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Department of Defense Formative Evaluation
Military Will to Fight
Public Summary

Department of Defense
OFFICE OF PREPUBLICATION AND SECURITY REVIEW

Evaluation Purpose and Research Questions

Responding to a congressional requirement for a formative evaluation of the will to fight (W2F) of foreign security forces and implications for security cooperation (SC), the Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Global Partnerships (ODASD GP) asked the Center for Naval Analyses (CNA), an independent, Federally Funded Research and Development Center (FFRDC), to develop a corresponding military W2F assessment framework. The evaluation, *“Will They Fight?” Assessing Military Will to Fight*, developed an initial assessment framework with corresponding questions and indicators. This summary provides an unclassified overview derived from CNA’s evaluation report.

Research Questions and Approach

The evaluation focused on two questions:

1. What factors shape the military W2F of foreign militaries?
2. How can these military W2F factors be assessed systematically?

To address these questions, CNA first conducted a systematic review and formative evaluation of existing knowledge on W2F and related concepts within the Intelligence Community, military professional, and peer-reviewed academic research groups. For the first two of these groups, CNA reviewed and evaluated written products and held semi-structured discussions with a sample of individuals with expertise and/or experience in W2F and related concepts. For the third group, CNA reviewed and evaluated peer-reviewed academic research according to commonly accepted social science research standards.

Using the insights from these groups, CNA identified several factors that shape military W2F. CNA then determined a subset of the most critical factors for military W2F, taking into account data availability and methodological limitations, as well as the analytical rigor of previous studies. CNA then categorized these factors for coherence to form the conceptual basis for the framework and outlined corresponding questions and indicators for use in assessing the military W2F of foreign partner security forces.

Findings and Recommendations

The table below displays the key findings from CNA’s evaluation, the military W2F assessment framework. These two groups of situational and dispositional factors together constitute those that analysts and practitioners should focus on when evaluating the military W2F of foreign partner’s security forces.

Situational Factors	Dispositional Factors
<p>Underlying concept: <i>The relative consequences of fighting versus backing down</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Expectations about the resolve of fellow soldiers</i> • <i>Expectations about intra-force resistance to the order to fight</i> • <i>Expectations about battlefield outcomes</i> • <i>The stakes or cause</i> 	<p>Underlying concept: <i>How much senior political and military leadership values patience, self-control, risk-taking, and honor</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Time horizons</i> • <i>Risk aversion</i> • <i>Honor orientation</i>

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In addition to the assessment framework itself, CNA noted several key takeaways from the evaluation:

- CNA recommends that decision-makers and planners shift their focus from trying to understand a foreign partner's military "will to fight" as an ascribed, static trait to one that is instead dynamic, varying across situations and over time. Consequently, decision-makers and planners should pursue an answer to the question of "will they fight?" in a particular scenario or context via a prospective approach, focusing on the factors that make it more or less likely that the said actor will fight.
- The multitude of factors that may shape military W2F make it hard to predict, even if one considers the situational and dispositional factors that CNA deemed to be most critical. Consequently, this makes a foreign partner's security forces' military W2F hard to "move" as it is unclear which factors will be more influential in any one situation.
- Rather than building a bespoke framework for each country, or picking and choosing which factors to focus on, CNA believes there is value in applying the same general framework across and within cases over time. Doing so supports comparative assessment, enhancing the quality of insights that can be used to inform national security decision-making and operational and campaign planning.

Finally, CNA noted several areas for future research:

- Although the military W2F assessment framework and its indicators are drawn largely from social science research, CNA was not yet able to test or apply the framework in this evaluation. Future work should apply this framework extensively to test its assumptions further and refine them as necessary. As part of this effort, analysis should include examination of how the situational and dispositional factors interact with one another.
- CNA made an underlying assumption in this evaluation that national or political W2F was at a level sufficient that it would not impede military W2F. Given the interplay between national/political W2F and military W2F, it would be valuable to relax this assumption and examine how doing so would affect the implications of the framework CNA built.
- CNA provided a brief overview of how DOD can integrate insights from the assessment framework into SC activities and identified three areas for further analysis: (1) determining how to prioritize military W2F factors for SC investment; (2) identifying (historically) which military W2F factors are most "moveable" and folding those findings into the original assessment framework; and (3) determining which military W2F factors are more "moveable" by the US versus third-party partners.

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