

15 Principles of Security Force Assistance (SFA)

In early Spring of 2012 General John Allen released a memorandum listing the "15 Principles of Security Force Assistance". These principles are listed below.

Mission

1. **SFA is the way to achieve mission success.** SFA is the way in which we will achieve the irreversible transition of lead security responsibility to the Afghans. The sovereign nation of Afghanistan will increasingly own the battle space and ISAF will support Afghan operations in accordance with their strategy and their plans.
2. **One Command and one mission.** SFA is conducted from the ministries down to the squad on patrol. Do not build alternative chains of command or ad hoc organizations. Use simple and unambiguous command and control systems that mirror the Afghan's chain of command and then support them at every level.
3. **SFA does not equal SFA Teams.** The Afghan's success is our success; therefore all elements of the force deliver SFA. SFA is the way by which we achieve the mission and SFA teams are one of the means; but they do not represent the only means.

Mindset

4. **Understand in order to advise.** Understand the entity that you are assigned to and where it resides on the continuum between dependency and self-sufficiency. Advise and assist from the perspective of unified action, do not become solely focused on any one entity at any one time. Examine and understand the connective tissue.
5. **There is no single approach.** ISAF will provide assistance to all ANSF entities. Do not solely focus on the ANA because it is comfortable to do so. The ANP are not the ANA, nor are they the NDS. SFA requires a change of mindset, a different way of doing business; be comfortable with change and relish this unique opportunity.
6. **One Afghan, one advisor.** Define the sphere of influence for every Afghan unit, official and leader. Avoid multiple and overlapping advisory chains. Determine who owns the relationship and then allow that individual to develop it. The appropriate individual with the connections to the appropriate resources can deliver far more than a fully manned team without direction. Do not confuse quantity with quality.

7. ***Their failure is not your failure.*** Have the confidence and patience to allow your counterpart to lead and to learn through self-discovery and to determine their own shortcomings. The Afghans will get the occasional bloody nose (experience occasional setbacks) and you must ensure that they learn from the experience. However, ISAF must not stand by and watch them being knocked down, i.e., fail.

8. ***Better that the Afghans do something adequately than we do it perfectly.*** Ask and then listen to how the Afghans will conduct operations, and then assist them accordingly; increase their capability along the way. Your effect is measured by how well the ANSF develop, not the number of times you successfully complete a task, acquire resources, or the number of suggestions you make.

Approach

9. ***This is Afghanistan.*** Don't template assistance based on your own background or prejudice. Approach every problem from an Afghan perspective. Your counterpart will always take an Afghan approach or seek an Afghan solution. Observe and understand the cultural norms, their systems and processes before offering advice. Sustainable solutions will be ones that Afghans can embrace as their own. Enable and then ensure there is accountability.

10. ***SFA is based on Afghan needs.*** Afghan needs and requirements are just that. Their solutions must be durable, consistent, and sustainable. The goal of effective SFA is self-sufficiency. Developing professionalism and leadership will have far greater and a more lasting effect than developing tactics. The emphasis should be on the "why and how" we do this, rather than on the "what to do".

11. ***Do not allow cultural differences to divide us.*** Operating according to Afghan priorities and timelines may involve periods of relative inactivity, be comfortable with this. Relationships are incredibly valuable. Chatting or drinking chai is not a distraction or an unproductive use of your time; view it as the time where you arrive at a mutual understanding of where you're going and how you are collectively going to get there.

12. ***Maintain the Sensory Network.*** As force levels reduce, our traditional situational awareness will decline. Make up for any shortfalls by viewing the Afghans as the primary sensors. Develop and maintain the sensory network. Locals have an advantage, culturally and linguistically, over ISAF and can access information that you will never leverage.

13. ***Afghans in the lead does not mean Afghans alone.*** Live, eat, advise and if required fight with the Afghans. Assisting on the ground will deliver the greatest rewards, but there are associated risks. Remember you are part of a far larger force. Know your adjacent units and understand how this operational network provides support.

14. ***It is OK to say "no"***. Just because you can, don't always provide enablers that the ANSF will not have access to, post transition. The routine provision of these assets will only stall the Afghans ability to develop their own enablers. Keep the Afghans focused on the mission, convince them to operate independently; build their confidence by offering a safety net to ensure their success.

15. ***Be a learning organization***. Share best practices; explain to others what has worked in your sector. It is important to realize where the ANSF are along the continuum from dependency to self-sufficiency. Ensure continuity, chart progress and pass relevant information to your replacement, so that they can tailor their own pre-deployment training to accurately reflect the events on the ground.