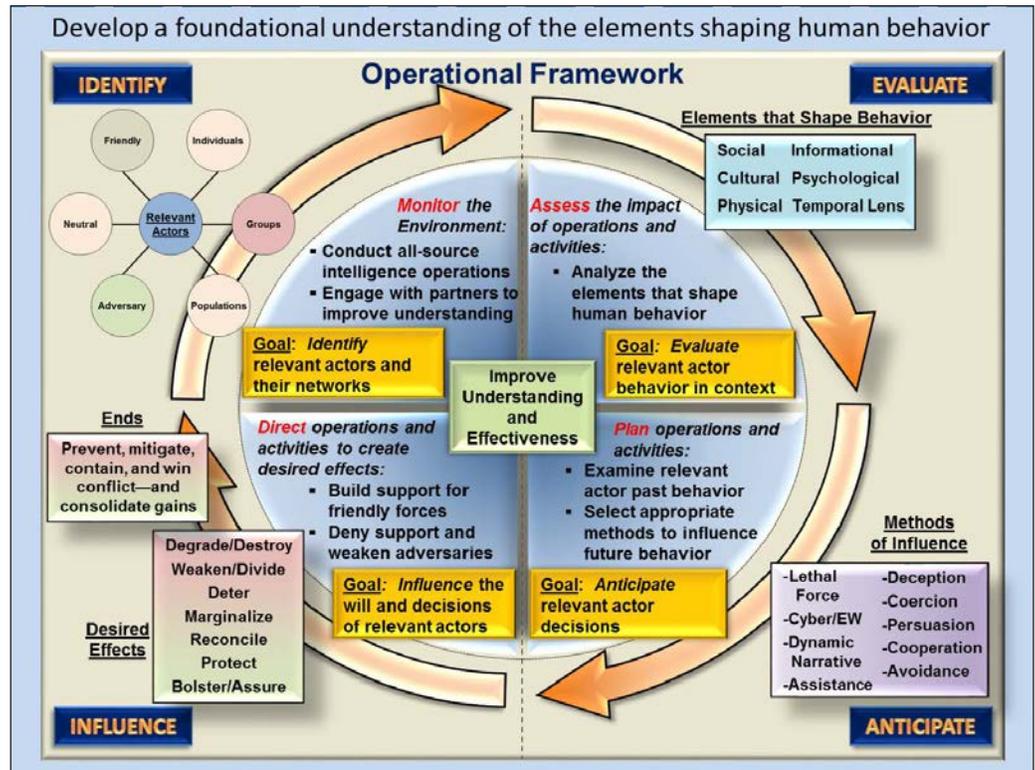
more lethal, survivable, and institutionally viable. SFABs implementation of the “by, with, and through” model is both a science and an art. Advisors spend significant time assessing their partner force, evaluating where to apply advisory capacity, deciding how to influence change, and identifying clear measures of performance and effectiveness. This is the science of advising. As advisors make contact with a partner force, they leverage their training and attributes to influence perspectives and decisions. This is the art of advising. The SFAB's distinct, human-centric approach also achieves a significantly improved outcome when employed to support U.S. forces' training progressions.

### What Can SFABs Bring to the Fight?

“The complexity of the SFAB planning for training is similar to the planning conducted by the combat training centers or training support brigades. The FSF and SFAB commander's visualizations and end states are refined into goals and objectives by commanders, staffs, and their FSF counterparts. These goals and objectives are then translated into training objectives.”<sup>8</sup>

The SFABs are different from anything Forces Command (FORSCOM) has fielded in the past. Their unique

Figure 2 — Operational Framework for the Joint Concept for Human Aspects of Military Operations<sup>9</sup>





Photos courtesy of author

**Advisors from the 3rd SFAB use Android Tactical Assault Kits to advise targeting concepts with 1-128 IN Mortars Section.**

requirement as combat advisors is to embed with a partner force, earn their trust, understand the situation from their perspective, and develop solutions together. The SFAB mirrors this approach when training with U.S. Army units, producing uniquely beneficial results. We work by, with, and through our partners — we are not outsiders, so we bring an organic understanding of the situation to leaders at echelon. This is extraordinarily valuable as it provides a multifaceted perspective of what is happening, which in turn helps leaders and commanders address challenges they may not otherwise see. Furthermore, because SFABs bring experience and maturity to the fight, we have an increased ability to influence people; reinforce human networks; leverage advanced tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs); and integrate efficient systems and processes. When applied to training with U.S. formations, the integration of SFAB advisors makes training more focused, progressively more challenging, and more tailorable to the individual needs of a unit.

In preparation to support 1-128 IN WIARNG, Bowie Company spent a week conducting focused mission planning, working with 1-128 IN leadership and staff to understand their training requirements and develop a tailored advisory plan. The company distributed tasks by both training requirements and staff functions to support those requirements. Throughout the planning phase, SFAB advisors paid particular attention to developing a battle rhythm around assessing key and relevant actors, identifying training needs, and influencing our 1-128 IN partners to see problems for themselves and trust advisors to assist them in problem solving. The advisors focused on identifying how we were going to help leaders lead and subordinates execute their tasks more effectively. The company developed a baseline of individual assessments (aka “baseball cards”) and human network diagrams, which helped the advisors understand the partner force (1-128 IN) and how the Soldiers interacted with each other. In other words, the SFAB paid significant attention to how advisors were going to influence people to see problems and act

together to address them. During this time, the company also developed internal training objectives and established a line of effort to meet those objectives.

“We were able to maximize resources and focus on areas of improvement. SFAB bridges the gap of evaluating collective tasks to beneficial holistic assessments, at echelon. Each partnered advisor, while having the experience and the ability to generate meaningful dialogue with NCOs and officers alike, was able to identify and tailor actionable solutions to increase our lethality. Their dedication and commitment to our force created a synergetic partnership based on a strong foundation to grow and develop leaders.”

— LTC Aaron Freund

Commander, 1-128 IN WIARNG

Bowie Company embedded with members of 1-128 IN, distributing personnel across the formation to observe from a variety of perspectives and develop solutions at echelon. Company leadership embedded with the battalion command team and staff. Advisory team leaders worked with company and platoon leadership, and team members embedded with the platoons and squads. Advisors supported individual skills training to include small-arms marksmanship, medical training, driver’s training, troop leading procedures, mortar ranges, and call-for-fire/close air support ranges. Advisors also supported a battalion staff exercise, squad live-fire exercise, and platoon situational training exercise. The advisor teams reinforced the importance of progressively more challenging training that integrated aspects of prior training. We assisted the battalion staff, company, and platoon leaders by helping them plan, lead, and self-assess with well-developed after action reviews (AARs). The advisor teams provided daily assessments of leaders, teamwork, training progression, and training gaps. The combined training enabled the advisors to integrate their unique tools and capabilities into training to reinforce partner force battle tracking, forward tactical operations center (TOC) operations, and enabler integration. For example, the advisor teams integrated Raven unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), personal locator beacons, and Android Tactical Assault Kits (ATAKs) into various training exercises from expeditionary TOCs to provide multiple perspectives of training. The combination of experienced NCOs and officers applying their capabilities and tools significantly improved battalion and company leaders’ ability to see their training for themselves, understand their teams more personally, focus effort on specific challenges, and know they had advisor horsepower to assist with overcoming any challenges.

“The operational assessment reveals strengths and gaps in the foreign security forces’ ability to perform their missions, roles, or functions. It shows how well the FSF can conduct their missions. A clear understanding of the FSF operational or institutional mission serves as the starting point to base the operational assessment.”<sup>10</sup>

Throughout the support to 1-128 IN, Bowie Company provided daily feedback to key leaders, reinforced on-the-spot corrections, and helped the unit build its approach to future

training events. The advisor teams also built a detailed operational assessment of leaders, unit tactical proficiency, staff functions, training sustainment, and training gaps. This culminated in a 33-page document and a formal discussion with battalion leaders on our perspectives. The assessment was well received by 1-128 IN leadership and integrated into the planning for future training. Most importantly, members of the collective team bonded quickly and created an atmosphere of trust and comradery. This intangible aspect of what the SFAB does is the single-most important reason advisors can build lethality so rapidly — SFAB partners see advisors as members of their team. With this built trust, advisors can influence change rapidly and help partners adapt at a pace that outperforms other methodologies.



Advisors from the 3rd SFAB conduct an operations meeting with security pillars in Ghazni Province, Afghanistan, in early 2020.

### The Future of Advisor-Enabled Training

The SFABs are uniquely capable and arrayed to support Army readiness and unit lethality. An early and continuous demand signal is essential to leveraging the opportunities of the advisor-enabled training model. This will allow SFAB leaders and staff to prepare to support future training, tailor their approach, build relationships, and maximize their capability to reinforce unit lethality. Operations officers and commanders from across the maneuver force in active, National Guard, and Reserve commands should look for opportunities to conduct advisor-enabled training events with SFABs. FORSCOM and Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) planners can work with the Security Force Assistance Command (SFAC) and the subordinate SFABs to organize the availability of various advisory packages. Additionally, there are six SFABs located at major U.S.

Army installations across the United States. This collocation of SFABs and Army maneuver formations presents an opportunity for mutually beneficial training that brigade combat teams (BCTs) and brigades can leverage during their home-station training progression for LSCO.

Over time and with individual and organizational experience gained through training repetitions and deployments, the SFABs are professionalizing their role as combat advisors. The SFAB capability to support maneuver force training and preparations for LSCO continues to increase. In the future, SFABs will bring unique experiences from worldwide deployments, which can reinforce region-specific training plans. SFABs will also turn support to U.S. maneuver elements into a natural extension of the advising mission, gaining efficiencies in processes and approach. SFABs are ready to execute advisor-enabled training events to enhance unit training, increase lethality, and prepare for LSCO; we are prepared to support at the highest standard.

### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> David Vergun, "Army Readiness, Lethality Increasing Amid Troubled World, Says Chief of Staff," Army News Service, 12 October 2018. Accessed from [https://www.army.mil/article/212191/army\\_readiness\\_lethality\\_increasing\\_amid\\_troubled\\_world\\_says\\_chief\\_of\\_staff](https://www.army.mil/article/212191/army_readiness_lethality_increasing_amid_troubled_world_says_chief_of_staff).
- <sup>2</sup> Army Techniques Publication (ATP) 3-96.1, *Security Force Assistance Brigade*, May 2018, 1-1.
- <sup>3</sup> Ibid, 1-14.
- <sup>4</sup> Ibid, 1-14.
- <sup>5</sup> Ibid, 1-20.
- <sup>6</sup> Ibid, 1-16.
- <sup>7</sup> Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Concept for Human Aspects of Military Operations*, 19 October 2016, 14.
- <sup>8</sup> ATP 3-96.1, 5-1.
- <sup>9</sup> *Joint Concept for Human Aspects of Military Operations*, 14.
- <sup>10</sup> ATP 3-96, 4-7 to 4-8.

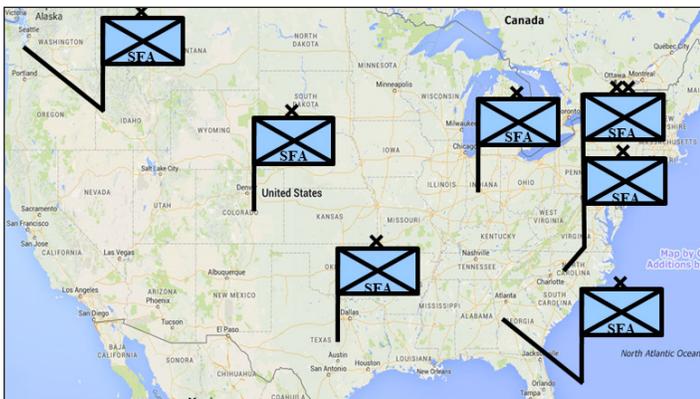


Figure 5 — SFAB Locations

The SFAB basing offers mutually beneficial training opportunities with U.S. Army BCTs and maneuver brigades. [1st SFAB: Fort Benning, GA; 2nd SFAB: Fort Bragg, NC; 3rd SFAB: Fort Hood, TX; 4th SFAB: Fort Carson, CO; 5th SFAB: Joint Base Lewis-McChord, WA; 6th SFAB (National Guard): Stout Field Army, IN]

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