



USAF ACADEMY LEGAL OFFICE
2304 Cadet Drive, Suite 2100
USAFA, CO 80840
(719) 333-3940

STATUS OF FORCES AGREEMENT (SOFA)

1. A FEW WORDS ABOUT THIS BOOKLET

This pamphlet is intended to provide a brief overview of Status of Forces Agreements (SOFAs) between the United States and other countries, their purpose, and applicability to deployed service members. Country specific SOFA pamphlets are also available.

2. WHAT IS A SOFA?

SOFAs are multilateral or bilateral agreements that establish the framework under which U.S. military personnel operate in a foreign country and how domestic laws of the foreign jurisdiction apply toward U.S. personnel in that country. A SOFA provides the legal framework for day-to-day operations of U.S. personnel while serving in a foreign country.

3. WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF A SOFA?

A SOFA may be written for a specific purpose or activity, or it may anticipate a longer-term relationship and provide for maximum flexibility and applicability. It is generally a stand-alone document concluded as an executive agreement.

4. HOW DOES A SOFA APPLY TO DEPLOYED SERVICE MEMBERS?

The most common issue addressed in a SOFA is which country may exercise criminal jurisdiction over U.S. personnel while serving in a foreign country. The U.S. has entered into agreements where it maintains exclusive jurisdiction, but the more common agreement results in shared jurisdiction between the United States and the signatory country. Shared jurisdiction occurs when each party to the agreement retains exclusive jurisdiction over certain offenses, but also allows the United States

The information provided in this document is meant for the sole use of Active Duty service members, retirees, their families, and those individuals eligible for legal assistance. The information is general in nature and meant only to provide a brief overview of various legal matters. Rights and responsibility vary widely according to the particular set of circumstances in each case. Laws can vary across states, services, and civilian jurisdictions and laws are changed from time to time. Do not rely upon the general restatements of background information presented here without discussing your specific situation with a legal professional.

to request that the host country waive jurisdiction in favor of the United States exercising criminal and disciplinary jurisdiction.

Other provisions that may be found in a SOFA include, but are not limited to, the wearing of uniforms, taxes and fees, carrying of weapons, use of radio frequencies, licenses, and customs regulations. SOFAs are peacetime documents, and therefore do not address the rules of war or the Laws of Armed Conflict. The existence of a SOFA does affect or diminish the parties' inherent right of self-defense under the law of war. In the event of armed conflict between parties to a SOFA, the terms of the agreement would no longer be applicable.