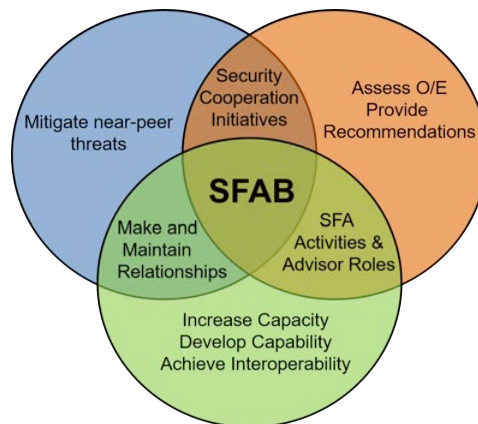


The Value of the SFAB

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In December 2016, the Chief of Staff of the Army announced the creation of a new formation known as security force assistance brigades (SFABs). SFABs are specifically manned, equipped, and trained to perform security forces assistance (SFA) activities to increase partner nation (PN) capacity, develop foreign security forces (FSF) capability, and achieve interoperability between FSF, U.S., and coalition forces. Advisors within SFABs are combat multipliers for the U.S. Army who conduct SFA tasks of organizing, training, equipping, rebuilding/building, advising, and assessing (OTERA-A) FSF. Our investment in manning, equipping, and training the SFABs has been great. The value of the SFAB manifests in two ways:

- (1) The SFAB's ability to assess and influence operational environments (OE) throughout the conflict continuum while providing objective security cooperation recommendations to combatant commanders (CCDRs) in support of U.S. strategic interests; and
- (2) Mitigating near-peer influence and transnational threats by increasing PN capacity, developing FSF capabilities, and achieving interoperability between FSF, U.S., and coalition forces.

Background

The 2018 National Security Strategy (NSS) identified a U.S. strategy centered on competition as the response to increasing threats from near-peer competitors globally. Furthermore, the 2018 NSS codified the mechanism to assist partners and allies to increase their capacity and capabilities and to achieve strategic partnerships. The SFAB advances American influence by building effective, long-lasting relationships and preserves peace through strength that is grounded in preserving shared national security interests. SFAB units (brigade, battalion, company, teams) exercise regional specialization capable of employment over large geographical areas simultaneously to cultivate strategic partnerships that provide tangible proof of U.S. commitment to regional stability and mitigate influence from potential adversaries.

Assessing the OE and Making Security Cooperation Recommendations

The National Defense Authorization Act of 2017 mandated the Department of Defense (DoD) take necessary steps to identify a "return on investment" regarding security cooperation programs. In response, DoD Instruction 5132.14, *Assessing, Monitoring, and Evaluating Security Cooperation Programs*, outlines the steps the DoD must take to ensure SC programs are effective. One function of the SFAB is to conduct environmental, institutional, operational, and organizational assessments of FSF from the tactical through strategic levels. These assessments provide the necessary data for an SFAB commander to make informed security cooperation recommendations to the combatant command, joint force commander, and/or country team. By thoroughly understanding the OE and its effect on the FSF, SFAB commanders leverage the personal relationships built with their counterparts to influence their actions leading to improved conditions that may otherwise adversely affect both the FSF and advising teams.



Advisors from 5th Security Force Assistance Brigade work with allied partners from the Indo-Pacific Command region at the Joint Readiness Training Center at Fort Polk, LA. (Photo courtesy of MCDID)

Mitigating Influence: Increasing Capacity, Capability, and Interoperability

Deterring transnational threats is accomplished through security cooperation programs and initiatives. Joint Publication 3-20, *Security Cooperation*, states, “Through complementary efforts of the Joint force, other U.S. Government agencies, and assuring partners and allies, unity of effort will be the main driver of mitigating the effects of adversaries around the globe.” Advisors achieve unity of effort between FSF, U.S., joint, and coalition forces by negotiating access to joint enablers (support role) for FSF partners and acting as liaison (liaise role) from the tactical through strategic levels within FSF headquarters, coalition headquarters, and embassies. As part of a whole-of-government approach to stability, the advising team, alongside their FSF counterparts, maintains a persistent presence in regions deemed vital to U.S. interests while providing tangible reassurance of U.S. resolve. Improving PN capability and capacity while achieving interoperability increases FSF confidence and demonstrates that the U.S. is committed to regional security and stability.

Supporting Information

The Army has historically performed SFA by either tasking individuals to deploy in support of combatant commands (COCOMs) or by stripping the leadership structure out of already deployed brigade combat teams supporting regionally aligned missions. This practice has increased risk to the force by removing critical leaders from formations and consumed readiness by forcing those leaders to perform SFA instead of their combat functions. The SFAB specifically addresses these practices and will ultimately eliminate the need for CCDRs to rely on less capable forces to build FSF capability.

The SFAB is a low-cost, small-footprint, conventional option available to CCDRs. According to budget analysis conducted by the Security Forces Assistance Command (SFAC) G-8, the total annual cost to train an SFAB from individual training through collective training, culminating in a brigade-level Combat Training Center (CTC) deployment readiness exercise, is approximately \$9 million. According to the Joint Readiness Training Center staff, the cost estimate for a single infantry brigade combat team is about \$30 million to conduct its CTC rotation alone.

Because of their unique mission, advisors are required to teach combined arms warfare at the graduate level. According to BG Curtis Taylor, 5th SFAB commander, NCOs and junior officers serving in an SFAB enjoy a three-year long leadership development program where they strengthen four vital competencies to become:

a) Masters of the fundamentals of warfighting at the platoon/company level,

- b) Experts at small unit training management,
- c) Practitioners of decentralized mission command and intent-based orders, and
- d) Fluent in cross-cultural dialogue with partners and allies.

As these advisors return to lead tactical formations in the conventional force, each of these four skill sets provides a valuable return on investment to our combat formations without sacrificing readiness.

Summary

Our investment in the SFAB is worth it. These brigades provide unique support for our national strategic objectives by increasing FSF capacity, capability, and interoperability without degrading readiness which makes the SFAB invaluable to the Army, joint force, and combatant commanders. FORSCOM Commanding General GEN Michael X. Garrett recently said, "SFABs are the most agile force that we have in FORSCOM." The SFAB is capable of meeting CCDR requests for SFA resources and will achieve more significant effects from the tactical through strategic levels by cultivating and reinforcing relationships, understanding and influencing the OE, and making objective SC recommendations critical to maintaining regional stability, mitigating influence, and deterring threats.

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