



Members of the 5th Security Force Assistance Brigade train alongside Indian army soldiers during the Yudh Abhyas exercise in Rajasthan, India, 9 February 2021. (Photo by Staff Sgt. Joseph Tolliver, U.S. Army)

Enabling Division Operations across the Conflict Continuum

What an SFAB Can Do for You

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It is 2200 hrs., and the 3rd Infantry Division (3ID) commander is beginning the commander's visualization meeting. Seventy-two hours prior, the 3ID division tactical command post, a High Mobility Artillery Rocket System battalion, a Multiple Launch Rocket System battalion, an attack aviation element from the combat aviation brigade, and a security force assistance brigade (SFAB) force package were rapidly deployed in support of a flexible deterrent option to contain a developing crisis. The commander looks around the room and asks if the partner force is ready if the enemy crosses the international border. The SFAB force package commander steps forward to present his assessment of the partner capability and their plan for the delay. The division commander listens as the force package commander briefs the partner plan. As the force package commander explains the partner plan, it becomes apparent they will need help with intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance, and fires. The division commander turns to the chief of staff and asks about the impact of diverting assets from the division deep fight to enable the partner brigade. The chief of staff explains the ongoing coordination with the SFAB force package staff and outlines the risk to the division's deep fight. At the end of the discussion, it becomes clear that if the partner cannot hold for ninety-six hours,

it will result in mission failure. The division commander is confident in the preparations between his staff and the SFAB force package should the crisis escalate to conflict. With division support SFAB advisors embedded with the partner force, the partner will be able to delay until U.S. brigade combat teams can arrive.

Same Old SFAB?

There are still many misperceptions of the role of the security force assistance brigade (SFAB) in the future force. Many in the Army view SFABs as a drain on organizational

manpower in a constrained environment. They see their best and brightest officers and noncommissioned officers leave their formations for SFAB assignments. Money and equipment go to the SFAB, which could go to operational divisions. Others acknowledge the utility of SFABs in competition but see no role for the organization in crisis or conflict. Many of these beliefs derive from the original mission (Afghanistan) and stand-up of the organization (units having no recourse if a soldier opted for SFAB). The Army, writ large, is undergoing significant doctrinal, organizational, and training changes, shifting to large-scale combat operations (LSCO) as the center of the Army's operating concept. The SFABs are undergoing similar changes. The current and future SFABs are not what you might remember. Field Manual 3-0, *Operations*, redefines and clarifies the role of SFABs as part of multinational operations in support of unified action.¹ These changes should drive a fresh look at how SFABs enable division operations.

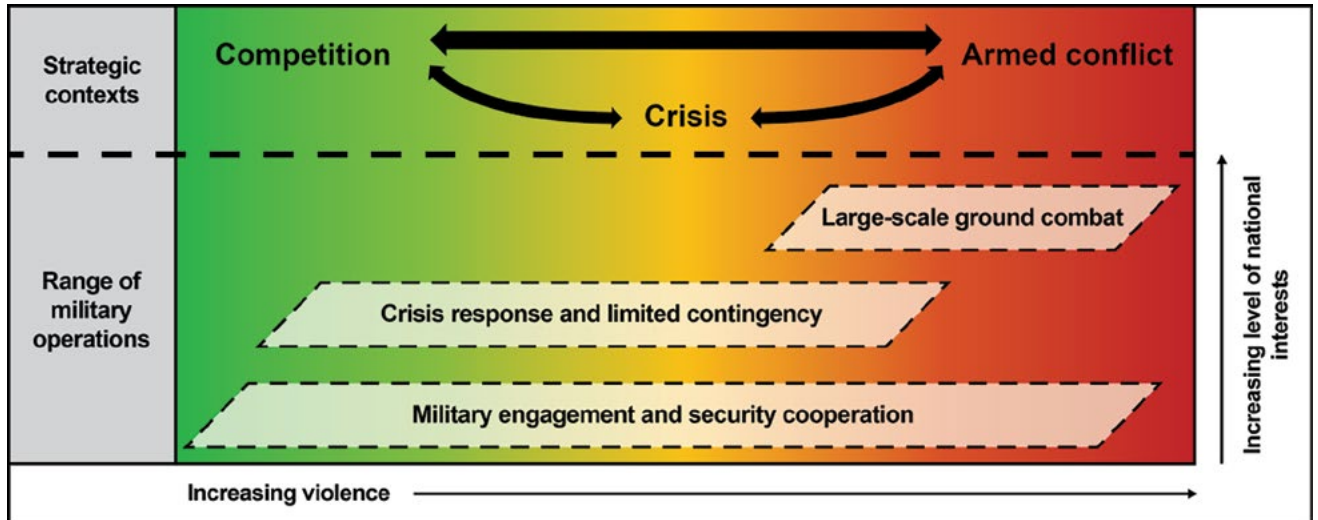
SFAB advisor force packages enable division-level operations across the conflict continuum (see figure 1).² Advisors provide tangible benefits to divisions during competition, crisis, and conflict. SFABs draw talented officers and noncommissioned officers (NCOs) from the operational force after they are complete with their key and developmental time. Advisors then return to the operational force with additional training and skills. If the operational force is going to commit scarce personnel resources, it is only fair to explain the return on investment at the organizational and soldier levels.

We Are All in This Together! The Operational Environment

Divisions, corps, and SFABs will find themselves in the same operational environment (OE) in the future. As described in Field Manual 3-0, this OE is a complex mix of competition, crisis, and conflict across multiple domains against adaptive and capable adversaries.³ Army forces within this OE must gain and maintain the support of allies and partners to prepare forward-stationed forces to fight and win outnumbered and isolated. Not just U.S. forward-stationed forces but allied and partner forces are the most likely to absorb the initial shock of crisis and conflict.⁴ During competition and crisis, adversaries will contest Army forces' deployment, seeking decisions before the United States can intervene.⁵ Advisors address these gaps in brigade and division capabilities.

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(Figure from Field Manual 3-0, Operations)

Figure 1. Army Strategic Contexts and Operational Categories

Ally and partner integration into future operations is a critical condition in the Army operating concept, and future operations will be multinational.⁶ Communication, relationships, and understanding are critical in these multinational operations. Commanders in multinational operations must liaise effectively with partner forces to maintain an effective common operating picture. In addition to situational understanding, multinational allies and partners bring additional forces to operations and often possess capabilities U.S. forces lack.⁷ The biggest challenge U.S. commanders will face in multinational operations is maintaining unity of effort with no formal command or support relationship with partner forces.⁸ In the strategic context of competition, crisis, and conflict, “SFABs provide the ability to partner with conventional allied and partner forces.”⁹ This professionalized advising capability is resident only in the SFABs and provides a unique force multiplier to Army operations.

Pay Now or Pay Later? Your Investment during Competition

Serving as an economy of force operation, SFABs in competition buy back time and personnel by absorbing combatant command (CCMD) theater security cooperation (TSC) requirements. This allows brigades and divisions to focus on preparation for LSCO rather than conducting TSC tasks or responding to crises created by adversaries taking advantage of weak deterrence.

Every advisor able to support CCMD TSC initiatives to improve partner capability creates less demand for rotational forces. Aside from absorbing TSC requirements, SFAB advisors set favorable conditions for arriving U.S. forces in the event of escalation to crisis.

Army forces assist allies and partners to improve their military capabilities and capacity during competition. They also build interoperability with partners, which will be critical if conflict erupts. “Preparation for combat operations and demonstrating the interoperability of the U.S. joint force with allies and partners presents the strongest deterrence to adversaries.”¹⁰ This deterrence provides several benefits for operational formations. Deterrence increases the likelihood a partner will be able to prevent escalation to crisis. It also decreases the likelihood of requiring U.S. brigades and divisions to deploy in support of a partner. SFAB competition missions assure allies and partners, improve interoperability, and ultimately increase the agility of the multinational force in crisis or conflict.¹¹ SFAB teams are executing these competition tasks on behalf of combatant commanders across the globe every day.

As part of security cooperation, SFABs “develop allied and other friendly military capabilities for self-defense and multinational operations, improve information exchange and intelligence sharing, provide U.S. forces with peacetime and contingency access, and mitigate conditions that could lead to a crisis.”¹² In competition, SFAB teams deploy across the globe

continuously to assess, support, liaise, and advise foreign security forces (FSF). These activities take many forms at many levels, from tactical to strategic. In exercises, advisor teams work with the FSF to hone the team's mission essential tasks while training the FSF on core competencies and building interoperability. In some cases, teams are building capacity by helping the partner acquire new skills, increasing partner interoperability with the joint force, or facilitating partner employment of new equipment. In some CCMDs, advisors also support operations by training foreign partners to prepare contingents in support of multinational peacekeeping operations. Enabling contingents for peacekeeping operations provides FSF with valuable deployment and operational experience. These activities enable FSFs to be net security exporters and contribute to regional stability. Advisors work closely with their partners, understand their capabilities and limitations, and have intimate real-time knowledge of the geography and culture of the host nation. Building capacity and training with the FSF in competition provides access, influence, and familiarity that confers benefits during crisis and conflict. Brigades and divisions are the direct beneficiaries of these benefits. On entry into a crisis or conflict situation, the access, influence, and increased partner capacity provide distinct advantages to U.S. forces and reduce both risk to mission and risk to force.

There are multiple examples of SFAB benefits during competition. In the U.S. Africa Command area of responsibility, approximately one hundred advisors conduct the bulk of TSC requirements, negating the need for a regionally aligned brigade. This frees up 3,500 soldiers to focus on training and preparation for LSCO. Our advisors are working with our partners on their most pressing security concerns, training border security tasks to combat the expansion of extremism from the Sahel region. The training helps our partners refine their existing skills and build confidence. A small team working with the partner creates an outsized return on investment to address significant global threats. Simultaneously, those advisors are building rapport and relationships with their partners. This engagement reduces the need for U.S. forces by enabling the partner to stabilize the local security situation. Our advisors are working on similar efforts with multiple partners in Africa. In addition, one of our logistics teams works

with our partner at the national level, assisting with improving distribution, maintenance, and sustainment interoperability. Some partners are major trainers for UN peacekeeping operations, preparing forces for missions across the continent. Our advisor efforts allow the partner to be a net security exporter, contributing to stability across the CCMD. This stability reduces the requirement for unilateral U.S. efforts, conserving precious readiness in U.S. brigades and divisions. Our advisors are creating relationships, building cultural knowledge, and supporting the military education system in many partner countries. The impact of advisors on the perceptions of the U.S. provides untold benefits to brigades or divisions that may one day operate with these militaries. All these advisor efforts, and many more globally, contribute to CCMD's great-power competition, setting favorable conditions to lower the likelihood of crisis and conflict.

Extrapolated across the CCMDs, the investment of five hundred to eight hundred advisors buys back nine brigades from the theater security cooperation requirements previously executed with the (regionally aligned forces) brigades. It also returns soldiers to brigades and divisions with unique experiences and skills. These advisors gain cultural experience and regional knowledge before completing their tours and returning to brigades and divisions across the Army. This reinvestment of talent from the SFAB benefits every unit receiving advisors by reinvesting adaptable and experienced leaders in your formation.

The Balloon Goes Up! If Deterrence Fails and a Crisis Develops, What Do You Get for Your Investment in SFABs?

While the benefits to divisions and brigades during competition are difficult to internalize, the benefits during crisis are more apparent. The rapport, knowledge base, and placement of advisors on the ground provide multiple benefits to the joint force in a crisis. If a crisis with an adversary arises, SFABs work with the partner to stabilize the situation, eliminating the need to deploy U.S. forces or buying time and space for multinational partner forces to arrive. SFAB teams ease the integration and improve situational awareness of arriving U.S. forces through liaison between partner and U.S. forces. If de-escalation is achieved, SFABs are the

ideal unit to assist the partner with reconstitution, relieving brigades and divisions from the task. SFAB crisis scenarios fall into two broad categories: (1) advisors are already present at the outbreak of crisis, or (2) SFAB advisors are deployed at the beginning of the crisis as a flexible deterrent option (FDO). Both scenarios generate similar benefits to brigades and divisions deployed in support of a partner in crisis.

The demonstration of U.S. commitment to the host nation and rapport developed with the FSF confer immediate benefits if the teams are in the country when the crisis begins. Advisors already in the country would provide critical indications and warnings before the crisis begins, enabling the joint force to respond more rapidly. Advisors deployed with their full equipment complement are well-positioned to respond both as liaisons for incoming multinational forces and to assist FSF in holding key terrain, enabling follow-on flexible response options (FRO). Advisors provide real-time operations and intelligence updates as a crisis develops. Advisors serve as key liaisons for joint reception, staging, onward movement, and integration (JRSOI) of incoming multinational forces. The ability to identify, coordinate, and confirm aerial ports of debarkation, seaports of debarkation, and JRSOI facilities for theater opening forces increases the speed of entry. To be clear, advisor teams train to augment JRSOI activities. Tasking advisor elements to execute JRSOI over extended periods reduces their ability to execute missions requiring specific advisor training. However, advisor team presence early in force generation enables designated theater opening forces to establish and execute JRSOI quickly. Specifically, the integration phase of JRSOI benefits from advisor team support. Teams brief leaders and arriving staff on the current ground situation, realistic cultural and geographic analysis of the operating area, and the assessment of the FSF operational situation.

A crisis in a country without advisor teams benefits from an FDO “to establish liaison capability or conduct security force assistance.”¹³ Deploying advisors signals a commitment to the partner nation. This FDO provides similar benefits to a scenario with an advisor team already in the country at the beginning of the crisis by providing intelligence, operational assessments, liaison, and support to an FSF. In this scenario, advisors are less effective at enabling JRSOI but can still serve to

develop situational awareness of aerial ports of debarkation, seaports of debarkation, and coordinated staging areas for U.S. commanders. Advisor teams arriving as part of an FDO rapidly integrate with the FSF to develop a common operating picture and support the FSF with joint effects to assist in stabilizing the situation.

As a crisis progresses, SFAB advisor teams use robust mission command systems to relay critical operational and intelligence updates to the theater army or the joint task force headquarters if one is activated. The teams, under the direction of the theater army or the joint task force, liaise and support the FSF to form a credible defense, ensuring the survivability of allied forces in theater. The teams assess, support, liaise, and advise FSF to retain key or decisive terrain. This creates conditions to amplify additional FDOs and FROs as the joint force attempts to return to competition. Advisor teams embedded with FSF provide insight into partner actions and attitudes to contribute data on the effectiveness of FDOs and FROs. In the event deployment to the crisis nation is not feasible, advisor teams conduct generating (train and equip) missions in an adjacent nation, relieving U.S. brigades of the mission. In this scenario, tailored enabling force packages manage the receipt, distribution, and sustainment of military assistance materiel while training teams build capacity in FSF formations.

“Regardless of the capabilities employed, there are generally two broad outcomes from a crisis. Either deterrence is maintained, and de-escalation occurs, or armed conflict begins.”¹⁴ In a transition back to competition, SFAB advisor teams are an ideal asset to assess, support, liaise, and advise FSF in reconstituting forces following a crisis. SFAB teams are uniquely qualified to bring clarity to the confusion of the crisis either because they are already in the country or through rapid deployment to the crisis area as an FDO.

SFAB’s contributions to crisis sound great, but practice is harder than theory. The Army agreed to test an operational SFAB crisis response during a first-of-its-kind National Training Center (NTC) rotation in February 2023. The 2nd SFAB deployed a force package to the NTC in support of the 3rd Infantry Division (3ID). In this scenario, a friendly nation was threatened by an invasion from a neighbor. The United States elected to deploy an SFAB FDO and an FRO consisting of a division headquarters (3ID), a High Mobility

Artillery Rocket System battalion, a Multiple Launch Rocket System battalion, and a combat aviation element. The SFAB element integrated with the partner force, replicated by the 1st Squadron, 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment, to assist with the planning of a delay if crisis turned to conflict (see figure 2). SFAB engagement with the partner allowed the division to understand the partner plan and resources required. This information was critical to determine the allocation of scarce U.S. resources between the division fight and the partner force deep fight should return to competition fail. An imbalance of resources in either direction could lead to mission failure. The link among the SFAB, the division, and the partner ultimately set favorable conditions when deterrence failed, and crisis turned to conflict.

Combat training centers are excellent preparation but are still only a proxy for real operations. A real-world example of SFAB crisis response and its benefits to brigades and divisions is ongoing operations in Europe. SFAB teams are supporting advising requirements previously performed by Army combat brigades. This prevents combat brigades from allocating personnel to these training and equipping missions, creating the operational space to focus on LSCO preparation. This creates operational depth in Europe, allowing rotational and forward-stationed forces to remain prepared in the event of escalation into conflict. How many additional brigades would need to rotate to the U.S. European Command to assume the training requirements fulfilled by advisor teams? Small investments of advisor personnel are benefiting much larger formations while also enabling partner forces to defend and deter aggression.

We Can Take It from Here. We Appreciate SFAB's Assistance

If crisis escalates to conflict, SFABs continue to add benefits to U.S. brigade and division operations. In an operational role, SFABs assess, liaise, support, and advise partner forces in support of multinational operations. Providing a realistic assessment of the capabilities and limitations of the partner force to adjacent brigades and divisions provides critical information to commanders. This analysis is integral to any combined operation with partner forces. SFABs are a critical two-way liaison for U.S. commanders. Through robust and interoperable mission command systems, they provide real-time intelligence,

battle damage assessment, targeting information, and common operating picture to U.S. commanders. SFABs also provide intelligence and targeting information from U.S. forces to the partner, enabling better integration of effects. SFABs provide access to unique partner capabilities not in the U.S. inventory through the same mission command channels. Conversely, SFABs enable U.S. support to partner forces for joint fires, intelligence, and sustainment, allowing partner forces to better integrate into multinational operations. Finally, SFABs advise U.S. commanders on partner concerns, plans, desires, and other atmospheric while also advising partners on better ways to integrate into operations. All these functions allow U.S. commanders to increase combat power while minimizing the risk of miscommunication, fratricide, and mission failure through the inclusion of partners.

SFABs are prepared to “conduct liaison and support activities to enable multinational operations during armed conflict.”¹⁵ Two broad categories for SFAB employment logically present themselves in a LSCO conflict scenario. These categories are the two security force assistance functions, “operational” and “generating,” found in Army Techniques Publication 3-96.1, *Security Force Assistance Brigade*.¹⁶ The “operational” functions use SFAB teams to integrate an ally or partner into a multidomain operations campaign. The “generating” function uses SFAB teams to assist FSF with organizing, training, and equipping a force for future employment.¹⁷ These categories are not mutually exclusive and can be assigned across an advisor force package at any level, varying chronologically based on the situation.

SFABs in LSCO sound great, but this is all just theory. Again, the Army tested the concept during NTC Rotation 23-04. The SFAB executed an operational role in support of the partner force and 3ID during a transition from crisis to conflict. At the tactical and operational levels, the SFAB element embedded advisor teams at echelon to accompany the FSF during combat operations.

In an accompanying and enabling role during the initial stages of the conflict, SFAB force packages liaised and supported partner forces to stabilize the operational situation. The force package used its robust mission command systems to link back to a small forward-deployed multinational headquarters (3ID) to enable our partner brigade to execute a successful delay. The force package

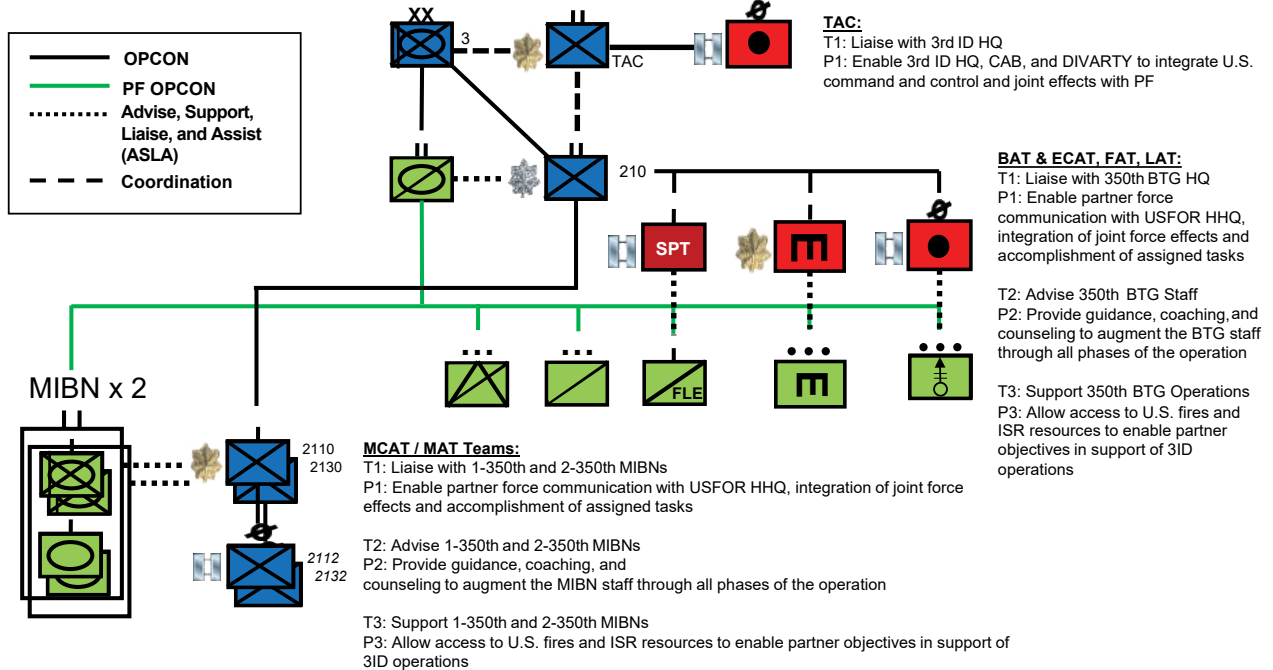


Red Lion Concept of Advising

2nd SFAB - Everyone Fights!



Concept Statement: Red Lions partner at echelon with the 350th BTG using a vertical reporting structure to accomplish the Operating SFA task in an accompany-and-enable posture to support NTC Rotation 23-04 from 4-23 FEB 2023 IOT validate Advisor Teams to conduct ASLA in a LSCO environment to support U.S. tactical objectives by, with, and, and through a partner force. The force package will liaise with 3rd ID HQ to enable U.S. support of a partner nation tactical force and conduct all aspects of ASLA activities with the partnered brigade.



(Figure by author)

Figure 2. LSCO Concept of Advising

provided the headquarters with intelligence and situational awareness from the partner force. The headquarters provided access to multidomain operations capabilities like long-range precision fires, joint fires, electronic warfare, and intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance. These capabilities allowed advisors to support partner forces to achieve coalition theater opening objectives. The partner brigade conducted a successful delay over four days to allow the arrival of 2nd Brigade, 3ID, to resume the offense (during their subsequent rotation). The difficulty of executing operations when compared to traditional Warfighter exercises was one of the many benefits of NTC Rotation 23-04 as observed by 3ID. The friction of communications issues, equipment failures, and timeline delays caused by weather, terrain, and a thinking adversary created a much more robust training event for 3ID, the SFAB, and the enabler units deployed in support of the division rotation.

But Wait, There Is More!

There are other benefits to sending soldiers to become advisors in addition to the tactical and operational benefits conferred by SFABs in competition, crisis, and conflict. Soldiers return with additional military occupational specialty training and cross-training, certifications, cultural awareness, critical-thinking skills, training management experience, and experience interacting with senior military and civilian leaders. Soldiers also receive unique training in the SFAB directly applicable to the LSCO mission. Advisors can go to traditional and nontraditional courses such as prolonged field care, foreign weapons, advanced driving, master resilience, and master trainer courses. These courses provide diverse skill sets to soldiers returning to brigades and divisions. Aside from the glamorous courses, advisors are usually unit movement officers, hazardous material, and container certified due to the

decentralized deployment of SFAB teams in competition. This provides brigades and divisions leaders with critical deployment skills and experience. Although not all advisors become fluent in a foreign language, many gain language capability from cultural immersion and unit language programs. The multidisciplinary small team organization creates inherent cross-training between occupational specialties. For example, mechanics may learn maneuver. Maneuver advisors may learn communications. Medics may learn logistics. All advisors must learn some other specialties for the team to function. This cross-training creates leaders returning to brigades and divisions who are versatile and competent in multiple specialties. The nature of competition advising requires multiple repetitions of executing and planning small-unit training. The soldiers sent to become advisors return well ahead of their peers in training management. The decentralized nature of competition advising exposes leaders to complex problems requiring autonomy and creativity to solve. These repetitions increase the adaptability and flexibility of the soldiers returning to your units. Advisors often work at the brigade, division, national, and embassy levels during employment. These experiences produce mature, well-spoken leaders returning to divisions and brigades to lead soldiers at the next grade plate. Finally, the soldiers sent to become advisors enable the joint competition and campaigning concepts through their TSC work globally in every combatant command.¹⁸

SFABs provide a steady stream of trained and culturally aware soldiers back to brigades and divisions across the Army. To serve in an SFAB, officers and NCOs must be key developmental (KD) complete at

their current rank. There are few or no modified table of organization and equipment positions in divisions or brigades for post-KD officers or NCOs before promotion. SFABs are looking for high-quality leaders who have completed their KD assignments and are ready to move out of the formation. The rumors of SFABs poaching talent are greatly exaggerated. SFAB experience helps leaders broaden following KD time and gets them back to operational units prepared to excel in their next KD assignments. So, not only does this investment return dividends at the tactical, operational, and strategic levels, but high-quality leaders are arriving back with skills and knowledge they cannot get anywhere else.

Is It Worth It?

SFABs enhance division operations across the competition continuum from competition to crisis to conflict. The operational force investment of talent is repaid with interest. Advisors during competition build rapport, enhance partner capability and interoperability, and create exporters of regional security. All these benefits set conditions favorable to U.S. units should escalation occur. In addition, the training and experience advisors gain in competition goes back into the operational force when they rotate out of the SFAB. During crisis, advisors provide critical liaisons for a partner to deter escalation or set favorable conditions if de-escalation fails. During conflict, advisors multiply combat power for the U.S. or coalition command by enabling the integration of partner forces into coalition operations. With all these benefits to brigades and divisions, the investment is a bargain. Now is the time to buy! ■

Notes

1. Field Manual (FM) 3-0, *Operations* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Publishing Office [GPO], 2022), para. 2-65.

2. *Ibid.*, 1-14, fig. 1-3.

3. *Ibid.*, para. 1-4.

4. *Ibid.*, para. 1-18.

5. *Ibid.*, para. 1-17.

6. *Ibid.*, para. 2-58.

7. *Ibid.*, para. 2-59–2-60.

8. *Ibid.*, para. 2-65.

9. *Ibid.*

10. *Ibid.*, para. 4-3.

11. *Ibid.*, para. 3-10.

12. *Ibid.*, para. 4-43.

13. *Ibid.*, 5-6, table 5-1.

14. *Ibid.*, para. 5-3.

15. *Ibid.*, para. 4-89.

16. Army Techniques Publication 3-96.1, *Security Force Assistance Brigade* (Washington, DC: U.S. GPO, 2020), 4-9.

17. FM 3-22, *Army Support to Security Cooperation* (Washington, DC: U.S. GPO, 2023), 2-9.

18. U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Concept for Integrated Campaigning* (Washington, DC: U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, March 2018), 9.