

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-14-482](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

SFA—DOD activities that contribute to supporting the development of foreign security forces and their supporting institutions—is a key component of U.S. efforts to create sustainable security around the world. These activities are carried out by DOD personnel serving as advisors who may have SFA-related training, education, and prior experience to conduct the advising mission.

GAO was mandated to review the Army's and Marine Corps' approaches to the SFA mission. GAO assessed the extent to which the Army and Marine Corps (1) identify and track personnel with SFA-related training, education, and experience and (2) consider SFA-related training, education, and experience in the promotion process. This report also describes the Army's process for preparing units to perform their core mission while some members are deployed to support SFA activities. GAO reviewed DOD policies, directives, and other documents and interviewed cognizant DOD and service officials.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that the Army develop and implement a plan, with goals and milestones, for how it will develop the means for systematically identifying and tracking personnel with SFA-related experience. DOD partially concurred with the recommendation, stating that sufficient guidance and direction exists for the Army to continue refining its processes and procedures. GAO continues to believe the recommendation is valid, as discussed in the report.

View [GAO-14-482](#). For more information, contact Cary Russell at (202) 512-5431 or russellc@gao.gov.

July 2014

SECURITY FORCE ASSISTANCE

The Army and Marine Corps Have Ongoing Efforts to Identify and Track Advisors, but the Army Needs a Plan to Capture Advising Experience

What GAO Found

The Army and Marine Corps have taken steps to identify and track personnel with Security Force Assistance (SFA)-related training, education, and experience, but the Army does not have a plan with goals and milestones to fully capture advising experience. A key element in conducting SFA missions is being able to identify the right personnel with the right training, education, and experience to execute SFA activities. The Department of Defense (DOD) established a requirement for the services to identify and track personnel with SFA-related training, education, and experience. Although the Army is able to identify and track soldiers with certain SFA-related training and education, it does not have a mechanism to identify and track SFA-related experience. Moreover, the Army has not developed a plan with goals and milestones on how it will capture this information. As a result, it is unclear how long it will take the Army to implement DOD's requirement and be able to readily identify the right personnel to serve in the SFA mission. The Marine Corps is implementing a mechanism to identify and track personnel with SFA-related training, education, and experience that is planned to be available in October 2014.

The Army and the Marine Corps have taken steps to ensure the consideration of SFA-related training, education, and experience in the promotion process. Both services have incorporated language into the guidance given to promotion boards to ensure that appropriate consideration is given to individuals who have served on advisor teams. However, opinions differ regarding the effect the guidance has had on the manner in which individuals with SFA-related training, education, and experience are considered during the promotion process. Some officials said that serving in an SFA role could potentially negatively affect career progression. Others noted that the promotion process considers the entirety of an individual's career and not just the time spent as an SFA advisor. However, because the Army and Marine Corps do not yet have comprehensive information on SFA advisors, officials are unable to determine whether promotion rates differ for people who served on SFA advisor teams versus those who did not. Such differences could be a potential indicator that servicemembers with SFA-related experience were negatively affected during the promotion process.

According to Army officials, the Army has taken a number of actions to ensure that units are prepared to perform their core mission when part of the unit is deployed in support of SFA activities. Officials stated that some actions taken to manage units that remain at the home station, also known as the rear detachment, when part of the unit deploys include consolidating units so that they can conduct training, ensuring the right personnel are left behind to lead the rear detachment, developing training plans for what the rear detachment would train to, and reporting on the availability of all personnel and equipment.