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# Leveraging Observations of Security Force Assistance in Afghanistan for Global Operations

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## Executive Summary

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The U.S. Army's Asymmetric Warfare Group (AWG) requested that the RAND Corporation conduct a study on how to leverage observations from Security Force Assistance (SFA) efforts in Afghanistan for global operations. Between January and April 2013, RAND researchers interviewed a total of 67 advisors and SFA practitioners at the tactical and operational levels—the majority of whom were based in Afghanistan's Regional Command East (RC-East)—in order to collect their firsthand insights into SFA. Interviewees included members of Security Force Assistance Teams (SFATs) and Special Forces Operational Detachments—Alpha (ODAs), senior leadership at the brigade level, and AWG Operational Advisors (OAs).

Many challenges recognized by the interviewed advisors have been well documented in the past decade. Yet the enduring nature of most of these challenges suggests that solutions still remain uncertain. The results indicate that SFA efforts in future theaters will benefit from the following suggestions:

- Modernize Army advising and combat-related narratives to generate capable and confident SFA advisors.
- Aggressively leverage the experience and institutional knowledge gained by Special Forces conducting Foreign Internal Defense (FID).
- Continue to seek out the best advisor candidates.
- Recognize that good training takes time.<sup>1</sup>
- Ensure that attention to the mission's end state overrides attention to advisors' personal end states.
- Remain focused on team operations and security during the advising mission.
- Maintain mental and cerebral fortitude while advising.
- Communicate and adhere to existing doctrine.

Future SFA missions, such as those envisioned for the Army's Regionally Aligned Forces, can benefit from the experience gained from SFA in Afghanistan, as captured, for example, in the insights above. These lessons need to be incorporated both at the institutional level and by individual SFA advisors.

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<sup>1</sup> Results of Headquarters International Security Assistance Force Joint Command SFAT Lessons Learned Section, 2012.