

SFABs TO FREE BCTs FROM ADVISE, ASSIST MISSION

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In May 2017, the Army established the first of what will eventually be six security force assistance brigades (SFABs). That unit, now assigned to Fort Benning, GA, has already identified about 70 percent of the personnel who will ultimately serve under its flag and wear its patch — though right now, both the patch and the flag are still being designed.

The new SFAB and the five others planned — a total of five in the active component and one in the National Guard — will each have 529 Soldiers assigned and will be tasked to conduct advise and assist missions for the Army, said LTC Johnathan Thomas, who serves with the Army's G-3/5/7 force management directorate at the Pentagon.

“The SFAB is designed to rapidly deploy into a theater of operations in support of a combatant commander,” said Thomas. “Once it arrives in that particular theater, it will begin to work with, train, advise, and assist those partner nation security forces on anything they need help with, be it logistics, be it communications, be it maneuver. Anything they need help with to improve their capacity and capability, that’s what the SFAB is designed to do.”

Thomas said SFABs could deploy to places such as Africa, South America, Europe, or anywhere Army senior leaders decide. The units will have the capability to deploy anywhere.

The advise and assist mission is one the Army has done for years, Thomas said, but it’s something the Army has until now done in an “ad hoc” fashion. Brigade combat teams (BCTs), for instance, have in the past been re-tasked to send some of their own overseas as part of security transition teams or security force assistance teams to conduct training missions with foreign militaries. Sometimes, however, the manner in which these teams were created may not have consistently facilitated the highest quality of preparation.

The SFAB units, on the other hand, will be exclusively designated to conduct advise and assist missions overseas. And they will be extensively trained to conduct those missions before they go. Additionally, he said, the new SFABs mean regular BCTs will no longer need to conduct advise and assist missions.

“The SFAB, because it is going to go forward and advise, will somewhat relieve the pressure on our BCTs to go forward and do that mission,” Thomas said. Instead, he said, BCTs can now concentrate on training and preparing for their next deployment.



A Soldier assigned to Train Advise Assist Command-East pulls security with an Afghan National Army troop during a partnered force protection patrol in Laghman Province, Afghanistan, on 23 September 2015. (Photo by CPT Jarrod Morris)

He said that because the advise and assist mission is considered an enduring mission, “the Army decided... we should have a dedicated, permanent structure to get after this mission on behalf of our partnered forces and partner nations.”

COL Scott Jackson, an infantry officer who has served in the Army for 27 years now, has been named the first commander of the Army’s first SFAB. His unit, the 1st Security Force Assistance Brigade, which is headquartered at Fort Benning, was established in May but will officially activate this October.

“The really unique aspect of the SFAB, as a concept, is the training we are going to give the organization,” Jackson said. “We are starting with a very talented pool of officers and leaders all around. But then we are going to give them an unbelievable training plan.”

Read more about the new SFABs at: https://www.army.mil/article/188004/security_force_assistance_brigades_to_free_brigade_combat_teams_from_advise_assist_mission.

(C. Todd Lopez writes for the Army News Service.)