

## Why GAO Did This Study

ISAF's mission in Afghanistan has shifted from a combat role to focus more on preparing ANSF units to assume lead security responsibility by the end of 2014. A key element in advising and assisting the ANSF is SFA advisor teams, provided by the U.S. Army and Marine Corps. A House Armed Services Committee report accompanying its version of the Fiscal Year 2013 National Defense Authorization Act directed GAO to review DOD's establishment and use of SFA advisor teams. Specifically, GAO evaluated the extent to which (1) DOD, in conjunction with ISAF, has defined SFA advisor team missions, goals, and objectives; (2) the Army and Marine Corps have been able to provide teams; and (3) the Army and Marine Corps have developed programs to train teams for their specific missions. GAO reviewed doctrine and guidance, analyzed advisor requirements, reviewed training curricula, and interviewed Army, Marine Corps, theater command, and SFA advisor team officials in the U.S. and Afghanistan.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that theater commanders take steps to work with brigade commanders and advisor teams to identify end states, objectives, and milestones for the development of their ANSF counterpart units in support of the regional commands' broad goals, and that the Army and Marine Corps improve availability of mission-specific information prior to advisor teams' deployment. DOD partially concurred with GAO's recommendations and identified actions to further prepare SFA advisor teams for their missions.

View [GAO-13-381](#). For more information, contact Sharon Pickup at (202) 512-9619 or [pickups@gao.gov](mailto:pickups@gao.gov).

## SECURITY FORCE ASSISTANCE

### More Detailed Planning and Improved Access to Information Needed to Guide Efforts of Advisor Teams in Afghanistan

## What GAO Found

DOD and the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) have defined the mission and broad goals for Security Force Assistance (SFA) advisor teams; however, teams varied in the extent to which their approaches for developing their Afghan National Security Force (ANSF) units identified activities based on specific objectives or end states that were clearly linked with established goals. SFA guidance states that to be successful, advisors must have an end or goal in mind, and establish objectives that support higher-command plans. Theater commanders have outlined goals aimed at strengthening specific capabilities such as logistics, and it is largely left to the teams to then develop their approach for working with their counterparts. GAO found some advisor teams had developed structured advising approaches drawing from these goals, such as identifying monthly objectives and milestones for their team. Other teams GAO met with used less structured approaches, such as relying on interactions with ANSF counterparts to identify priorities and using this input to develop activities on an ad hoc basis, rather than as part of a longer-term, more structured approach to achieve broad goals. Officials from several teams stated that the guidance they received lacked specificity regarding desired end states for the development of their ANSF counterpart units. Without a more structured approach with clear linkages between end states, objectives, and milestones that are in support of broad goals for ANSF units, theater commanders cannot be assured that the advisor team activities are making progress toward these goals.

The Army and Marine Corps have been able to fill requests for SFA advisor teams, using various approaches such as tasking non-deployed brigades to form advisor teams or creating teams using personnel already deployed in Afghanistan. According to Army and Marine Corps officials, the ability to substitute an individual at one rank above or below the request has helped the services meet rank and skill requirements. The Army's reliance on brigades to provide a portion of their personnel to form advisor teams has enabled them to meet requirements but resulted in leaving large numbers of personnel at the brigades' home stations. To manage these large rear detachments, brigades undertook significant planning to ensure that enough stay-behind leadership existed to maintain a sufficient command structure and provide certain training.

The Army and Marine Corps have developed training programs for SFA advisor teams, but teams varied in the extent to which they had specific information to help prepare them for their mission prior to deployment. SFA guidance states that an in-depth understanding of the operational environment and of foreign security force capabilities is critical to planning and conducting effective SFA. Advisor teams may access such information from a variety of sources such as conducting video teleconferences with the teams they will replace, using secure networks to gather information, or sending personnel on predeployment site surveys, although teams varied in the extent to which they were actually able to gain access to these sources. For example, GAO found that while teams had access to a certain secure network at training sites, only some had access at home station, enabling them to shape their training and mission analysis earlier in predeployment training or after training but prior to deploying. Having limited access to this information prior to arriving in Afghanistan may result in advisor teams needing more time after deploying to maximize their impact as advisors.