

NEWS FROM THE FRONT

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Building Partnership Capacity through Train, Advise, and Assist

**Insights from BG Scott Jackson
Commander, 1SFAB and Task Force SE**

14NOV18 Interview with CALL and Military Historian

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News from the Front:

Building Partnership Capacity through Train, Advise, and Assist: Insights from BG Scott Jackson

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Insights from BG Scott Jackson, Commander, 1st Security Force Assistance Brigade

Afghan soldiers listen to a map reading class taught by an advisor non-commissioned Officer (NCO) with 1st Security Force Assistance Brigade, 18 SEP 18. (Photo Credit: Sean Kimmons)

Forward

The 1st Security Force Assistance Brigade (1SFAB) deployed in support of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) RESOLUTE SUPPORT (RS) and Operation FREEDOM's SENTINEL (OFS) from February to November 2018. The 1SFAB supported RSM and OFS with the Army's first unit dedicated to training, advising, assisting, accompanying and enabling (A3E) conventional foreign security force partners.

The 1SFAB had a positive impact on NATO and U.S. strategic initiatives in Afghanistan by advising Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) at tactical levels of command that had not been consistently and directly advised since 2015. 1SFAB regularly advised kandaks, brigades, corps headquarters, regional military training centers, and the Capital Division responsible for securing Kabul.

Afghanistan/US Crosswalk

Kandak = Battalion
Tolay = Company

1SFAB's six battalions advised Afghan partners in every Afghan National Army (ANA) corps and each of RSM's regional Train, Advise and Assist Commands (TAACs). The brigade also advised Afghan National Police (ANP) and Afghan Special Security Forces (ASSF) units.

Key Insights

- 🛡 Know what training you must complete and what training you would do given more time.
- 🛡 Keep Security Force Assistance Brigade (SFAB) teams together. Do not break teams into smaller pieces.
- 🛡 Keep SFAB Brigade headquarters (HQ) as a functional headquarters located at either RESOLUTE SUPPORT (RS) or Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations (DCOS-Ops) level.
- 🛡 All SFAB members, to include support personnel, should attend advisory training, as they might be called upon to be trainers.
- 🛡 Linguists should be added to the teams while they train.
- 🛡 Measuring success takes time, but having continuity between all SFABs will be a marked improvement over previous training. After action reports (AARs), lessons learned (LLs), and best management practices (BMPs) are recorded for all to access.
- 🛡 Persistent advising makes a difference.
- 🛡 The brigade level is the "sweet spot" for tactical advising.
- 🛡 The kandak level is where there are institutional effects.

Insights from BG Scott Jackson, Commander, 1SFAB

Conducted November 14, 2018 at Bagram Air Field, Afghanistan



Brigadier General (BG) Scott Allen Jackson is the first Commaner of 1SFAB at Fort Benning, Georgia. He assumed command in March 2017 and deployed to Afghanistan in March 2018. The 1SFAB rotated out of Afghanistan in November 2018. Throughout his career, BG Jackson has served in leadership and staff positions, from infantry platoon leader to First Cavalry Division G3, at duty stations throughout the United States, Korea, and Iraq. His previous command of the 2nd Armored Brigade Combat Team, was from July 2013 to January 2015. He is a graduate of the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College and the School of Advanced Military Studies, where he researched and analyzed command and control relationships between conventional and special operations forces in combat, as

seen in Afghanistan and Iraq. BG Jackson has deployed to Iraq three times, for a cumulative 41 months.

PREDEPLOYMENT TRAINING

The SFAB concept was created to be a dedicated formation to accomplish the Train, Advise and Assist (TAA) mission that had been going on since 2014, at the start of Operation RESOLUTE SUPPORT. At that time, the training was delivered via Security Force Assistance Teams, (SFATs) which were generally composed of 10 to 15 personnel. Given the initial success of the SFAT missions, the SFAB concept was born. The Army plan is to have six SFABs total, and to have them constantly rotate in and out of theater with continuous back to back coverage. When it was time to create the first SFAB, also known as 1SFAB, senior Army leaders held an informal board and did a scrub of recent brigade commanders who were available. Having just completed a successful brigade command, BG Scott Jackson (then Colonel), was chosen to be the 1SFAB Commander in March 2017.

By the time BG Jackson arrived at Fort Benning in early May, the belief was that there would be roughly 15 months to put the brigade together, train on a multitude of subjects, complete collective training, and then validate at the Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC) in Fort Polk, Louisiana. Since time was the limiting factor, forming the initial brigade staff and creating the initial training calendar had to occur up front. The priority was on Core Advisor Level training, and also individual competency across the brigade. As part of the Core Advisor Level training, everyone was required to complete the Military Advising Training Academy (MATA) and medical training. Also on-line was a 16-week language course for all primary advisors, in addition to a three week Survival, Evasion, Resistance, and Escape (SERE) course for everyone.

After developing what training they wanted to complete, the deployment date for the 1SFAB was moved up six months, and the training calendar had to be adjusted. Much of the language course was sacrificed, and SERE training was shortened to one week. Training in communications, language, and culture still happened, just not to the degree originally planned. Everyone still went to the advisor's academy and did medical training. The collective training was shortened to about four weeks of home station collective training, focusing primarily on tactical movement, team building, and live fire certification.

Due to the unique nature of the SFAB structure, and this being JRTC's first experience validating an SFAB, only a single battalion went to JRTC for the first rotation in December of 2017. According to BG Jackson, that battalion was a "proof of principle" rotation so that JRTC would know what to expect when the full SFAB came through the following month. When the SFAB returned, the JRTC staff was ready, and 1SFAB completed a full training rotation. The brigade validated and deployed approximately three weeks later.

DEPLOYMENT

The SFAB was designed to be a force provider and not an operational headquarters. The SFAB commander provided battalions and teams to all the TAACs. While the SFAB brigade headquarters was designed to provide leadership to the subordinate battalion commanders, BG Jackson kept a hands off approach to managing his subordinate commanders. According to BG Jackson, "...you have to acknowledge that you have second-time battalion commanders, branch qualified field grade officers, and experienced company commanders as your team leaders." For BG Jackson, it was easier to manage by exception. As a force provider, the SFAB was built in a certain way for TAA missions. The battalions can be broken down into teams that can be split into smaller units, but only to a certain point. Army senior leaders, in addition to doctrine, informed BG Jackson of two important commands that must be followed. Number one is to not break up the teams, and number two is to never overextend your risk factors.

Assuming TAAC Command

"My recommendation for 2SFAB and all follow on SFABs deployed to Afghanistan is for the SFAB brigade headquarters to be pulled out of any regional location. This will make it more of a functional headquarters. Working at the DCOS-Ops level, or Resolute Support level, would provide the functional headquarters that can provide recommendations on the best utilization of SFAB teams across the CJOA-A."

BG Scott Jackson, Cdr. 1SFAB, interview 14 November 2018

The SFAB units train as teams and that is how they should be employed. Leadership has to acknowledge the fact that the SFAB works best when it is kept together. Keeping the units intact occurs at every single level of command from the team, and the units must stay together from battalion level all the way to the brigade headquarters level. When the 1SFAB battalion commanders followed these commands, they were able to do their training and command their units. That trust allowed the 1SFAB commander to look at the larger perspectives, such as strategic messaging and organizational design in order to help the Army shape 2SFAB, as well as the overall messaging of the SFAB.

For the 1SFAB's deployment, an extra challenge was encountered. In addition to being the higher headquarters for all six SFAB battalions, the 1SFAB headquarters was employed as the "mission command" for Task Force Southeast (TF SE). In essence, the 1SFAB fulfilled three functions in Afghanistan: 1) It was the overall higher headquarters for all six 1SFAB battalions. 2) It was the mission command for TF SE, which means it did all TF SE operations. 3) It was the advising platform for 203rd ANA Corps.

TF command had its ups and downs. The downside of being TF SE command is that it limited the availability for the brigade staff to interact with battalion staff. Although it kept the staff busy, it did not maximize all that they were capable of. Another downside of taking on command is that there was considerably less time to visit the battalion commands and engage with the troops. In the course of nine months, BG Jackson was only able to visit TF South and TF East a limited number of times.

The upside to being assigned as TF SE command was that the SFAB had the ability to maximize corps-level advising. The standard TAAC corps advising team is about 17-20 people, when you look at TAAC South or TAAC East. 1SFAB had 44 Soldiers committed to the 203rd Corps. There were eight logisticians focused on corps logistics, and five medical officers focused on the corps medical

SFAB Workload

"No, I was never concerned about that [the workload] but I knew my staff was extremely busy. The SFAB Soldiers who were hired for this mission were well chosen, screened, and prepared and they all rose up to the challenge. I would even say that they were 'work horses'.... The reason is simple, these officers are A+, rock solid officers and I really didn't have a concern about that issue."

BG Scott Jackson, Cdr. 1SFAB, interview 14 November 2018



Brig. Gen. Scott Jackson shares a laugh with the Afghan National Army 203rd Corps Commander, before a battle update briefing Sept. 18, 2018. (Photo Credit: Sean Kimmons)

functions, to include running the corps hospital, and overseeing corps medical evacuation and resupply operations. There were also explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) technicians and Engineer route clearance advisors. The SFAB had depth at the corps staff that allowed it to do training in certain areas that other battalion staffs did not have the capacity to do.

Inserting the SFAB Force Structure into the TAACs

There was no SFAB advising platform below the corps level when the 1SFAB arrived in theater. No brigade or battalion/kandak level advising existed. All that existed was the concept of the Mobile Advisory Teams (MAT) advising at the corps level. The arrival of the 1SFAB changed everything.

The Brigade Advisory Teams (BATs) primarily advise at the brigade level, though, dependent upon the mission, some staff advise at higher levels to include division and Ministerial level. The BAT also provides mission command for 12 subordinate Company Advisory Teams (CATs) (advisory teams at the battalion/kandak and company/tolay level). These maneuver CATs advise tactical level operations and conduct the training and assistance for combined arms maneuver.

Upon arrival to the TAACs, there was not an established role for the SFAB. The SFAB brigade commander's first task was to get his team into the different TAACs, and get environmentally and organizationally acclimated; and develop trust not only with their ANA partners, but also with their U.S. higher headquarters in each respective TAAC.

Developing trust was a challenge due to the fact that very few people in theater knew much about the SFAB or their capabilities. According to BG Jackson, several TAAC Commanders were surprised to learn all that the SFAB could accomplish. Developing this trust with their ANA partners and their U.S. higher headquarters did not happen overnight. It took time for both to understand the full capability of the SFAB.

Leadership

“Every one of the SFAB missions in each of the TAACs was different. That was another reason why I had to step back with a hands-off approach because of the diversity of missions for my six battalion commanders in Afghanistan. Even if I had operational control of my battalion commanders and I was able to direct the advising mission in each TAAC, it's so different for each one that, unless I was on the ground, I really wouldn't know what the requirements are. You really just have to trust your subordinates and let them command their units.”

BG Scott Jackson, Cdr. 1SFAB, interview 14
November 2018

Measuring Training Success

1SFAB TAACs and battalion missions were all different. Therefore, the ability to establish a common set of metrics to measure training effectiveness was challenging. To a certain extent, it is possible to measure the ANA partner's performance. The 1SFAB only affects one portion of the ultimate goal of ANSDF independence, and that is to make the ANA partner units better. So the actual question is "Did the 1SFAB make their ANA partner units better?" Performance can be measured by employments of A29 light attack planes, MD530 light helicopters, logistics, and self-sustainability through logistics systems. Also, implementations of command and control systems help assess the ANA partner unit's performance. In the end, the 1SFAB used a number of different metrics.

BG Jackson mentioned a few unique ways the 1SFAB measured success. One method was by helping their partners with problem solving. If the ANA partner units cannot get something done through their channels, the SFAB advisors would work through their channels to get results so that each unit was working the problem multiple ways. This methodology worked well during typical paperwork issues. The SFAB advisors knew where the paperwork was going and where it was stopped, and they were able to teach their partner.

Another unique method of problem solving is seen in the example of some ANA soldiers that manned multiple check points for their forward operating base (FOB). The soldiers believed that all of the Taliban had night vision devices, and that the Taliban could easily overrun and kill them at night. They insisted that they needed night vision devices as well. An SFAB advisor explained to them that they did not need night vision devices, and told them all they needed was a strong flashlight. He then showed

Opportunistic Training and Measurements of Performance

"...one of the things the ANA partner units struggled with was their reluctance to use maps. If you were to ask them to show you where all their checkpoints were located, they would pull out books, but not a map. They were really reluctant to put these on the map, despite being told how much easier it would be for them. Over the course of a couple of months, the SFAB Geo-Spatial Engineer Soldiers, who were originally not tasked as SFAB advisors, but were designed to be mission support to the 1SFAB, came up with a solution.

These Soldiers went to the ANA partner units and taught them how to use Google Earth, because they had computers and internet access. They taught them how to put all the check points into Google Earth, and taught them how to embed data like check point numbers and commander names. This was important because if a checkpoint was under attack, they could go into Google Earth and pull up all the contact information. This also helped the ANA partner units to develop a common operating picture (COP), and this was one of our main efforts at the Corps level."

BG Scott Jackson, Cdr. 1SFAB, interview 14
November 2018

everyone his pocket flashlight. Because the SFAB was spending the night there, they conducted a class on how to defeat the night vision devices. For the purposes of the class, all the ANA partners were given night vision devices and they put them on, just as they believed the Taliban would. He asked if they all could see him and they all said they could. An SFAB advisor then takes out his flashlight and shines it at them and temporarily blinds them while they wore the night vision device. He asked them if they could see and, as expected, they said they could not.

An SFAB advisor used the practical class to show the ANA soldiers how light can defeat night vision devices. He explained how mortars and illumination rounds could be used to effectively counter the belief that the Taliban “owned the night.” This was followed by a practical exercise, where he then taught them how to shoot with illumination rounds to counter any benefit of night vision goggles.



Advisors with the 1st Security Force Assistance Brigade's 3rd Squadron, speak with their Afghan National Army counterparts during a routine fly-to-advise mission at Forward Operating Base Altimur, Afghanistan, Sept. 19, 2018. (Photo Credit: Sean Kimmons)

The teaching of these simple tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTP) not only made a difference on the battlefield, but also changed their perspective regarding the enemy to the point that they were no longer afraid to fight at night; this was a training success. An SFAB advisor took it a step further, and also taught them how to put light sets on their FOBs, which faced out and not inward. This was another way that made all the difference, and ANA partner soldiers stopped abandoning their check points up in the 1st Kandak area. Their partners learned these TTP and their performance as a unit was markedly improved.

Training success was not just limited to the ANA partners, but also to the SFAB soldiers themselves. When the geo-spatial soldiers (Warrant and a Staff Sergeant) taught several of the ANA units to use Google Earth, the SFAB learned a valuable lesson. Though the two soldiers were not assigned as original SFAB advisors, they did go through all the pre-deployment training that the SFAB advisors had done. Their jobs, by organizational design, were to support the SFAB brigade. The main lesson the SFAB learned was that “Everybody in the SFAB has the potential to be an advisor.” This message has been relayed back to the 2SFAB, so that they can leverage their full complement of soldiers.

SFAB CONTINUITY

One of the main drivers in establishing the SFAB program is to maintain consistency between rotations that did not always occur between Security Force Assistance Teams (SFATs) in years past. The 1SFAB is utilizing lessons learned from prior SFAT teams, and the whole Relief in Place/Transfer of Authority (RIP/TOA) process in general. Many positive recommendations came out of the AR 15-6 investigation from the Niger ambush, and the 1SFAB has implemented many of them. The 1SFAB conducted video teleconferencing (VTC) every Wednesday night with all SFAB battalion commanders, and discussed operations, lessons learned, observations, and concerns. Starting in May or June of 2018, when 2SFAB got their feet on the ground and began their training, they were immediately incorporated into the 1SFAB's weekly VTCs. And in a leaning forward position, the 3SFAB is currently incorporated into the VTCs with 2SFAB. It has now become the SFAB "community of practice" VTC. While all the 1SFAB battalion commanders are discussing how "this kandak advising team is doing this; or the concerns we're having here with operations; or this is the dilemma", the 2SFAB and 3SFAB are getting all this information.

Another way that the 1SFAB is sharing knowledge with future SFABs is through the After Action Review (AAR) process. After every single "fly to advise" mission, or significant operation, the battalion commanders are required to conduct a written narrative AAR. There are no slides, and it must be an English narrative. The narratives must address the following: 1) What was the purpose of the operation, and to some extent what took place. 2) What was the Afghanistan plan from our ANA partners? Then, based on the Afghanistan plan, what was the advisor's analysis of the Afghan plan?

The 1SFAB has over 125 written narrative AARs in a repository. BG Jackson's vision was to find a secure Facebook-like page where the 1SFAB could put AARs and other relevant files, and follow-on SFABs could have ready access. They selected "I-Space" since the forum contains community pages where they are able to post blogs, discuss questions, and post all of their AAR products.

Continuity through AARs

"Every one of these operations is tied to an Afghan unit. The idea is that you can take that AAR tied to 1st Kandak, 1st BDE, 203rd Corps and, if you're with a follow-on SFAB, you can then go back to this AAR and fill in the learning gap. For example, you can search on 9 April 2018, pull up the report on 1st Kandak, 1st BDE, 203rd Corps, and you can read all these AARs up and get a running tally on where they've come from and what our advisory focus has been. The scope of the operation, observations, and the TAA plan are now all written down. Follow-on advisors can discover why we went out there, what were the objectives, what we observed, and how the Afghans did."

BG Scott Jackson, Cdr. 1SFAB, interview 14
November 2018

The 1SFAB also shared lessons learned with JRTC for when the 2SFAB went through for validation. The 1SFAB sent battalion command teams, a portion of the brigade staff, and one senior leader from each team to JRTC to be mentors and subject matter experts. With the 1SFAB Commaner as the lead, they built a battalion-level advising team to cover down on all six battalions on 2SFAB. The battalion level advising team assisted the JRTC Observer/Controller-Trainers (OC-Ts) with training and validating the 2SFAB.

The final piece of the SFAB continuity puzzle was the in-country RIP/TOA. Simultaneous to the 2SFAB deployment, the 1SFAB sent the command group, and a leader per team or battalion, back to Afghanistan to complete a proper left-seat/right-seat hand off. Between the VTCs, the written AARs, and JRTC validation, the 1SFAB ensured that the ANA partners have a good hand off to the next SFAB.

The long term goal is to have SFABs RIP “heel to toe.” While the 2SFAB will still be required to send some leaders back from Afghanistan to JRTC to train up 3SFAB, it should not have to be as intense as the previous rotation. With each additional deployment and rotation, JRTC staff will be gaining more experience.

1SFAB Lessons Learned

Continuity is an important factor to achieve continual improvement. Just as critical as ensuring continuity between SFAB units, is recording lessons learned and making sure successive units have access to them. The 1SFAB had roughly a year at home station before coming to Afghanistan for nine months. While many of the LLs and BMPs are in the records that they shared with 2SFAB, there are “larger” lessons learned that affected the way they operated or intend to operate in the future. Three main lessons at the top of the list include: persistent advising is important; institutional changes happen at the kandak level; and linguists should be added to the modified table of organization and equipment (MTOE).



BG Scott Jackson, left center, attends an Afghan-led battle update briefing Sept. 18, 2018. BG Jackson and other advisors in his brigade often attend the briefings near his command headquarters at Advising Platform Lightning to offer their insight to counterparts. (Photo Credit: Sean Kimmons)

The 1SFAB realized early that periodic touchpoints worked well for sustainment of skills. In order to have improvement though, the training team needs to be there every day and conduct “persistent advising.” At times it can be challenging to be out there every day with a unit, so that is why it is important for SFAB teams to look for creative ways to change the battlefield geometry or resourcing to create those “persistent advising” opportunities when needed.

The SFAB advised at multiple levels, to include the corps, brigade, and the kandak level. To achieve tactical effects, being plugged in and advising at the Afghanistan brigade level is the place to operate. According to BG Jackson, the brigade-level advising is the “sweet spot” for tactical effects. This is true in the Afghanistan Army because their brigades are the last level at which true decision makers exist. The level of operations at the kandak are so small that it really comes down to the Afghanistan brigade commanders, who really make decisions on the battlefield. The kandak level is where the “institutional” development is really taking place. BG Jackson believes that the Afghanistan older generation brigade leadership, by and large, is still tied to the old Afghanistan culture, and it is difficult to change things at the brigade level. The kandak level is a younger generation. Several kandaks are led by Afghanistan majors who are in their late 20s or early 30s, which is not too far off from where the SFAB captains and majors are in age. These Soldiers can talk “peer-to-peer,” not by rank but by generation. The more that the younger Afghan generation is exposed to how the SFAB and U.S. forces do business, the faster and more efficiently we’ll be at improving the Afghan military culture.

Institutional Change starts at the Kandak

“Very early in our deployment, we were sitting in the corps headquarters building one night and the President of Afghanistan was visiting. It’s 0200 and I’m talking with a couple of U.S. Soldiers with the rank of PV2, who were my Guardian Angels. and this Afghan captain was looking at me intensely. We were laughing and having a good time, and the Afghan captain continued to stare until I asked my interpreter to ask him if something was the matter. The Afghanistan captain asked the interpreter my rank and duty position, and he was told that I was a colonel and the SFAB brigade commander. His response was that this interaction with junior Soldiers by a colonel would never happen in the Afghan Army. He said that brigade commanders don’t talk to privates in the Afghan Army, and they rarely talk to him as a captain.

This point hit home to me that the more we can engage the young officers and non-commissioned officers in the Afghan Army, the better effect we’ll have on the “institution” development across Afghanistan....you have to start at the kandak level. Just like in our Army, we identify and develop leaders and things like that, but you cannot do that if you don’t have the presence down there to see those guys.”

BG Scott Jackson, Cdr. 1SFAB, interview 14
November 2018

BG Jackson believes that advising at the kandak level is important because the relationship that develops can actually be more secure than advising at the brigade or corps level. If a leader advises at the kandak level, they know everyone in the kandak.

One of the keys to important training is having qualified linguists. There were eleven 09L (Linguist Interpreters) attached to the SFAB for this mission. They were both Dari and Pashtu speaking linguists, and according to BG Jackson they were an “absolute game changer.” His assigned linguist was an U.S. Army Specialist originally from Afghanistan. Like the brigade commander, all of the SFAB battalion commanders also had 09L linguists with them at all times. Having an Army linguist with the SFAB commanders gives the mission instant credibility and instant trust with the ANA partner units.

The 09L Soldiers are flexible and understand mission requirements and the needs of the Army advising mission. The 09L Army linguists tend to be more flexible than their civilian counterparts, and are essential to the SFAB mission. Based on the tremendous value of the 09L linguists during the 1SFAB deployment in Afghanistan, BG Jackson recommended that they be built into the SFAB MTOE for future deployments. Currently, they are not part of the SFAB MTOE, and are attached for this deployment.



BG Scott Jackson with linguist, advises a role player acting as a commander in the Afghan National Army during a key leader engagement held Jan. 15, 2018, during the month-long 1st SFAB training rotation at the Joint Readiness Training Center in Fort Polk, La. The engagement was held to prepare the 1SFAB leadership for their upcoming deployment to provide training and advising assistance to Afghan National Security Forces. (Photo Credit: SPC Noelle E. Wiehe, 50th Public Affairs Detachment)

If the MTOE cannot be adjusted to include the linguists, BG Jackson recommends that future SFAB units receive their 09L linguists early on in their pre-deployment training. The benefit to having them early is that it gives the deploying unit the ability to incorporate them into their advisory training program. In addition, the linguists can participate in the language sustainment training which is part of the pre-deployment training, and provide cultural advising to the SFAB advisors. Being incorporated earlier allows them to be with the unit and helps them become an integral part of the SFAB team from the start.

The Army linguists give instant credibility because they are part of the SFAB and are associated with the advisors. While the partners see them as U.S. Soldiers, many of them are native born and this gives the SFAB advisors a greater understanding of the Afghanistan culture and heritage. The 09L is definitely a force multiplier.

Insider Threat

The insider threat is alive and well in Afghanistan. While the overall number of insider threats has gone down over the past few years, so has the coalition force's number of interactions with the Afghans. While not all incidents happen during training engagements with Afghan partners, SFAB members have to constantly be aware when there are new partner members, or when there are outside visitors to their training.

As stated earlier, trust was an important component of the training. The SFAB commanders on the ground know their training environments and variables the best. Overly restrictive force protection (FP) policy can take away the judgment of the commanders, and potentially put them in a worse place by being overly cautious. According to BG Jackson, you have got to trust your Commanders to make the right call.

The “Afghan Blanket” an Insider Threat Vignette

“There were times at Ghazni I was downtown with the ANA Corps commander, and he said to me that we should go and see the governor. It’s a 150 meter walk inside the compound and Afghan generals never wear body armor. I had a choice to make, I could go next door and get my personal protective equipment (PPE), or I could just walk with him without my PPE. I made the decision to go with the ANA Corps commander without PPE, but ensured all my Soldiers who accompanied me remained in full PPE.”

“I use the term that I “wrapped myself in an Afghan blanket,” and was literally side by side with him so that I was almost touching him with my shoulder as we walked. I later used the term “Velcro to Velcro” as we walked closely side by side. Bottom line is that we need to trust the judgment of the SFAB commanders to make PPE calls when interacting with their ANA partners. You need the freedom to adjust your TTPs, and it made a difference. In fact, the ANA Corps commander stated to me “now you look like an Afghan general.” From there on out, our relationship was solid. I did the tactical actions on the ground to mitigate the risk and chose not to wear my PPE in this situation.”

BG Scott Jackson, Cdr. 1SFAB, interview 14 November 2018

SFAB Gap and the Arizona National Guard (1/158)

As it stands now, there is an approximate four month gap between the 1SFAB's departure and the 2SFAB's arrival. There will be no gap between 2SFAB and 3SFAB as they rotate in and out of Afghanistan. The plan is for the gaps between SFABs to disappear. The hope is that when the 2SFAB arrives in theater, the Army will be able to generate a SFAB brigade to maintain "heel to toe" rotations from here on out.

Since the 2SFAB had a late start in standing up and a limited time to train, and the Arizona Army National Guard (AZARNG) was originally planning to be in theater during the winter months (normally the nonfighting season), it was decided that they could potentially fill the gap between the 1SFAB and 2SFAB.

According to BG Jackson, the mission of the 1/158 AZARNG was to "keep the fires warm" at the Regional Training Centers. Their mission set was specially scoped to keep them focused on maintaining critical relationships and functions, but not to conduct expeditionary advising at the kandak level. The AZARNG was not resourced or equipped to conduct the SFAB mission. While it is true that their rank structure and experiences were different from the SFAB, the 1/158 AZARNG was fully capable of maintaining the critical relationships and functions until the arrival of the 2SFAB in March 2019.

