



U.S. Security Force Assistance Command

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Purpose

Security assistance as an enterprise across the U.S. government is often fragmented among the various bodies that implement it, ranging from the Departments of Defense and State, to U.S. Army and Marine advisors and civilian contractors. The enterprise is large and often uncoordinated, resulting in fragmented approaches and disconnects that fail to resemble any sort of "whole of government" approach. The U.S. Army's work in Security Force Assistance as a functional extension of policy is one important component that does not receive enough attention from outside the Department of Defense. In Washington, security force assistance training being carried out by the U.S. Army and its role are often poorly understood, as it happens on the ground and may not be reported on. Assessments often are not made public, and the experiences of Army advisors are often absent from policy discussions on security partnerships. This is unfortunate, as it leaves out an important piece of the work being done in military-to-military engagement.

History

In past years, Special Operations Forces (SOF) carried out most security force assistance missions. Over time, that work increasingly began to be carried out by general purpose forces (GPF) through Brigade Combat Teams (BCTs). However, this resulted in readiness concerns. Removing the key leaders of a BCT for use as ad hoc advisors detracted from the ability of a BCT to carry out its usual operations. There was also previously no formal structure or career path for conventional advising.

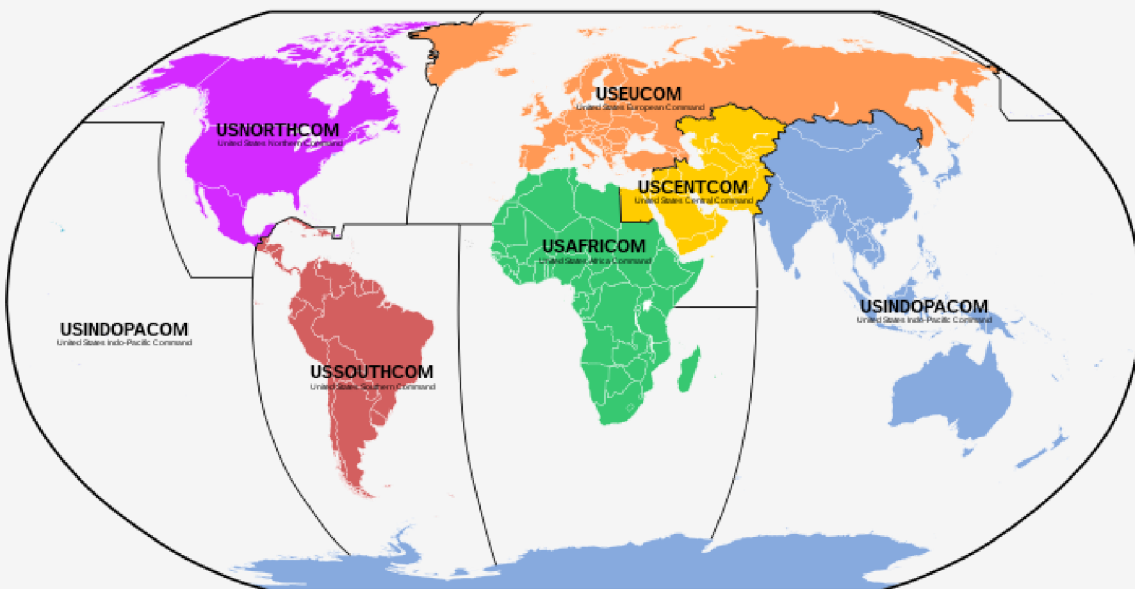
In 2016, the Chief of Staff of the Army announced the creation of Security Force Assistance Brigades (SFABs), designed to train and equip foreign security forces and increase their interoperability with U.S. forces. SFABs were designed to replace the BCTs' ad hoc role in combat advising.

Overview of SFAC

The Security Force Assistance Command (SFAC) recruits, trains, and equips Security Force Assistance Brigades (SFABs) in support of Geographic Combatant Commanders' security cooperation objectives to train and advise U.S. partner security forces around the world. The military breaks up the world into regions with their own command structure to employ troops in each area. Each SFAB is aligned with one of these regions.

There are five active duty and one national guard SFAB aligned to five different regions of the world. The mission of the SFAB is to conduct advise, support, liaise, and assist operations with foreign security forces worldwide. They are more permanent organizations than previous ad hoc advising and training formations. Ad hoc teams of the past were incapable of tasks like cultivating a relationship with Mongolia in an effort to appeal to Mongolia's "Third Neighbor Policy," for example. This involves teaching small unit tactics, peacekeeping operations, and combat medical care. In India, another example, SFABs are seeking to reshape the cultural divide between enlisted personnel and officers.

The mission of each SFAB advisor is to train foreign security forces on a variety of topics ranging from intelligence collection management to countering unmanned aerial systems, though the SFAB. SFABs train and assist foreign security forces until they are eventually capable of conducting operations independently and effectively. In doing so, outside of SOF, SFABs are at the forefront of teaching the laws of armed conflict around the world to their practitioners. Additionally, SFABs work to avoid the three security force assistance traps (see more below) in order to promote effective security force cooperation.



Geographic Alignment

- 1st SFAB - SOUTHCOM
Fort Benning, GA
- 2nd SFAB - AFRICOM
Fort Bragg, NC
- 3rd SFAB - CENTCOM
Fort Hood, TX
- 4th SFAB - EUCOM
Fort Carson, CO
- 5th SFAB - INDOPACOM
Joint-Base Lewis McChord, WA
- 54th SFAB - National Guard
FL, GA, IL, IN, OH, & TX

Authorizations

Title 10 is the authority advisors most commonly work under. Title 10 U.S. Code (USC), Chapter 16, *Security Cooperation*, regulates security force assistance, defined as “unified action to generate, employ, and sustain local, host nation, or regional security forces in support of a legitimate authority.” Security forces may include military forces, as well as police and border forces, depending on the organizational structure of the partner nation and legal interpretations. Furthermore, elements of humanitarian assistance and military-civil affairs cooperation with the local embassy are approved through this code.

U.S. Advisors:

- "Provide institutional, ministerial-level advice, and other training to personnel of the ministry or regional organization to which [they are] assigned in support of stabilization or post-conflict activities; [and]
- Assist such ministry or regional organization in building core institutional capacity, competencies, and capabilities to manage defense-related processes." according to the law.

Title 22 USC, *Foreign Relations and Intercourse*, authorizes the transfer of weapons and equipment and services by the U.S. government to friendly foreign countries in furtherance of the security objectives of the United States. The State Department is responsible for determining which partner nation units have committed human rights violations that would prevent them from receiving SFA missions.

Structure & Functions

Each SFAB is commanded by either a colonel or brigadier general and is comprised of 816 soldiers. SFABs are further broken into roughly 60 teams, consisting of four to twelve soldiers each. On any given day, up to 800 SFAB advisors are deployed around the world, and they operate across all Geographic Combatant Commands. Advisors are deploying to over 30 countries worldwide on a near-constant basis, with 6-month rotations occurring in multiple partner nations.

One major function of the SFAB teams are their foreign military assessments. The 2017 National Defense Authorization Act mandated that the DOD identify a “return on investment” for security cooperation programs. which comes in the form of assessments.

The SFAB assessments do not have to be military in nature and can cover a variety of topics, ranging from political to economic to social. Teams analyze security forces on the ground, based on their observations. These reports are designed to give military planners a greater understanding of their operating environments. For example, recent foreign military assessments sought to assess Russia's abilities to fight in Ukraine. Advisors present an opportunity to evaluate equipment and tactics on the ground with their own eyes around the world to prevent strategic surprises.

U.S. Army Security Assistance Command (USASAC)

The U.S. Army's Security Assistance Command (USASAC), similar in name but not to be confused with the SFAC, sits under the U.S. Army Materiel Command and implements Army security assistance efforts, including developing and managing security assistance programs and foreign military sales cases to build partner capacity, support engagement strategies of U.S. combatant commanders, and strengthen U.S. security partnerships around the world.

According to USASAC, in 2021 it was managing 6,000 foreign military sales cases, including case execution and coordinating the logistics and transportation of weapons and equipment to U.S. partners. These cases have a combined program value of over \$192 billion, supporting more than 140 countries and multi-national organizations. Additionally, USASAC manages the Excess Defense Articles program, whereby defense items no longer needed by the U.S. military are offered at reduced or no cost to other countries. USASAC's field office at Fort Belvoir, Virginia represents the command to partners in Washington, DC, and also manages the Army's role in executing Section 333 programs—a consolidated authority to conduct programs providing training and equipment to security forces in other countries.

USASAC was formed in 1965 at New Cumberland Defense Depot in eastern Pennsylvania. Underneath USASAC are three subordinate organizations: 1) USASAC's U.S. Army Security Assistance Training Management Organization, a brigade-equivalent command, which provides tailored foreign military training supporting foreign military sales requirements of U.S. partners; 2) Office of the Program Manager – Saudi Arabia National Guard Modernization Program, formed in 1973 in Riyadh, and designed to maintain the relationship between the U.S. and Saudi Arabia and to assist in the modernization of the Ministry of the National Guard; and 3) the U.S. Army Military Advisory Group, also located in Riyadh, and created in 2015 to provide technical assistance in training and advising for certain security sectors of the Saudi government, in large part to protect Saudi Arabia's infrastructure.



Budget

According to some estimates, the total annual cost to train an SFAB is approximately \$9 million, compared to \$30 million for a BCT. However, the full budget for SFABs is difficult to assess, because it is not broken out separately in U.S. Army budget documents. For example, the fiscal year 2023 Army Operations and Maintenance budget estimates include about \$38 billion each for fiscal years 2021 and 2022 and a \$39 billion estimate for the fiscal year 2023 to support a range of operating forces, including 31 brigade combat teams, five SFABs, and 11 combat aviation brigades.

Security Force Assistance Traps

Military planners have identified SFA traps that impact the training and arming of foreign security forces. Based on diplomatic, informational, military, and economic (DIME) dimensions of a nation, American security force assistance likely leads to one of these traps if certain characteristics are present.

Unaffordable: Creating a military that is too expensive to be maintained by a weak state, as in *Afghanistan*.

Threatening: Creating a military that threatens civilian control of the military, as in *Somalia*.

Politicized: Creating a military that involves itself in national politics, as was the case in *Iraq*.