

NATIONAL WILL to FIGHT

**Why Some States Keep Fighting
and Others Don't**

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Preface

This report documents research and analysis as part of a project titled *Assessing and Influencing National Will to Fight*, which is sponsored by the Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations, Plans, and Training, U.S. Army (G-3/5/7). The purpose of the project was to provide a generalizable analytic method to assess national will to fight, to use that method to provide an assessment in a Korean Peninsula scenario and a scenario involving Russia and members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, and to provide recommendations for the best methods to influence national will to fight.

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Summary

Wars rarely end simply because one military destroys another. Government leaders determine how and when wars end, and they may have to decide many times during a conflict whether their country should continue enduring risk and sacrifice or whether it is time to stop fighting. Tangible factors like remaining numbers of weapons and troops are obviously part of the decision calculus, but it is often less-tangible political and economic variables that ultimately determine what might be called *national will to fight*.

The U.S. Army asked the RAND Arroyo Center to help U.S. leaders better understand and influence will to fight at both the national level and at the tactical and operational levels. This report, along with a companion report, *Will to Fight: Analyzing, Modeling, and Simulating the Will to Fight of Military Units*,¹ documents the first steps in this multiyear effort.

We define *national will to fight* as *the determination of a national government to conduct sustained military and other operations for some objective even when the expectation of success decreases or the need for significant political, economic, and military sacrifices increases*. Although the range of actors relevant to national will includes citizens, military leaders, media, and foreign officials, we focus on governments and, in the process, account for the influences of these and other actors. Ultimately, governments make the decisions about war. Their will is reflected in the political decisions they make during a conflict to either continue or stop fighting. At the national level, we define *fighting* to include not only military force but also the use of all aspects of national power to achieve particular political objectives. And although our analysis focuses on will to fight, it is important to highlight that governments should find the will to *stop* themselves or their partners from fighting when the moral, human, or financial costs outweigh the benefits.

Classic military theorists from Sun Tzu to Carl von Clausewitz have addressed the importance of will to fight. Leaders from Winston Churchill to Ho Chi Minh

¹ Ben Connable, Michael J. McNerney, William Marcellino, Aaron Frank, Henry Hargrove, Marek N. Posard, S. Rebecca Zimmerman, Natasha Lander, Jasen J. Castillo, and James Sladden, *Will to Fight: Analyzing, Modeling, and Simulating the Will to Fight of Military Units*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-2341-A, 2018.

embodied national will to fight. In fact, we identified dozens of classic and contemporary writers with something to say on the subject, including through themes of national leadership, influence of elites, popular opinion, culture, history, economic pressures, alliances, ideology, and many others. Moreover, after a long absence from Army, Marine Corps, and joint military doctrine, the importance of human will and the concept of will to fight are again being incorporated. But none of the academic or doctrinal sources we researched had systematically and comprehensively broken down the concept of will to fight into an examination of its relevant influencing factors and analyzed them. No simple literature review could answer our U.S. Army sponsor's overarching research question: *How can the United States assess and influence partner and adversary will to fight?*

Understanding national will to fight can help Army and other leaders in many important ways, to include improving how they plan for potential conflicts, how they assess the reliability of partners in potential conflicts, and even how they approach daily geopolitical challenges. Moreover, the ability to influence will to fight can have repercussions for battles and campaigns, or it can shorten wars or prevent them entirely. As discussed in our companion report on will to fight of military units, most U.S. military games and simulations focus on military capabilities and attrition (i.e., killing people and breaking things). At best, they include only minor proxies for will to fight, such as suppression (commonly caused by enemy fire), that are inadequate to convey its complexity. In the late 2000s, the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) developed the Integrated Gaming System, which addressed some of the influences on will to fight, such as information warfare and cohesion. It even included a "political will model," which analyzed relationships among leaders and populations and measured support for specific policies. The system's complexity and mixed levels of support from military planning organizations, however, meant that it never had its full intended impact.

Research Approach

Given the challenges inherent in trying to analyze something as complex and amorphous as human and institutional will, we used a mixed-methods approach in our research, including an extensive literature review, interviews with experts, case studies, and reviews of relevant modeling and war-gaming.² We also invoked several caveats about the limits of such analysis, including that there can be no perfectly predictive models of will to fight (although estimating is certainly feasible and desirable) and that different variables will carry more or less importance in different scenarios.

² Most of the modeling and wargaming efforts that we reviewed focused more on tactical-operational will to fight and are analyzed in the companion report.

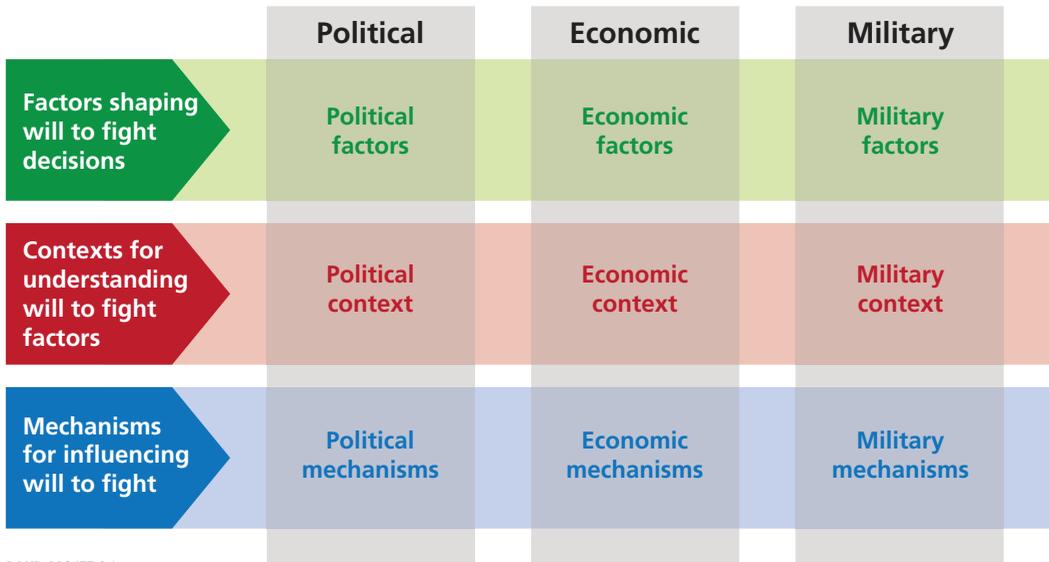
Based on the first phase of our literature review and interviews, we identified 42 variables relevant to understanding national will to fight, such as stakes (e.g., national survival, regime change, or nation-building), popular support for the conflict, cohesion within the government, the resilience of a country's economy, and indoctrination of the population. We organized these variables into three categories: political, economic, and military. While most of these variables were factors that shape a government's decisions on national will to fight, other variables represented contexts in which particular factors might be more or less important. For example, popular support might matter more in a democracy. Finally, some of the variables represented mechanisms, such as international engagement or messaging, that a government can use to influence will to fight. The framework in Figure S.1 shows our approach to organizing the variables.

As we organized our variables into the framework, we also conducted a more focused literature review and a second round of interviews to combine, adjust, and prioritize the variables, resulting in 15 independent variables that we found to be particularly relevant for Army leaders and best able to inform our development of tools to assist the Army in understanding and influencing will. As shown in the following list, we also conducted 15 mini case studies to explore these variables using historical and contemporary examples:

- Austria-Hungary, World War (WW) I
- France, WW I
- Germany, WW I
- Italy, WW I
- Russia, WW I
- France, WW II
- Germany, WW II
- Soviet Union, WW II
- North Korea, Korean War (1950–1953)
- South Korea, Korean War (1950–1953)
- India and Pakistan, India-Pakistan War (1965)
- North Vietnam, Vietnam War (1965–1975)
- South Vietnam, Vietnam War (1965–1975)
- Iran and Iraq, Iran-Iraq War (1980–1988)
- Russia, Chechen Wars (1994–2009).

We also used key insights from the literature and examples from the case studies to substantiate the 15 variables we included in our model, to describe how they relate to will to fight, and to explore how they relate to each other. Table S.1 shows a summary version of the model.

Figure S.1
National Will to Fight Framework



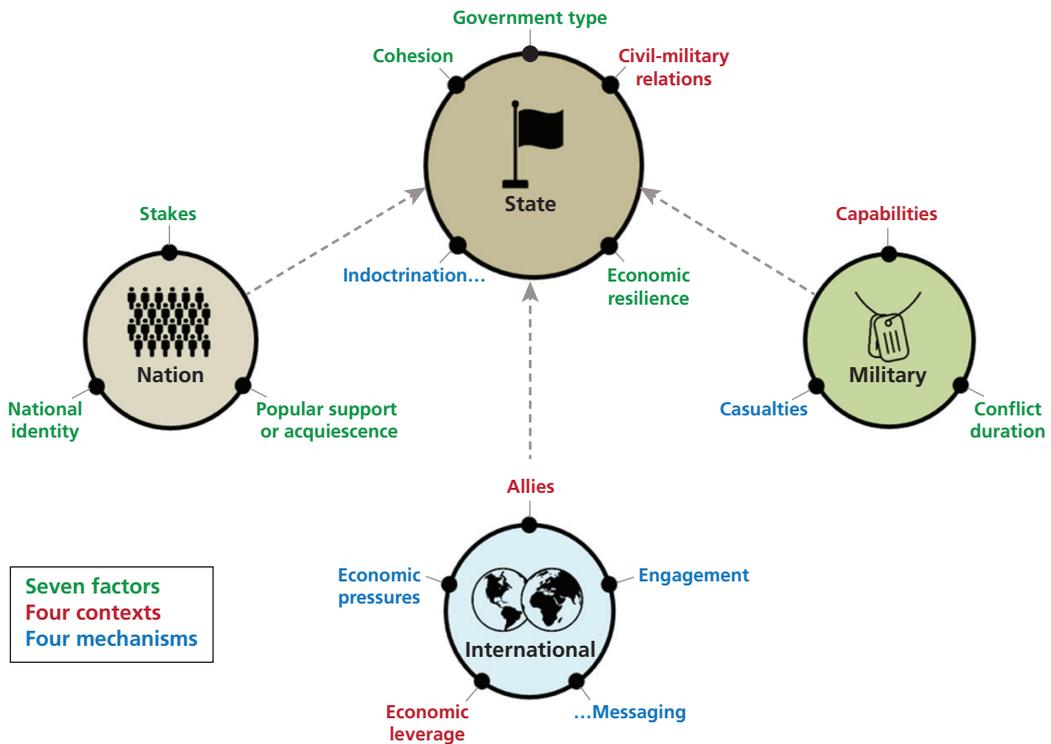
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Table S.1
Simplified National Will to Fight Exploratory Model

	Political	Economic	Military
Factors shaping will to fight policy decisions	Stakes Cohesion Civil-military relations Popular support Allies	Leverage	Capabilities
Contexts for understanding factors	Government type National identity	Resilience	Conflict duration
Mechanisms for influencing national will	Engagement Indoctrination and messaging	Pressures	Casualties

Another way to view the model is through *centers of gravity*—that is, focal points that can be influenced during conflict (Figure S.2). While our examination of national will to fight focuses on state decisions, many of the variables draw from the nation more generally (i.e., citizens and society as a whole) and from the military or the international environment.

Figure S.2
Centers of Gravity and Variables in the National Will to Fight Exploratory Model



NOTE: As discussed, indoctrination and messaging combine to form one mechanism in our analysis.

RAND RR2477-S.2

Key Findings

Our exploration of the variables in our national will to fight model led to several findings, which we summarize in Figure S.3.

As in our companion study on will to fight at the tactical and operational levels, our overarching finding is that will to fight is poorly analyzed and the least understood aspect of war. To be sure, our literature review identifies dozens of articles and books that discuss the topic in general terms and provides many citations of relevant works. Among these are several works that dive deeply into particular aspects of will to fight. Comprehensive, rigorous examinations of national will to fight as a concept, however, are severely lacking. Most importantly, efforts to apply that concept to contemporary conflict scenarios are also lacking. Exploratory models like the one we have developed in this report can be a valuable tool to support the kind of rigorous examinations that Army leaders, policymakers, analysts, and planners need.

More specifically related to our model, we found that a country with more factors in its favor (e.g., high stakes, strong cohesion, popular support) should have stronger

Figure S.3
Summary of Overall Findings



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will to fight and thus a higher chance of victory. Our research indicated that this is true but that improving one's odds is certainly not the same as ensuring victory. We also found that national will to fight could vary during the course of a conflict and that, when analyzing the factors shaping will to fight, it is best to look across an alliance rather than at states in isolation.

Next, we found that context plays an underlying but important role in strengthening or weakening will to fight. For example, thinking first about political context, our research supported the proposition that strong democracies and totalitarian states are better able to maintain will to fight (through very different means) compared with democracies in turmoil or states with a mix of democratic and autocratic traits. The inter-relationships among our variables matter, however. Our research showed a moderating variable in the relationship between strong democracies and will to

fight: stakes. When their existential or vital national interests are threatened, strong democracies have powerful and enduring national will to fight. When stakes are questionable, strong democracies' will to fight is more fragile—and increasingly so if casualties are high and conflict duration grows. The same interaction is not the case for totalitarian societies, perhaps because indoctrination allows leaders to more easily paint the stakes as high.

Another contextual variable, national identity, permeates almost every other aspect of will to fight. Governments and other organizations frequently try to influence national identity for good or ill, including through what we have called indoctrination and messaging. The implications are significant for strengthening or weakening will to fight and even for strengthening or weakening the very foundations of society. While difficult to analyze in a way that is rigorous yet useful to policymakers, national identity is an underlying and crucial variable in our model.

We also found that the influence of economic variables on will to fight depends on a government's alliances and its engagement with other countries. In other words, a country's economic dependency on and support from its allies often matter more than economic pressures from an adversary. Governments should be wary of overestimating their ability to weaken an adversary's will to fight through economic pressures, unless that adversary is truly isolated. On the other hand, governments may be able to use their economic leverage over dependent partners to help bring a conflict to an end.

Perhaps of particular interest to Army leaders and other government officials, we found that the effective use of engagement and information (internally directed indoctrination and externally directed messaging) can greatly influence will to fight and thus should improve the chances of victory. While our research focused on states in conflict, it is especially important to note that these mechanisms are most effective *before* a conflict begins. We used a broad definition of engagement that includes not only international diplomacy but also defense engagement (including military-to-military contacts). We found that engagement efforts can help a government strengthen the resolve of partners and bring adversaries to the negotiating table.

Our final finding addresses two of our military variables: capabilities and infliction of casualties (or attrition). We found that when will to fight is evenly matched, superior capabilities and infliction of greater casualties should lead to victory—or stalemate. Most models focus on capabilities and casualties when, in fact, rigorous assessments require all three components of a conflict to be considered. Many of our case studies indicated that only when will to fight is about evenly matched are capabilities and casualties likely to be reliable indicators of war outcomes. For example, North Vietnam's national will to fight was high from the start of its conflict with South Vietnam until the end, helping it overcome capability shortfalls and high attrition. During WW II, the will to fight of Germany's adversaries started out mixed but, over the course of the war, grew to match German will, leading to their eventual victory as attrition ate away at the capabilities and manpower of Germany and its partners. We also

found that the infliction of casualties on an adversary in some scenarios was actually more likely to strengthen that adversary's will to fight than to weaken it—for example, with France during WW I and the Soviet Union during WW II.

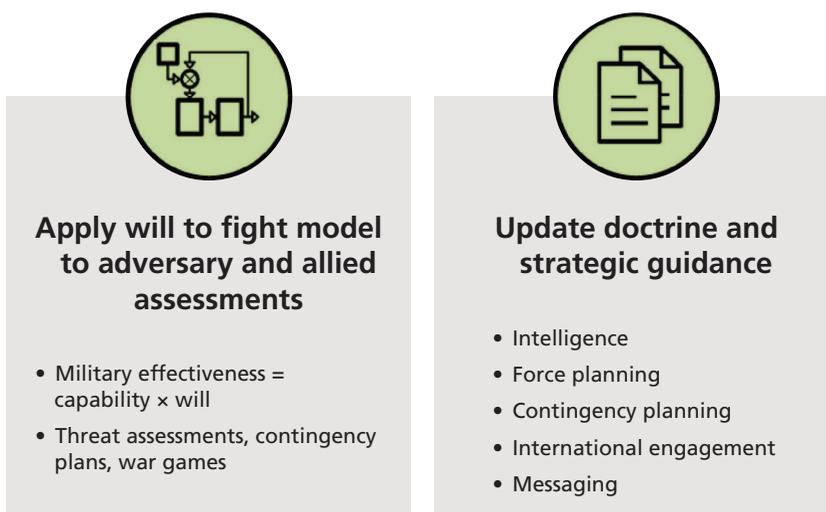
Recommendations

We used our findings to develop several recommendations that should help leaders understand and influence national will to fight in allies and adversaries. We summarize our overarching recommendations in Figure S.4.

First, U.S. Army and other leaders should undertake assessments of national will to fight in potential wartime allies and adversaries. Most policy discussions, intelligence assessments, and military planning efforts continue to be based on military capabilities, while discussions of will to fight—to the extent they occur—focus on deterrence. A fundamental change in assessments is needed whereby policymakers and planners consider military effectiveness to be a product of capability and will. The national will to fight model that we explore in this report can be tailored and applied to a wide set of conflict scenarios and drive a much-needed dialogue among analysts conducting threat assessments, contingency plans, war games, and other efforts that require an evaluation of how future conflicts might unfold.

Second, if leaders wish to incorporate considerations of will to fight into future analysis, they will need to update strategic guidance documents and military doctrine. Those who deal with analyzing intelligence, military force requirements (i.e., force

Figure S.4
Summary of Overarching Recommendations



planning), and potential military operations (i.e., contingency planning) rely on strategic guidance to help them understand their missions and prioritize their activities. The same is true for those who manage international engagement and messaging efforts. Although senior leaders can immediately begin a dialogue about incorporating will to fight into assessments of potential allies and adversaries, it will take several years to integrate the concept with all its nuances into the many relevant documents across the Army and the U.S. government.

Figure S.5 summarizes two detailed recommendations, which are derived from two of the mechanisms from our national will to fight model: (1) engagement and (2) indoctrination and messaging.

For our third recommendation, we suggest that U.S. Army and other leaders incorporate will to fight considerations into international engagements, from high-level political discussions to multinational military exercises and tactical training events. Leaders will need to clarify roles, responsibilities, priorities, and tasks among policymakers in Washington, diplomats, military commanders, staff at military operational headquarters, military attachés, and so forth.

Fourth, for the Army to help guide U.S. government efforts to operate more effectively in the information space, Army and other leaders should understand and influence the indoctrination and messaging efforts of other countries. DoD, State Department, and Intelligence Community officials could start by incorporating the concept of will to fight into their analysis of foreign information operations and their interac-

Figure S.5
Summary of Mechanism-Based Recommendations



tions with foreign officials and citizens. For example, intelligence analysts can increase their focus on understanding how other countries portray international security challenges, manage civil-military relations, shape national identity, and shape public perceptions, all through the lens of national will to fight. Force planners and contingency planners can analyze military requirements for operating more effectively in the information space. Through DoD's and the State Department's international engagements and messaging efforts, U.S. officials can reach out directly to foreign populations to strengthen popular support for such organizations as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, for United Nations peacekeeping operations, or for allies under threat (e.g., South Korea).

Looking Ahead

In light of growing tensions with countries like Russia and North Korea, it seems prudent to open up a rigorous dialogue in the United States and among its allies to better understand and influence the human factors in war. Incorporating this concept of national will to fight in the analysis of potential future conflicts will help leaders and strategic thinkers improve their assessments of what may happen in various conflict scenarios and what to do about it.

The model presented in this report can be applied for this purpose. For this model and its tactical-operational counterpart, we provide a guide to assessment and analysis, not a mathematical formula. With our models and reports, we hope to stimulate the dialogue necessary to develop the concept of will to fight further and incorporate it into strategic decisionmaking and planning.

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Abbreviations

DMZ	Korean Demilitarized Zone
DoD	U.S. Department of Defense
ICBM	intercontinental ballistic missile
JC-HAMO	Joint Concept for Human Aspects of Military Operations
KPA	Korean People's Army
NVA	North Vietnamese Army
POW	prisoner of war
ROK	Republic of Korea
UN	United Nations
WW	World War

What Is Will to Fight and Why Does It Matter?

In war there are two factors—human beings and weapons. Ultimately, though, human beings are the decisive factor. Human beings! Human beings!
— Võ Nguyên Giáp, commander, People’s Army of Vietnam¹

President Merkin Muffley: I will not go down in history as the greatest mass-murderer since Adolf Hitler.

General Buck Turgidson: Perhaps it might be better, Mr. President, if you were more concerned with the American people than with your image in the history books.²

Purpose of the Study

What drives some governments to persevere in war at any price while others choose to stop fighting? Too often, policymakers, military planners, and researchers alike make the mistake of portraying war as a point of transition from a multifaceted environment of political and economic competition and collaboration to a narrowly focused clash of military forces. Countries go from talking and trading to killing and back again at war’s end, supposedly determined when one military force overwhelms the other. While analysts recognize the less physical aspects of war, when thinking about how wars end, it can be almost irresistible to focus on the tangibles—things that can be measured, such as tanks, troops, and body counts. Most predictions of a country’s or military unit’s will to fight are derived from measurements like these. But from the presidential palace to the muddy foxhole, less-tangible variables often determine why

¹ Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, New York: Penguin Books, 1983, p. 21.

² *Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb*, dir. Stanley Kubrick, Columbia Pictures, 1964.

some people keep fighting and some decide to stop. And at the national level, the political and economic considerations so prominent in peacetime—such as public opinion, international relationships, and economic pressures—often prove equally important during a conflict.

The U.S. Army's senior strategists asked the RAND Arroyo Center to analyze the relationships among these tangible and intangible factors to help U.S. leaders better understand—and ultimately influence—the will to fight of other countries. When considering potential future conflicts, how can government decisionmakers account for adversary will to fight, and when a conflict is under way, how can they weaken that will and thus bring the conflict to an end? Conversely, how can decisionmakers better assess the will of future partners in a conflict and strengthen that will in support of alliance cohesion? While this study focuses on will at the national level, a companion report, *Will to Fight: Analyzing, Modeling, and Simulating the Will to Fight of Military Units*,³ focuses on will at the tactical and operational levels.⁴

Understanding why some governments decide to persevere in war, even in the face of major setbacks, and others do not is inextricably tied to understanding will to fight. Perhaps no one has written more eloquently (or been as excessively quoted) on this topic than the Prussian strategist Carl von Clausewitz. His seminal book *On War* has sometimes, however, been the victim of lip service and misunderstanding. For example, Clausewitz's oft-cited definition of war as a “continuation of politics by other means” is not always appreciated for its breadth of scope.⁵ Considering the context of the rest of his book and the fact that the German word *Politik* refers to both politics and policy, Clausewitz viewed war to be tightly integrated with a government's policymaking, international diplomacy, and domestic political wrangling. Similarly, “by other means” could be misinterpreted as military force displacing the other elements of national power, whereas the phrase *mit anderen Mitteln* more accurately translates to “with other means,” indicating that military force simply becomes part of the mix.⁶

A quotation from later in Clausewitz's book reinforces this point, although it is cited less often (understandably so, given its clunkiness and use of the now-awkward

³ Ben Connable, Michael J. McNerney, William Marcellino, Aaron Frank, Henry Hargrove, Marek N. Posard, S. Rebecca Zimmerman, Natasha Lander, Jasen J. Castillo, and James Sladden, *Will to Fight: Analyzing, Modeling, and Simulating the Will to Fight of Military Units*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-2341-A, 2018.

⁴ We define the main actors at the *national* level as the government decisionmakers running a state, and we define the main actors at the *tactical and operational* levels as military forces from the individual to the major unit level, such as army brigades and divisions.

⁵ For a deeper discussion of Clausewitz and the multifaceted meaning behind his definition of war, see Antulio J. Echevarria II, “War, Politics, and RMA—The Legacy of Clausewitz,” *Joint Forces Quarterly*, Winter 1995–96.

⁶ Although the title of his article is a bit overstated, James Holmes provides an important discussion of this distinction in Clausewitz's most famous quote; see James R. Holmes, “Everything You Know About Clausewitz Is Wrong,” *The Diplomat*, November 12, 2014.

term “political intercourse”): “We see, therefore, that war is not merely an act of policy but a true political instrument, a continuation of political intercourse carried on with other means.”⁷

Clausewitz more directly addresses the importance of will when he says, “[Two] factors which cannot be separated . . . [are] the sum of available means and the strength of the will.”⁸ And later, “the moral elements are among the most important in war. . . . [T]he will is itself a moral quantity.” He warns, “it is paltry philosophy if in the old-fashioned way one lays down rules and principles in total disregard of moral values.”⁹

Many other classic and contemporary strategists have addressed the issue of will, directly and indirectly, using terms like moral elements, motivation, cohesion, morale, resolve, and endurance in war. For example, one of Sun Tzu’s Five Constants of warfare is “The Moral Law,” which “causes the people to be in complete accord with their ruler, so that they will follow him regardless of their lives, undismayed by any danger.”¹⁰ He also makes the important point that will is not always about fighting: “supreme excellence consists in breaking the enemy’s resistance without fighting.”¹¹

Our review of relevant literature in Chapter Two and Appendix A cites dozens of additional writers on this subject, many of whom provide interesting perspectives relevant to national will.¹² Indeed, certain themes arise over and over again relating to national leadership, elites, popular opinion, culture, history, economic pressures, alliances, ideology, engagement, and expectations of victory. Only a small number of the books and articles that we reviewed, however, take a systematic, analytically grounded approach to the topic. Fewer still attempt to analyze the factors that drive national will to fight in a comprehensive way that is relevant to policymaking and military planning. Intrepid readers are faced with a vast trove of interesting but muddled or only tangentially relevant insights, along with a few academically rigorous but more narrowly focused studies.

Our Army sponsors began with a single research question: *How can the United States assess and influence partner and adversary will to fight?* Army leaders and U.S. policymakers, however, likely have several additional questions as they consider diving into this report. For example, What does *national will to fight* really mean? Is it something I should spend my time thinking about and discussing with colleagues? How does it manifest itself—that is, what does it look like in practice? What are the factors

⁷ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1976, Book 1, Chapter 1. Note that, because there are multiple translations of this book available, we simply cite book and chapter rather than the page number from the specific version we used.

⁸ Clausewitz, 1976, Book 1, Chapter 1.

⁹ Clausewitz, 1976, Book 3, Chapter 3.

¹⁰ James Clavell, ed., *The Art of War: Sun Tzu*, New York: Delta Trade Paperbacks, 1983, Chapter 1.

¹¹ Clavell, 1983, Chapter 3.

¹² Appendixes A and B of this report are available on RAND’s website.

that strengthen or weaken it? Which factors are most important? What should I do about it?

The short answer to these questions is, “it’s complicated, but worth exploring.” The rest of this report provides the long answer.

We finish this section with a favorite Clausewitz quote that well describes what we sincerely hope to avoid in this study:

Thus it has come about that our theoretical and critical literature, instead of giving plain, straightforward arguments in which the author at least always knows what he is saying and the reader what he is reading, is crammed with jargon, ending at obscure crossroads where the author loses its readers.¹³

What Is Will to Fight?

Definitions are funny things. For academics and practitioners alike, the classic paradox applies: “can’t live with ’em, can’t live without ’em.”¹⁴ Inevitably, attempting to condense a complicated concept into a few words invites concerns about clarity and semantic debates over the definitions of the words within the definition. Despite these challenges, definitions help focus discussion and provide a stable foundation for rigorous analysis.

While we acknowledge that there are many ways to define *national will to fight*, the definition in Figure 1.1 captures several points that helped frame our research.

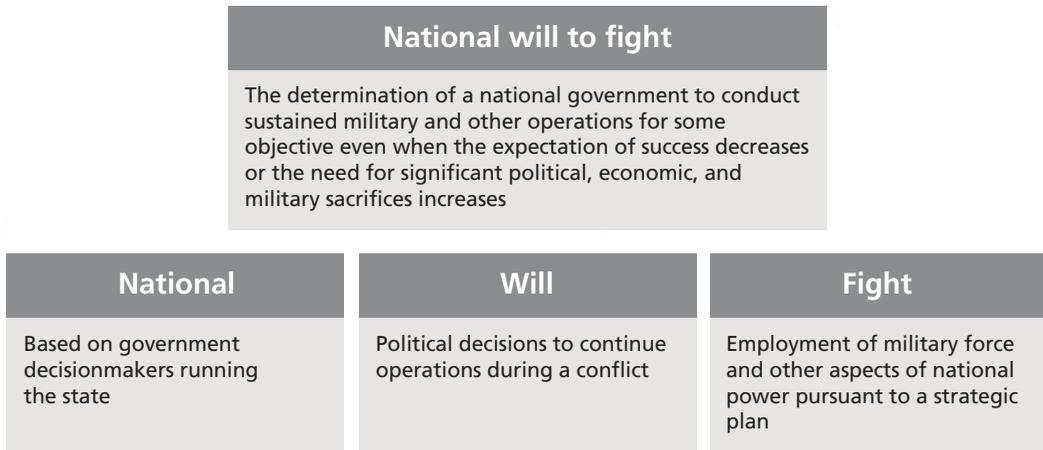
Although the role of societies and their zeitgeists is important, we decided to focus on government decisionmakers (i.e., *national* actors). Decisions to initiate, continue, or end a war are the most important a government makes. We interviewed almost 70 current and former government officials and academic experts on such subjects as wartime decisionmaking, civil-military relations, conflict negotiations, social psychology, economics, and military history to glean their perspectives on why a government sustains wartime operations. As David Segal, professor emeritus and founding director of the University of Maryland’s Center for Research on Military Organization, explained, “a nation’s willingness to fight is driven by its perceived threat, its likelihood of victory, and perceptions of the time it will be at war.”¹⁵ Michael Linick, a retired U.S. Army colonel and director of the RAND Arroyo Center Personnel, Training, and Health

¹³ Clausewitz, 1976, Book 1, Chapter 5.

¹⁴ Indeed, “There’s something irresistible-ish about ’em” (per Rowlf the Dog; see Paul Williams and Kenneth Ascher, “I Hope That Somethin’ Better Comes Along,” from *The Muppet Movie: Original Motion Picture Soundtrack*, Burbank, Calif.: Walt Disney Records, 2013). The saying was first attributed to Desiderius Erasmus, Dutch philosopher, 1466–1536, who ironically also said, “The most disadvantageous peace is better than the most just war” (Joseph Demakis, *The Ultimate Book of Quotations*, Charleston, S.C.: CreateSpace, 2012, p. 415).

¹⁵ David Segal, telephone interview with the authors, August 29, 2017.

Figure 1.1
Definition of National Will to Fight



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Program, told us that “will to fight at the national level is a political and economic discussion. It’s about, ‘can I sustain the fight,’ especially in a democracy. It has some resource, economic, and moral components, but it’s not a personal issue of bravery.”¹⁶

From mature democracies to totalitarian states and everything in between, governments make the decisions about war. Elites, peasants, military leaders, media—even presidents and dictators¹⁷—play greater or lesser roles, and our analysis attempts to illustrate that diversity. Culture and history also matter, but ultimately governments decide. Insurgency groups, militias, and other independent actors can also be central to this topic, but with a few exceptions, we have put them outside the scope of our study. Interstate war seems to be a large enough challenge to tackle, at least initially.

Will, in our definition, consists of the political decisions themselves and focuses on the time after initial decisions to engage in war have been made. Initiating and deterring conflict are also important topics. In fact, understanding how wars begin is crucial to understanding how they continue and end, but, for the purposes of our study, we put considerations prior to the start of a war (“willingness to fight”) outside our scope. Also outside our scope but crucially important are the considerations and debates that must go into determining—and regularly reconfirming—whether a war is just, and whether the war’s political objectives are worth the cost.¹⁸ While the focus

¹⁶ Michael Linick, interview with the authors, Arlington, Va., August 29, 2017.

¹⁷ Louis XIV and later Napoleon Bonaparte famously said, “I am the state,” which sounded impressive (especially in French: *L’état c’est moi*) and was closer to the truth than for most leaders, but it still proved to be an exaggeration.

¹⁸ See, for example, Michael Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars*, New York: Basic Books, 1977.

of this study is on will to fight, the will to *stop* fighting an unjust or unreasonable war can be even more important and more challenging for national leaders.

We use a broad definition of *fight*, consistent with our theme that war involves much more than the use of military force and is best understood in the context of a strategic plan to achieve particular political objectives. In our study, *fight* includes coordinated nonkinetic activities,¹⁹ such as cyberattacks, information warfare, economic pressures, and engagement, with a focus on national use of these approaches, not the individual-level activities involved in actually fighting.

Finally, our definition of national will to fight has two additional important words: expectation and sacrifice. Governments often initiate conflicts with optimistic expectations of victory. This is partly due to the tendency to overestimate one's own capabilities, will, and the rightness of one's cause while underestimating those factors in others, and it is partly due to the need to build support for the decision. Setbacks almost inevitably occur, and a government's reaction provides important indicators of its will. In the same way, a government's reaction to the need for greater political, economic, and military sacrifices to achieve success can indicate will. Determination to persist no matter the strategic circumstances indicates stronger will. Determination slowly deteriorating as probability of success declines or sacrifices increase might be considered conditional will, while rapid deterioration indicates weaker will.

Does Will Really Matter in Practice?

While most readers are hopefully quite impressed that military strategists like Clausewitz and Sun Tzu thought will to fight mattered 200 and more than 2,000 years ago, respectively, some may ask whether this concept has mattered to national leaders in more recent history and today. It did, and it does.

On June 4, 1940, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill (Figure 1.2) described to the House of Commons the evacuation of 338,000 Allied troops from Dunkirk, proclaiming, "A miracle of deliverance, achieved by valor, by perseverance, by perfect discipline, by faultless service, by resource, by skill, by unconquerable fidelity, is manifest to us all."²⁰

Churchill's speech was not one of celebration, however, but an absolute declaration of national will to fight. Although a retreat, Dunkirk illustrated how heroic displays of will at the operational and tactical levels could preserve entire armies and reinforce the will of an entire society. Churchill described how the Royal Navy, reinforced by hundreds of volunteers in their private vessels, "strained every nerve" to rescue British

¹⁹ *Nonkinetic* is military jargon that basically means not physically hitting something or someone.

²⁰ Winston Churchill, "We Shall Fight on the Beaches," speech to British House of Commons, International Churchill Society, June 4, 1940.

Figure 1.2
Winston Churchill



SOURCE: Public domain photo via Imperial War Museums, May 1943.

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and Allied troops. He then noted that “German aeroplanes . . . have turned on several occasions from the attack of one-quarter of their number of the Royal Air Force.” In one example of British Army will, Churchill explained how 4,000 British and French troops spurned an offer to surrender and conducted four days of street fighting in Calais, France, to ensure that the port of Dunkirk was kept open. Only 30 unwounded survivors were evacuated from that force. Churchill’s speech sought to rally his government and his people, noting these immortal words:

We shall defend our island, whatever the cost may be, we shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills; we shall never surrender.²¹

More than 25 years later, on the other side of the earth, a national leader in many ways Churchill’s opposite expressed similar sentiments, though in very different circumstances. Ho Chi Minh was a small, ascetic, aloof, soft-spoken, anti-imperialist revolutionary (Figure 1.3). As president of North Vietnam, Ho was fighting not only his South Vietnamese neighbor but also their far more powerful ally, the United States. U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara measured progress in the Vietnam War largely through casualty data and capability assessments. As early as 1962, McNamara said, “Every quantitative measurement we have shows that we are winning the war.” His senior military commander in the region, General William Westmoreland, took a similar approach, stating in 1967 that North Vietnam had hit a “crossover point” at which it could no longer sustain the level of casualties inflicted by U.S. and South Vietnamese forces. A year before the Tet Offensive, North Vietnam’s largest military offensive of the war, U.S. leaders had essentially assessed that North Vietnamese will to fight was close to breaking.²²

Throughout the war, however, Ho had a very different perspective about measuring will, saying, “You can kill ten of my men for every one I kill of yours, but even at those odds, you will lose and I will win.”²³ Ho’s Minister of Defense, General Võ Nguyên Giáp, shared this perspective:

Every minute, hundreds of thousands of people die on this earth. The life or death of a hundred, a thousand, tens of thousands of human beings, even our compatriots, means little. . . . Westmoreland was wrong to count on his superior firepower to grind us down.²⁴

²¹ Churchill, 1940.

²² See Ben Connable, *Embracing the Fog of War: Assessment and Metrics in Counterinsurgency*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, MG-1086-DOD, 2012, pp. 140, 144.

²³ Stanley Karnow, “Ho Chi Minh: He Married Nationalism to Communism and Perfected the Deadly Art of Guerrilla Warfare,” *Time*, April 13, 1998.

²⁴ Connable, 2012, p. 143.

Figure 1.3
Ho Chi Minh



SOURCE: Public domain photo via Wikimedia Commons.

RAND RR2477-1.3

U.S. Experience with National Will to Fight

National leaders in the United States have a mixed record acknowledging the importance of will to fight as a component of war. Russell Weigley's book, *The American Way of War: A History of U.S. Military Strategy and Policy*, accurately captures the preference of many U.S. officials to focus on strategies of attrition—that is, killing enemy personnel and destroying their equipment.²⁵ Achieving conventional military objectives—destroying the adversary's military forces and occupying its capital—is sometimes then conflated with achieving political objectives, thus limiting the attention given to the much wider array of factors that influence the will to fight of both adversaries and partners. In other words, attrition becomes *the* factor instead of *a* factor in weakening an adversary's will to fight and achieving one's objectives. Over time, this perspective evolved to emphasize the role of technology, perhaps most famously illustrated by then-U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld's "shock and awe" strategy to overwhelm Iraqi forces in the 2003 Gulf War and thereby break their will to fight.²⁶

Superior conventional force and revolutionary technologies obviously play important roles in determining the outcomes of battles, but they are insufficient for understanding and influencing the full range of government decisions that determine the outcomes of a war. U.S. government documents like the National Security Strategy, National Defense Strategy, National Military Strategy, and Quadrennial Defense Review, at best, make indirect references to will to fight. While acknowledging the need to integrate diplomatic, informational, military, and economic aspects of national power generally, these documents fail to address it in the context of understanding and influencing U.S., partner, and adversary will to fight. They fail to address the need to understand what motivates governments, what sustains their will during conflict, and how governments may try to sap the will to fight of others.

In the late 2000s, some U.S. defense officials and military leaders began using the Integrated Gaming System to move beyond the military's traditional focus on attrition in modeling and war-gaming the outcomes of conflicts.²⁷ The system included two components especially relevant to will to fight. The first was the Entropy-Based Warfare Model, based on the idea that warfare can be directed against the cohesion of units or states, focusing on a combination of friction, disruption, and lethality. The model

²⁵ Russell Frank Weigley, *The American Way of War: A History of U.S. Military Strategy and Policy*, Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1977.

²⁶ Harlan Ullman and James Wade, Jr., *Shock and Awe: Achieving Rapid Dominance*, Washington, D.C.: National Defense University, 1996. See also Thomas G. Mahnken, *Technology and the American Way of War Since 1945*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2010. America's lopsided victory in the 1991 Gulf War, followed by its initial victories in 2003, reinforced this perspective.

²⁷ Alok Chaturvedi, Michael Cibulskis, Yee Ling Tham, Brian Armstrong, Daniel Snyder, Paul Everson, and Jason Shreve, "Integrating Planning & Experimentation," ResearchGate, 2014; and U.S. defense official, interview with the authors, October 2017.

analyzed the effects of information warfare and the breaking down of connectivity among military units. One article noted that

[U.S. Department of Defense (DoD)] analytic models run prior to the [1990–1991] Persian Gulf War almost universally predicted an attrition-oriented outcome involving heavy coalition casualties that never materialized. An alternative model based on the entropy metric which accounts for various factors affecting cohesion would have more accurately predicted the outcome.²⁸

The second component was the Political Will Model, which analyzed relationships among leaders and populations and measured support for specific policies. This model highlighted how leaders could be influenced by both military and nonmilitary means to break adversary will and thus end a conflict faster. Both models were quite complex, however, and never had their intended impact, particularly after the 2011 dissolution of the military’s “transformation laboratory,” which was part of U.S. Joint Forces Command.²⁹

As shown in Figure 1.4, the 2015 National Military Strategy creates challenges for those who would argue that state conflict involves much more than large-scale military force and technology. The document’s “continuum of conflict” concept separates out state conflict as higher consequence, lower probability, and focused on traditional military capabilities, and thus amenable to an attrition-based strategy. Only in the less-consequential hybrid and non-state conflicts do we see elements of will emerging in this strategic document, highlighting such complications as ambiguity, paralysis, populations, and propaganda.

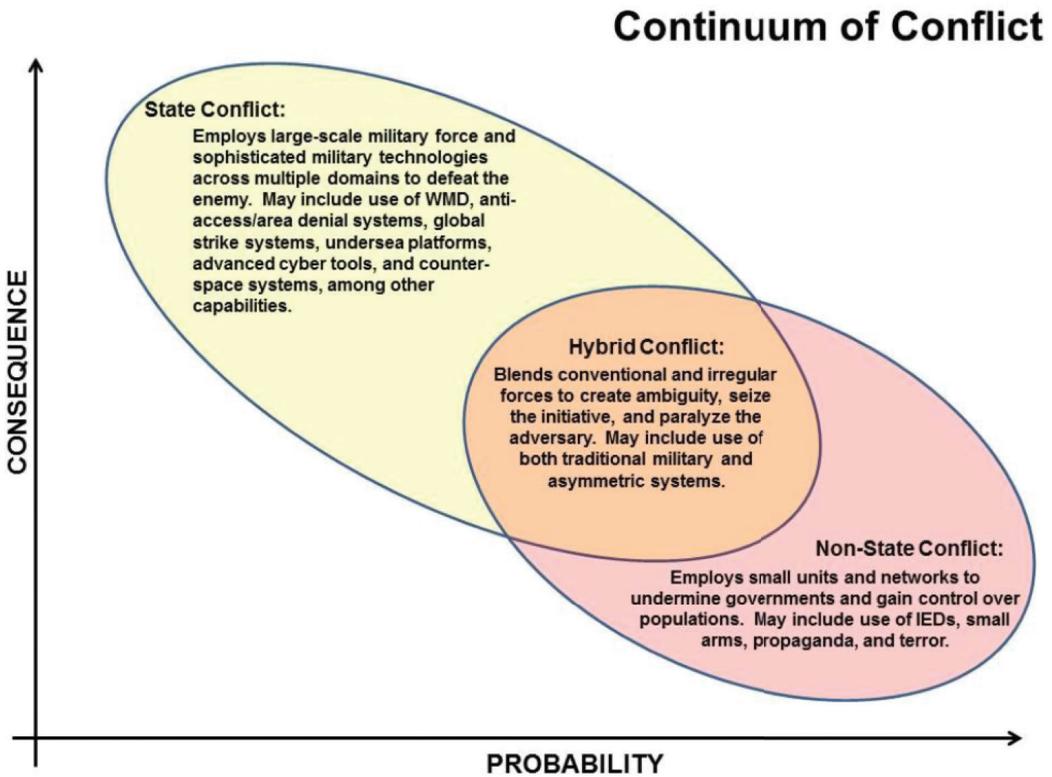
Of course, it is not the intent of these strategy documents to argue that there are clear lines dividing three distinct types of conflict—hence the use of a Venn diagram. But the failure to describe how these different aspects of conflict relate to the nature of war broadly and will to fight in particular weakens the value of this and the other strategies as they pertain to will to fight and misses an opportunity to enrich national dialogues on international peace and security. Simply put, the failure to understand and apply concepts of national will to fight represents a significant vulnerability for U.S. strategy development.

This vulnerability was perhaps most recently highlighted in 2015 when then-U.S. Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter lamented the collapse of the Iraqi military against Islamic State fighters, saying, “What apparently happened was that the Iraqi

²⁸ Mark Herman, “Entropy-Based Warfare: Modeling the Revolution in Military Affairs,” *Joint Forces Quarterly*, Autumn/Winter 1998–1999, p. 86.

²⁹ U.S. defense official, interview with the authors, October 2017.

Figure 1.4
2015 National Military Strategy Continuum of Conflict Concept



SOURCE: Joint Chiefs of Staff, *The National Military Strategy of the United States of America: The United States Military's Contribution to National Security*, Washington, D.C., June 2015, p. 4.

NOTE: IED = improvised explosive device; WMD = weapon of mass destruction.

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forces just showed no will to fight. . . . They were not outnumbered, but in fact, they vastly outnumbered the opposing force. And yet they failed to fight.”³⁰

Our companion report, *Will to Fight: Analyzing, Modeling, and Simulating the Will to Fight of Military Units*, discusses Army doctrine in detail, tracking how emphasis on will to fight has risen and fallen in waves since the start of World War (WW) II. While the concept of will to fight virtually disappeared from doctrine in the 1970s and again in the 2000s, it reappeared in the 2016 Army Doctrine Reference Publication 3-0. For example, Chapter One discusses “war as a human endeavor,” while Chapter Two describes the goal of collapsing “the enemy’s capabilities or will to fight.”³¹

³⁰ Greg Jaffe and Loveday Morris, “Defense Secretary Carter: Iraqis Lack ‘Will to Fight’ to Defeat Islamic State,” *Washington Post*, May 24, 2015.

³¹ Headquarters, Department of the Army, *Unified Land Operations*, Army Doctrine Reference Publication 3-0, Washington, D.C., November 11, 2016.

The Army's October 2017 Field Manual 3-0 notes that, among other things, brigade combat teams "break the enemy's will to fight," but the manual does not describe what that means.³² Few references focus on the national level. Marine Corps doctrine talks about "this dynamic interplay between opposing human wills" but, as with Army doctrine, provides little more than what one Army strategist called "a head nod to the classic works of military literature."³³

Also in 2016, the Joint Chiefs of Staff released the *Joint Concept for Human Aspects of Military Operations (JC-HAMO)*. In it, the vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff says that the JC-HAMO "focuses the future Joint Force on a critical and enduring challenge in warfare—the need to understand relevant actors' motivations and the underpinnings of their *will*. . . . The JC-HAMO recognizes the centrality of human will in war."³⁴ The document includes a discussion of "required capabilities to influence the will and decisions of relevant actors."³⁵ Those required capabilities are not yet understood and thus a long way from being met, but the first step—recognizing that there is a need—has been taken.

Recognizing How Will to Fight Matters

Clearly, there is a growing, but still insufficient, recognition of the importance of will to fight as a critical component of ending wars and achieving national objectives. Army leaders are beginning to see the value in understanding national will to fight in three ways.

First, the concept can improve planning. The Army will need to be able to assess whether an adversary might keep fighting beyond all U.S. planning expectations. Army leaders need to analyze the will of adversary governments to relentlessly continue fighting a war in pursuit of an objective and to mobilize popular support and suppress dissent to achieve it. In the RAND report *Why the Vietnamese Will Keep Fighting*, Brian Jenkins calls tenacity the most powerful weapon of the North Vietnamese. This tenacity derived from religious and political philosophy, belief in the legitimacy of national leaders, and historical expectations of struggle, all of which enabled the North

³² Headquarters, Department of the Army, *Operations*, Field Manual 3-0, Washington, D.C., October 2017, p. 2-14.

³³ U.S. Marine Corps, *Warfighting*, Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication 1, Washington, D.C., June 20, 1997a, p. 4; U.S. Marine Corps, *Strategy*, Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication 1-1, Washington, D.C., November 12, 1997b; and U.S. Army officer, interview with the authors, October 2017.

³⁴ Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Concept for Human Aspects of Military Operations (JC-HAMO)*, Washington, D.C., October 19, 2016, p. i, emphasis in original.

³⁵ Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2016, p. 34.

Vietnamese to sustain heavy losses and keep fighting.³⁶ A long history of nationalism also drove this tenacity. As former Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara said, "We underestimated the power of nationalism to motivate a people to fight and die for their beliefs and values."³⁷ Better understanding of national will to fight can not only help shape baseline expectations but also support the planning of measures to weaken adversary will to fight. This might include considering will to fight as a center of gravity and including efforts aimed explicitly at weakening adversary will in plans, with an eye toward concluding conflicts as expediently as possible.

Second, the concept can improve assessments of partner reliability. Across presidential administrations and particularly since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the U.S. national security strategy is highly reliant on partner nations to pursue common national security goals to address a diverse range of threats, including those in Eastern Europe, on the Korean Peninsula, and in counterterrorism missions around the world. The Army should play a leadership role in trying to understand how to incorporate will to fight considerations into partner assessments, security cooperation activities, and military planning. It should be playing a leadership role in discussing will to fight with partners for scenarios in which deterrence fails. Included in these discussions, of course, would be effective civil-military relations, which not only strengthen resolve but also help determine when to stop fighting (i.e., when costs outweigh benefits).

Third, the concept can help leaders understand broader, geopolitical challenges. The Army should play a central peacetime role analyzing will to fight considerations as they apply to other potential conflicts around the world, because Army soldiers may find themselves facing distinct adversaries with varied motivations. Simply put, understanding will to fight provides soldiers and others with insights that improve their ability to engage foreign counterparts. Consider Pakistan and its determination to create a credible nuclear deterrent. Pakistan continues to suffer high rates of poverty and inadequate infrastructure but consistently funds nuclear weapons despite the high diplomatic and economic costs. Former Pakistani leader Zulfikar Ali Bhutto allegedly articulated this national will to fight paradox when he discussed funding the atom bomb: "We will make an atomic bomb even if we have to eat grass."³⁸ This paradox persists because Pakistan, primarily its military, has convinced a large portion of its population that India is an existential threat. While some disagree with these priorities, Pakistan's media, Pakistan's education system, and broad popular support for the military make

³⁶ Brian Michael Jenkins, *Why the Vietnamese Will Keep Fighting*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, P-4395-1, 1972.

³⁷ Robert McNamara and Brian VanDeMark, *In Retrospect: The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam*, New York: Times Books, 1995.

³⁸ Feroz Khan, *Eating Grass: The Making of the Pakistani Bomb*, Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2012, p. 87.

pursuing a different path difficult. Nevertheless, U.S. leaders should explore whether there are opportunities to apply will to fight concepts to U.S. engagements with foreign governments in an effort to address cold war–style tensions like these overseas.

Despite this growing recognition that understanding will to fight is important in theory, it is challenging to analyze in practice. In the next section, we discuss the limitations of such efforts and how those limitations influenced our research approach.

Can National Will Be Analyzed?

As we discuss in Chapter Two, there is a tremendous amount of literature that is relevant to will to fight but precious little that analyzes the concept comprehensively or in depth. Given that both theorists and practitioners recognize national will to fight as a critical aspect—perhaps *the* critical aspect—of war, why has there been so little rigorous analysis of it? The answer surely lies in the challenges that such analysis poses. While it is difficult but at least possible to compare military capabilities and the ability to inflict casualties, how does one go beyond passionate exhortations to focus on human beings or moral elements? B. H. Liddell Hart summed up the problem nicely: “In war the chief incalculable is the human will.”³⁹

If will is incalculable, are we on a fool’s errand? Are we trying to do the impossible? If the objective were to actually calculate will and predict war outcomes, then yes. While there are certainly important opportunities to apply quantitative modeling and simulation methods to improve analysis of will, even the best researchers cannot create any kind of perfect predictive models. Instead, our study provides a groundbreaking, systematic approach to assessing and influencing will to fight. The result should improve the ability of Army and other leaders to incorporate will, however imprecisely, into future political-military planning, war-gaming, intelligence assessments, security cooperation activities, and other efforts to understand and shape the security environment in various regions around the world. So, that’s pretty ambitious, too.

National will to fight can be analyzed, but there are important limits, both generally and specific to this project. First, people have agency—the capacity to make choices. Whereas machines can be tested in ways that allow for predictions about performance, people and the groups they form are far less predictable. For our study, as with most U.S. studies, the majority of our researchers and sources had a Western (mostly U.S.) perspective, which is also true for many of our readers. This creates additional limitations to understanding, much less influencing, how governments in other parts of the world will act, particularly in the drama of wartime. Indeed, one of the experts we interviewed for this study, a professor based in London, pointed to Western analysts’ tendency to apply their own brand of rational thinking about when to

³⁹ B. H. Liddell Hart, *Strategy*, New York: New American Library, 1974. p. 323.

fight and when to stop fighting to non-Western adversaries, which ignores important components of non-Western adversary motivations.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, employing non-Western cases, such as the India-Pakistan and Iran-Iraq wars, have provided guidance on what is distinct, and what is constant, about will to fight in different countries and conflicts over time.

Second, it seems unlikely that there are only two or three factors that consistently predominate in understanding a nation's will to fight. The diversity inherent in countries and governments over time means that there are likely many relevant factors and that they will matter more or less in different scenarios. Thus, for this study, we sacrificed some level of simplicity for the sake of utility, with the understanding that the tools we provide in this report will require some tailoring from those who use them.

On the other hand, we also sacrificed some comprehensiveness to make our exploratory model more manageable. We combined some factors that overlapped with each other and dropped some factors that seemed less important or were ambiguous. These limitations are explained in more detail in Chapter Two and the online Appendix B.

Finally, our research team sacrificed some academic depth for the sake of breadth. To analyze this issue from multiple perspectives, we took a cross-disciplinary approach, drawing from the fields of political science, sociology, psychology, and history. This allowed us to develop a more comprehensive toolkit for policymakers to use than any single analytic approach could have provided. We hope that, rather than acting as a stand-alone guide, this report can serve as an introduction to an ongoing dialogue among a growing community of interest and an initial look at key factors influencing will, some of which may warrant additional and detailed treatment in future work.

Using Mixed Methods Is the Best Approach to Understanding Will

In the spirit of tackling highly complex topics, we used a mixed-method approach, including an extensive literature review, interviews with experts, case studies, and application of relevant modeling and war-gaming. The following research design questions drove the analysis for both this project and our companion study on tactical-operational will to fight:

- How do we identify the variables that affect will to fight, organize them, and translate them into the major questions the Army needs answered?
- Which variables seem most useful for our project to analyze?
- Which case studies will help us explore our model?

⁴⁰ British professor and author, interview with the authors, September 2017.

- How do we translate the results of our analysis into concrete actions for Army leaders?
- How do we ensure that national and tactical-operational analysis stay closely linked?

For our combined national and tactical-operational will to fight projects, we reviewed more than 100 books, articles, and reports for our literature review and interviewed more than 70 academics and government officials. We did this over two phases: an initial phase to identify a wide range of variables relevant to will, followed by a more extensive effort to understand how these variables relate to each other and prioritize where we would focus our analysis. We leveraged our cross-disciplinary team of RAND researchers and our interviewees to ensure that the literature we used was high quality and sufficiently wide-ranging.

In the initial phase, we focused on interviewing a handful of scholars with expertise in such areas as government decisionmaking in conflict, war termination, and national motivations during war. We interviewed current and former U.S. and United Kingdom government officials and military officers with wartime experience in the field and at national headquarters. We also read numerous academic works, which we discuss in Chapter Two and Appendix A, that most directly tackle this issue of will to fight.

In the second phase, we cast a wider net to ensure that we had identified a sufficiently broad set of variables and to help us organize and analyze our variables. Using a coding scheme described in Appendix A, we analyzed the prevalence with which each variable was considered in the academic works and its relevance to will to fight. We interviewed a range of experts specifically about which variables they believed were most relevant in various historical and contemporary conflict scenarios. We explored a range of existing models and computer simulations, as well as U.S. government and commercial war games that address different aspects of will, such as DoD's Integrated Gaming System and Joint Warfare System.

For the national will to fight project, we organized the variables relevant to government decisionmaking and created an analytic framework to help make sense of them. We selected these variables based on the first phase of our literature review and discussions with experts. After our second-phase literature review and more structured interviews, we chose the variables we thought were most important for our effort and inserted them into our framework, thus creating an exploratory model. A deeper explanation of the relationships between the variables in our model is provided in Chapter Two. We use the exploratory model as a method for drawing insights about how these independent variables might affect will and how they might relate to each other.⁴¹ We then developed a handful of hypotheses about how these independent variables might affect will. To explore these hypotheses, we wrote a question for each of these

⁴¹ In Chapter Two, we discuss frameworks and models in more detail.

variables, which could be answered through case study analysis, interviews, or other methods.⁴² We used 15 case studies to explore these questions and illustrate how the independent variables in our model have manifested themselves over the past century. We answered these questions in a uniform coding scheme and wrote narratives about each case. The case study selection and analysis process is described in detail in Chapter Three and Appendix B.

Throughout this report, national will to fight is our dependent variable—that is, the thing that changes depending on the characteristics of the independent variables. But how is that measured? Although there is no way to scientifically measure will to fight, we identified three ways that will manifests itself and wrote a question for each, which we discuss in Chapter Two. The answers to these questions could serve as indicators of how will is strengthening or weakening.

Finally, it is very important to note that our research is designed to help leaders think about this concept of will to fight, not to provide proof of causality for each variable in our model. This study integrates a great deal of existing work, but it also breaks new ground in developing national will to fight as both a scholarly and practical concept. While our analysis is deeply sourced, many of the inferences and arguments are our own. In addition, while our analysis is evidence-based and well-cited in several sections of the report and in the online appendixes, we did not attempt to cite specific evidence for every assertion about the variables that we explore and their relationships. Rather, we collected evidence from numerous sources about what might influence will to fight, both theoretically and across historical cases, and then tried to synthesize this research in a way that our U.S. Army sponsor and other stakeholders would find most useful. In an effort to improve the readability of the main report, we have kept many of the details of our analysis in two online appendixes.⁴³

Structure of the Report

In Chapter Two, we discuss how to analyze this challenging question of national will to fight: Why do governments persevere in war? Terminology and methods are described in more detail, explaining how we move from (1) a disorganized “laundry list” of variables discovered through our literature review and interviews to (2) an analytic framework to organize our thinking to (3) an exploratory model to understand what variables might matter most. We then present our exploratory model, which identifies

⁴² Because of the complexity of this topic, we do not scientifically test our hypotheses but rather use them to gather insights in a structured way. Quantitative methods could yield additional insights, although they might also risk creating misleading outputs through false precision.

⁴³ For a discussion of the problems of social science and the challenge of building theory and generalization, see Nancy Cartwright, *Evidence-Based Policy: A Practical Guide to Doing It Better*, Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2012.

and organizes the independent variables that we think influence will to fight. To help understand the variables in the model better, we discuss how they may influence will to fight and how they relate to one another. We discuss the measures one can use to analyze how will to fight manifests itself. Then, as a way to tee up Chapter Three, we present hypotheses about how these independent variables might affect our dependent variable, national will to fight. Rather than having the reader work through all the evidence first and then present the model as the “big reveal” at the end of the report, we chose to use Chapter Two as a bottom-line-up-front (or almost up-front) and then provide analytic details in Chapters Three through Five and the appendixes.

In Chapter Three, we explain how our case studies are relevant to our exploratory model and hypotheses about national will. Unlike many case studies, which provide rich details about particular events in history, we organize the chapter around our independent variables. In Chapters Four and Five, we provide more-extensive narratives on Korea and Russia, respectively, in order to show how historical analysis can be carried forward to inform debates about contemporary international security threats and opportunities.

In the final chapter, we present findings from our research and recommendations for Army leaders. The findings do not provide definitive answers to the questions raised throughout the report, but they serve as a summary of the key takeaways from the various strands of our research to date. Through our recommendations, we explain how to make use of our exploratory model and the other analytic tools discussed in the report. The recommendations provide concrete steps that Army leaders can take to help improve U.S. government understanding of contemporary warfare; assess the reliability and resolve of potential partners and adversaries in future conflicts; and, most importantly, suggest means to influence that resolve in ways that can bring conflict to an end favorable to the United States. By doing so, we suggest how the United States can avoid or limit strategic surprises and shape the international security environment before, during, and after conflicts. While our analysis and recommendations are tailored for our sponsor, the U.S. Army, they should also be of interest to officials across the U.S. government, as well as anyone with an interest in this challenging and fascinating topic.

For those hardy souls interested in learning more about the vast range of literature relevant to this topic and how we plumbed its murky depths, Appendix A describes our literature review, including our literature coding scheme and variables that were not explicitly called out in our model. Appendix B describes our case study coding scheme and examples of our variables as illustrated by the coding exercise. The appendixes are available online at www.rand.org/t/RR2477.

Why Do Governments Persevere in War?

In this chapter, we discuss how to analyze why governments persevere in war. We first describe terminology and methods and then present our exploratory model, which identifies our independent variables. We also present hypotheses about how these independent variables might affect national will to fight.

A Word About Our Literature Review

The concept of national will to fight is complex and often addressed indirectly as part of research on war termination, governance during conflict, civil-military relations, and other topics. Thus, we cast a wide net in our literature review, examining sources across a range of disciplines, eras, and methodological approaches. The most useful resources were concentrated in such disciplines as sociology, history, political psychology, social movements, and military studies, with a few exceptions. Within the literature (as we discuss in Appendix A), case studies—comparative and otherwise—were the most commonly employed analytical method, while surveys and field research represented the next most common form of research.

Based on our initial survey of the literature and brainstorming discussions with experts, our team developed a list of variables across several dimensions, including political, military, economic, social, and others, to describe national will to fight as a dynamic process continually influenced by external and internal forces. This list contained a range of variables, from the possible effect that economic sanctions have on a nation's will to fight to the military characteristics of a country, which might create a natural inclination or opposition toward military involvement.

We pared this list down and isolated 42 variables for further examination. These are described in Appendix A, which also includes an explanation of our coding scheme, a review of the most relevant works of literature, and an in-depth review of the academic literature as seen through the variables from our will to fight model.

We further narrowed our focus from 42 to 15 variables that we believed were particularly relevant and useful to Army leaders and other stakeholders. Appendix A provides detailed treatment of how those variables are discussed in the literature, as

well as additional discussion of variables that we initially considered but either left out of the model or incorporated in one of the other variables.

A Word About Frameworks and Models

Meshing academic perspectives with policymaker needs naturally creates tension in scientific research. Fundamentally, these tensions arise from differences between basic and applied research; in the former, researchers carefully select questions for which answers can be found and, in the latter, researchers must take questions as they are given.¹ In our examination of will to fight, the challenges of achieving analytic rigor and translating it into useful findings were exacerbated by the many seemingly disparate variables at play.

The model developed in this research is not a final statement about national will to fight that provides precise findings about a state's willingness to endure hardship and casualties when challenged by rivals. Instead, the model is better understood as a reasoning tool to make the abstract and complex phenomenon of national will to fight conceptually accessible. This exploratory model serves two primary roles: an organizer of information and thoughts that provide structure to assessments and a tool that enables researchers and practitioners to have a meaningful dialogue.²

This approach to modeling begins by developing a framework that specifies factors, contexts, and mechanisms identified through literature reviews, expert consultations, and theoretical and historical assessments of how nations develop, sustain, and lose their will to fight. Frameworks provide an ontology that specifies the constituent elements of a theory (in this case, of national will), a scheme for organizing information, and language for exchanging information and ideas. Thus, the model began with a speculative framework employed in the process of building a theory of national will to fight rather than expressing a theory that had already been formed.

Exploratory models help identify outcomes that the model should explain, such as the defeat of great powers by militarily weaker states or the decision of national leaders to sacrifice their armed forces in a foreign land rather than risk bringing them home defeated. The resulting model was developed by iterating between examples of how national will to fight changed over the duration of conflict and theories about the relationship between elements of the framework, adding structure and focusing attention on relationships that were empirically identified while discounting or dismissing those that could not be seen in the historical record.

¹ Herbert A. Simon, "The Business School: A Problem in Organizational Design," *Journal of Management Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 1, February 1967, pp. 4–5.

² Exploratory models may be formally constructed as equations or computer simulations, but they may also be informal models, codified as a set of statements and verbal descriptions that nevertheless encourage transparent and logical manipulation in order to gain qualitative insights into complex systems.

From Framework to Exploratory Model

As we discussed earlier, our literature review initially provided us with 42 variables that might help us understand what drives will and how, including government cohesion, elite cohesion, popular support, economic pressures, and geography, among others. While most academic studies would zero in on a handful of variables and perhaps attempt to create a predictive model, our study was aimed at helping U.S. decision-makers think about national will to fight across a wide range of variables.

Developing the Framework

We decided to organize our 42 variables into three categories:

- *Political* variables address characteristics of the government and the government's changing perceptions, relationships, assessments, and ideological motivations during a conflict.
- *Economic* variables address characteristics of the country's economy and the changing influences on the economy (pressures and assistance) during a conflict.
- *Military* variables address characteristics of the military and the changing military factors that influence government decisionmaking during a conflict.³

While most of these variables are *factors* that shape a government's national will to fight decisions, other variables represent *contexts* within which particular factors might be more or less important. Finally, some of our variables represent *mechanisms* that influence will to fight:

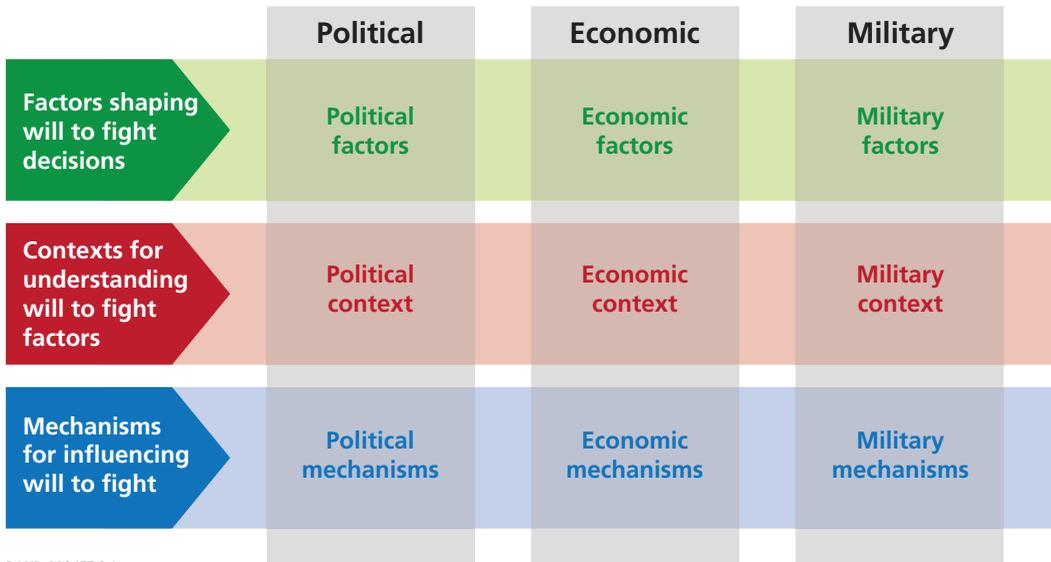
- *Factors* shape a country's will to fight; in other words, they are the considerations that drive government decisions.
- *Contexts* represent the background conditions in a country within which particular factors are likely to be more or less relevant. Contexts do not change quickly and can rarely be influenced in the short or medium term.
- *Mechanisms* are used by governments to strengthen or weaken a country's will to fight.

Whereas factors and contexts should help us design tools for Army leaders to better understand will to fight, mechanisms should help Army leaders identify ways to influence will to fight. Using these considerations, we developed the framework in Figure 2.1.

The logic chain in Figure 2.2 helps describe how these categories of variables relate to one another.

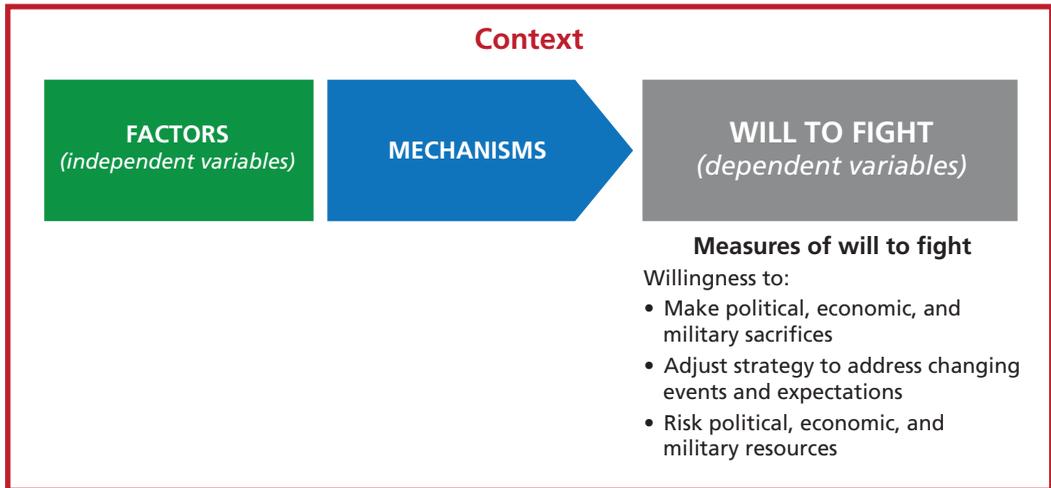
³ The political sociologist Michael Mann identified four sources of social power: political, economic, military, and ideological. As we discuss later, we incorporated ideological considerations into our political category. See Michael Mann, *The Sources of Social Power*, Vol. 2: *The Rise of Classes and Nation-States, 1760–1914*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1993.

Figure 2.1
National Will to Fight Framework



RAND RR2477-2.1

Figure 2.2
Logic Chain Behind the National Will to Fight Framework



RAND RR2477-2.2

As we discussed earlier, when we view this framework analytically, we can consider national will to fight as the *dependent variable*, or the thing that changes depending on what else is happening. Any analysis of those changes requires measuring those changes, which leads to the three questions we hinted at in Chapter One: Does the government show a relatively greater willingness to

1. make political, economic, and military sacrifices?
2. adjust its strategy to address changing events and expectations of costs and success?
3. take risks?

The factors in our framework are the *independent variables*, or the things that influence will. The context is the background within which these factors have their effect. And the mechanisms are the vehicles by which the independent variables have an effect.

Developing the Exploratory Model

As we discuss in Chapter Three, we explore these variables through 15 brief historical case studies as seen through a will to fight lens. In each case, we answered a series of questions derived from each of the variables. We answered the questions using a series of codes as a type of shorthand to allow us to aggregate our answers and make comparisons across cases. We answered each question three times: at the start of the conflict, at a turning point in the conflict (i.e., a point at which expectations of victory changed), and at the end of the conflict. We then wrote short narrative descriptions of the variables that were particularly relevant and interesting in each case.

Rather than try to prove that any particular answer is correct, we intend to illustrate how policymakers and other stakeholders might use the model as a tool to support decisionmaking. The questions can spur a structured discussion that could produce what in military circles might be called “best military judgment.” In fact, the dialogue generated by the questions is more important than any particular answer.

Table 2.1 organizes our 15 national will to fight independent variables into our exploratory model, and Table 2.2 provides our definitions for these terms.

Linking Factors, Contexts, and Mechanisms

Given the breadth of variables in our model, we believe that it is important to analyze the relationships among each of these factors, contexts, and mechanisms and how they relate to national will to fight. For example, stakes can influence popular support, government type can influence cohesion, engagement can influence allied support, indoctrination can influence civil-military relations, and national identity can influence almost all our factors. It is impossible to define exactly how each of the variables interact with each other, yet it is crucial to analyze these interactions, however imperfectly, when trying to understand national will to fight.

Table 2.1
Simplified National Will to Fight Exploratory Model

	Political	Economic	Military
Factors shaping will to fight policy decisions	Stakes Cohesion Civil-military relations Popular support Allies	Leverage	Capabilities
Contexts for understanding factors	Government type National identity	Resilience	Conflict duration
Mechanisms for influencing national will	Engagement Indoctrination and messaging	Pressures	Casualties

Table 2.2
Definitions of Terms in the National Will to Fight Exploratory Model

	Political	Economic	Military
Factors shape a government's decision to fight	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stakes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Existential: Strategic defeat would end society as the population knows it (e.g., long-term occupation, destruction of governance system) or likely result in ruin for elites. ○ Vital: Strategic defeat would prevent the government from achieving grand strategic goals. ○ Important: Strategic defeat would inhibit the government's progress toward economic or security goals. • Cohesion: A majority of government officials and elites agree on the need to begin or sustain fighting. • Civil-military relations: Civilian and military leaders have a constructive relationship that maximizes military effectiveness and helps leaders appropriately balance the costs, benefits, and risks of conflict. • Popular support: The majority of the population supports the conflict or at least does not actively oppose it; opposition is muted or perceived as radical by the majority of the population. • Allies: The government has relatively strong allies that provide diplomatic, monetary, military, or other support. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leverage: Government has means to impose significant economic pain on adversaries and rewards on allies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capabilities^a: Government is focused on using military forces and equipment to maximize chances of victory.

Table 2.2—Continued

	Political	Economic	Military
<p>Contexts are the background conditions in a country within which certain factors and mechanisms are likely to be relevant</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government type <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Totalitarian: The government wields absolute control of all aspects of society; uses ideology to penetrate deeply into society and mobilize the population; and extensively uses coercion, terror, and repression. ○ Autocratic: The government’s leader—or a small group of political elites—monopolizes power and prohibits any political opposition; society has some liberty as long as people do not contest the government’s political power; the government selectively uses coercion, terror, and repression. ○ Democratic: The government wields power through rule of law, institutions, and will of the population. • National identity: The government, military, and society have ethnic, ideological, nationalistic, or religious characteristics that could strengthen will to fight.^b 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resilience: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Dependent: The government relies on external economic ties to sustain citizens. ○ Resilient: The government and society may benefit from external economic ties but can sustain long periods of isolation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conflict duration: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Short: < 1 year ○ Medium: 1–5 years ○ Long: > 5 years <p>Long conflicts can lead to war weariness or other developments that affect certain variables over time.</p>
<p>Mechanisms are used by governments to strengthen or weaken a country’s will to fight</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engagement: The government leverages diplomatic and defense relationships with foreign counterparts to influence will to fight. • Indoctrination and messaging: Indoctrination is the government’s use or misuse of information to strengthen will among elites, members of the military, and the population; messaging is the government’s use or misuse of information to influence partner and adversary will. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pressures: The government uses sanctions or other economic pressures to influence partner or adversary will to fight. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Casualties^a: The military inflicts deaths and injuries on the adversary’s military.

^a Superior capabilities and infliction of casualties should predict the victor if will is evenly matched.

^b National identity was not part of our original coding scheme, but these identities were a salient dimension for many of the case narratives. Based on this salience, we added national identity as a contextual variable after completing our exploratory coding.

Although perceptions are not a variable in our model, they clearly play an important underlying role in how our variables relate to each other and then translate into will to fight, particularly ones like stakes, economic leverage, national identity, engagement, and indoctrination and messaging.⁴ When the government, the people, and

⁴ Indeed, many government efforts to influence popular support are, in essence, efforts to shape perceptions, as many of our subsequent discussions reveal.

the military believe the stakes are existential, for example, will to fight is stronger, even if outside observers might see the stakes differently. Expectation of victory was a common theme in our literature, and although we did not include it as one of our final 15 variables, it is part of the causal logic connecting will to fight with such variables as government and elite cohesion, civil-military relations, popular support, and allied strength and support. For example, if government leaders work effectively with military leaders, mutual confidence and trust grows, which can improve expectations of victory. Higher expectation of victory in turn strengthens will to fight.

There is also clearly a relationship between national will to fight and tactical-operational will to fight. For example, when military commanders and their troops see resolve and unity in their political leaders and support from the population, their confidence and dedication to the mission grows, and when units fight with resolve, that confidence and dedication can strengthen the resolve of their political leaders and society. Finally, because the variables in our model are not an exhaustive representation of war's material and nonmaterial characteristics, one must assume that our 15 variables will combine with other variables to influence national will to fight in ways that are difficult to predict but important to analyze.

Based on the research described in detail in Chapters Three through Five and Appendixes A and B, Table 2.3 explores how each variable relates to national will to fight and to other variables.⁵ While we focus on decisions to continue fighting, these variables are also highly relevant to decisions to initiate fighting.

As Tables 2.2 and 2.3 demonstrate, each variable in our model is distinct and relates to will to fight in a specific way. Table 2.3 also provides brief examples of how the variables may relate to one another, and there are additional examples later in this section, all based on our research. We also illustrate many of these linkages through our case study analysis in Chapter Three and Appendix B.

As we discuss throughout the rest of the report, both the academic literature and our case studies illustrate many ways that these variables may relate to each other; ultimately, however, the arguments about how they relate specifically within the context of this model are our own. The examples that follow are our hypotheses, many of which are explored in Chapters Three, Four, and Five, but because rigorous empirical research on will to fight is limited, the evidence base for our assertions in this report is

⁵ For a review of relevant sociology literature that helped us think through the connections listed in this table, see Meyer Kestnbaum, "The Sociology of War and the Military," *Annual Review of Sociology*, Vol. 35, 2009. Relevant political science literature included Philip Bobbitt, *The Shield of Achilles: War, Peace, and the Course of History*, New York: Alfred Knopf, 2002; George W. Downs and David M. Rocke, "Conflict, Agency, and Gambling for Resurrection: The Principal-Agent Problem Goes to War," *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 38, No. 2, May 1994; James D. Fearon, "Rationalist Explanations for War," *International Organization*, Vol. 49, No. 3, July 1995; Jenkins, 1972; and Alex Weisiger and Keren Yarhi-Milo, "Revisiting Reputation: How Past Actions Matter in International Politics," *International Organization*, Vol. 69, No. 2, April 2015. Additional citations are provided in later chapters as we discuss each factor, in Appendix B, and in the reference list at the end of this report.

Table 2.3
How Each Variable May Relate to National Will to Fight and to Other Variables

Variable Type	Variable	Description
Factor		
Political	Stakes	The higher the perceived stakes, the more likely a government will believe that the costs of ending a conflict will be higher than the costs of continuing. If stakes are perceived as relatively low (e.g., simply important as opposed to existential), cohesion, popular support, allied support, and even civil-military relations could weaken and thereby weaken will to fight. As political, military, and economic sacrifices and risks increase, the government's perceptions of the stakes and thus will to fight may decrease, even if the reality has not changed.
	Cohesion	Strong cohesion among political leaders from opposing parties and ideologically disparate advocacy organizations can strengthen will to fight because political obstacles to wartime actions are minimized. Strong cohesion combined with strong allied support and strong indoctrination and messaging can strengthen popular support because citizens will perceive a united front both domestically and internationally. High stakes and strong popular support can strengthen cohesion.
	Civil-military relations	When a government's civilian and military leaders have a constructive relationship, they can work more effectively together to maximize military effectiveness (including through stronger military capabilities) and appropriately balance the costs, benefits, and risks of conflict. This can increase confidence and expectations of victory and thus strengthen will to fight. When civilian and military relationships are seen to be strong and effective, it can also lead to stronger popular support, stronger cohesion, and stronger allied support.
	Popular support	A supportive or at least submissive population reduces the political risks for government leaders, which can increase leader confidence and expectations of victory and thus strengthen will to fight. Strong popular support may strengthen government and elite cohesion and even encourage allies to provide stronger support.
	Allies	Strong allies that provide extensive support can increase leader confidence and expectations of victory and thus strengthen will to fight.
Economic	Leverage	A government's ability to impose significant economic pain on an adversary or to provide rewards to an ally can increase its confidence and expectations of victory and thus increase will to fight. A country's economic leverage obviously influences our other economic variables (resilience and pressures), but strong economic leverage can also influence variables like allied support by creating expectations of financial rewards.
Military	Capabilities	A government that believes the quality and quantity of its military capabilities are superior to those of its adversary may have higher expectations of victory and thus stronger will to fight. Strong capabilities may also increase expectations of victory among elites, citizens, and allies and thus strengthen their will to fight.

Table 2.3—Continued

Variable Type	Variable	Description
Context		
Political	Government type	Governments with more totalitarian or autocratic characteristics tend to rely more on coercion than governments with democratic characteristics, which tend to rely more on perceptions of legitimacy. Strongly totalitarian governments have greater ability to use coercion, while strongly democratic governments have stronger foundations of legitimacy. Both these types of governments are better equipped to maintain popular support, and thus can have stronger will to fight, compared with governments that fall between these two extremes. An exception to this may be democratic governments fighting for less-than-vital stakes over a long duration.
	National identity	Governments that inspire cohesion and popular support by leveraging emotional appeals to elements of national identity can use that influence to strengthen will to fight.
Economic	Resilience	Governments with resilient economies likely have greater confidence in their ability to sustain their military's capabilities and protect their populations from destabilizing sacrifices, which can increase will to fight.
Military	Conflict duration	A longer war may fatigue a nation's populace and thus erode popular support, economic resources, and military capabilities necessary to sustain combat operations, leading to a negative impact on a nation's expectations of victory and thus will to fight.
Mechanism		
Political	Engagement	When a government effectively engages its foreign counterparts (through diplomacy and defense engagements), it can influence will to fight among these groups through persuasion or coercion.
	Indoctrination and messaging	When a government makes effective use of information to influence members of the governing coalition, elites, general population, and military (indoctrination) or to influence foreign elites and populations (messaging), it can use that influence to strengthen or weaken will to fight among these groups. Governments may use indoctrination and messaging differently over the duration of the conflict, as well as prior to a conflict. Democratic, totalitarian, and autocratic governments may use indoctrination and messaging differently from each other.
Economic	Pressures	A government that effectively imposes economic sanctions or otherwise influences allied and adversary will to fight through economic incentives and disincentives should have increased confidence and expectations of ultimate victory and thus have stronger will to fight.
Military	Casualties	A government that can inflict more deaths and injuries on the adversary than it is incurring itself may have greater confidence in its capabilities and its expectations of victory and thus strengthen its will to fight. Infliction of casualties can also backfire, however, if it increases the adversary's perceptions of the stakes or strengthens the adversary's national identity, popular support, and cohesion. Similarly, public reaction to excessive enemy casualties could erode domestic or allied support under some circumstances.

limited. Further research is needed, particularly through the testing of these hypotheses against real-world scenarios using expert elicitation, gaming, and other types of empirical data to verify and nuance the relationships we propose in this report.⁶

In our model, we hypothesize that a country with superior **military capabilities** may be able to muster those capabilities to inflict a greater number of **casualties** on its adversary. This may also be true even when the government only perceives its capabilities to be superior. **Conflict duration** may also affect a military's ability to inflict casualties: The longer a conflict draws on, the more depleted military capabilities may become. One way to mitigate this risk is through **allied support**. Countries with strong allies—relationships that are often forged through **engagement (both diplomacy and defense engagement)**—are better positioned to rely on these relationships for additional monetary and material resources to sustain fighting.⁷ We also expect that a government's will to fight can be influenced by its expectations of victory, which are, in turn, shaped by the strength of its military capabilities, allied support, popular support, cohesion, and infliction of casualties on the adversary.

Our economic variables relate both to each other and to other variables, such as allied support and engagement. For example, an economically powerful country may have (or believe it has) strong **economic leverage** over other countries, which enables that country to cajole allies and threaten adversaries and thus may strengthen its will to fight.⁸ If a country uses that leverage effectively through engagement (i.e., savvy economic diplomacy) and **economic pressures** (i.e., incentives to keep allies in the fight and sanctions or attacks on industry to weaken adversaries), its will to fight should grow even stronger because it will perceive reduced risks and greater likelihood of victory. On the other hand, a country that has strong **economic resilience** may be able to resist these pressures, which would help it maintain its own will to fight and, over time, possibly weaken that of its adversary as it becomes clear that perceived leverage did not translate into the ability to influence will to fight. A more resilient economy can also sustain its military capabilities over a longer period than a dependent economy that lacks strong allies.

A country's **government type** can influence how effectively the government is at maintaining **popular support** for the war.⁹ Totalitarian and democratic countries also use information (**indoctrination and messaging**) very differently from one another,

⁶ See Appendix A for a review of some of the academic literature relevant to the linkages discussed below.

⁷ See, for example, Stephen Walt, *Origins of Alliances*, Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1990; and Thomas J. Christensen and Jack Snyder, "Chain Gangs and Passed Bucks: Predicting Alliance Patterns in Multipolarity," *International Organization*, Vol. 44, No. 2, 1990.

⁸ See, for example, James D. Morrow, "Alliances and Asymmetry: An Alternative to the Capability Aggregation Model of Alliances," *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 35, No. 4, 1991; and Benjamin O. Fordham, "Trade and Asymmetric Alliances," *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 47, No. 6, 2010.

⁹ See, for example, Bruce Bueno de Mesquita, Alastair Smith, Randolph M. Siverson, and James D. Morrow, *The Logic of Political Survival*, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2005.

with potentially different effects on will to fight. **Cohesion** within the government and among elites within a country can influence **civil-military relations** and vice versa, all of which is important for maintaining a shared understanding of the costs, risks, and resources necessary to sustain fighting.¹⁰

The mechanisms described in Tables 2.2 and 2.3 also provide a linkage to each of the variables in our model. We previously discussed how **engagement** is related to **allies** in an external context, which can lead to pledges of support designed to enhance a nation's **military capabilities** or its ability to inflict **economic pressure** on an adversary. The more that diplomats and defense officials engage with each other, the greater the opportunity for communication and mutual understanding that can keep them closely linked and reinforcing each other's will to fight.

Our **indoctrination and messaging** mechanism links to almost all of our other political variables, including stakes, popular support, cohesion, civil-military relations, allied support, national identity, and even government type.¹¹

Economic pressure, as previously discussed, is the mechanism that links most closely to our **economic leverage** factor. However, **allied strength and support** is also related to a country's ability to exert economic pressure over an adversary: A country with strong support from its allies may be able to draw on collective resources to inflict such pressure. We also discussed how **economic resilience** relates to a country's ability to exert economic pressure, but **conflict duration** is another relevant context pertaining to economic pressure. The longer a country can sustain economic pressure over an adversary, the weaker the adversary's capabilities may become as supplies run low. Casualties are the final mechanism of our model; their relationship to military capabilities is a principal linkage within the model, but casualties also pertain to conflict duration. A government that suffers many casualties over time may lose **popular support, allied support**, or the economic means to sustain the war, thereby lessening the government's expectation of victory and diminishing its will to fight.¹²

Our National Will to Fight Model Can Be Viewed Through Centers of Gravity

Another way to view the model is through *centers of gravity*—that is, focal points that can be influenced during conflict. Although national will to fight analyses focus on state (i.e., government) decisions, many of the variables are focused on the nation (i.e., citizens and society as a whole), the military, or the international environment. Organizing the variables in this way aligns somewhat with Clausewitz's oft-discussed refer-

¹⁰ See, for example, Adam Berinsky, "Assuming the Costs of War: Events, Elites, and American Public Support for Military Conflict," *Journal of Politics*, Vol. 69, No. 4, November 2007.

¹¹ The robust public relations campaign run by Pakistan, primarily the military, provides a good example of how all of these things can be tied together (Abdurrahmān Şiddiqī, *The Military in Pakistan: Image and Reality*, Lahore: Vanguard, 1996).

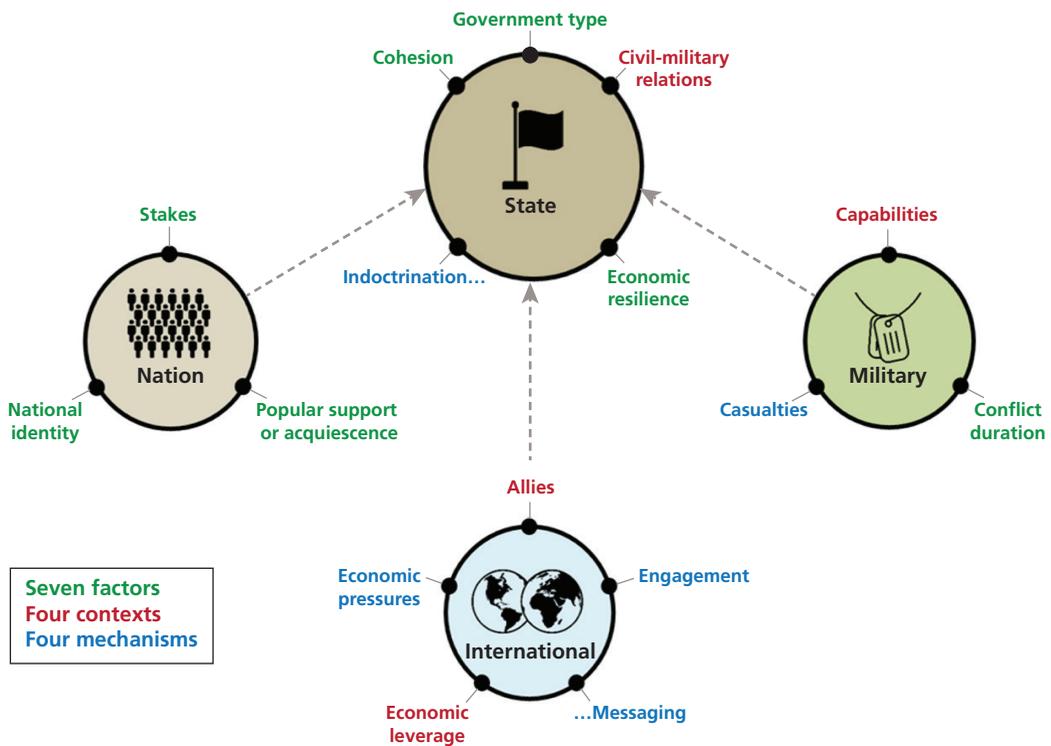
¹² See, for example, Eric V. Larson, *Casualties and Consensus: The Historical Role of Casualties in Domestic Support for U.S. Military Operations*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, MR-726-RC, 1996.

ences to centers of gravity and his tripartite concept (also called Clausewitz’s trinity), which is influential in military sociology and consists of the following:

- the state (political leadership and foreign allies)
- the military (which uses the tools of coercion against adversaries on behalf of the state)
- the nation (citizens under the rule of political leaders).¹³

In Figure 2.3, we separate out the international environment, but the overall similarity to Clausewitz’s concepts remains. Our intent is not to open an academic can of worms about centers of gravity and trinitities.¹⁴ Rather, we hope to highlight a way of

Figure 2.3
Centers of Gravity and Variables in the National Will to Fight Exploratory Model



NOTE: As discussed, indoctrination and messaging combine to form one mechanism in our analysis.

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¹³ Kestnbaum, 2009.

¹⁴ An interesting and valuable study of these cans of worms can be found in Beatrice Heuser, *Reading Clausewitz*, London: Pimlico, 2002. For useful insights on Clausewitz’s concept of center of gravity in particular, see Antulio J. Echevarria II, “Clausewitz’s Center of Gravity: It’s *Not* What We Thought,” *Naval War College Review*, Vol. 56, No. 1, Winter 2003.

viewing our model through lenses that will help us move from simply trying to understand national will to fight to trying to influence it.

How to Measure National Will to Fight

As mentioned earlier, there is no way to quantitatively measure will with scientific precision. Thus, we simply lay out the independent variables in an exploratory model and illustrate them through case studies in the hopes of understanding potential connections among those variables, instances where national will strengthened or weakened over time, and why these trends may have occurred. We discuss our case study approach more in Chapter Three, but it is worth talking briefly about some of the challenges in getting from creating the model to exploring how the independent variables connect with our will to fight measures.

First, in support of the old adage that “it takes two to tango,” a country’s national will to fight is best analyzed relative to another country or coalition of countries. Otherwise, when attempting to answer how strong country *x*’s will to fight is, we would have to ask, “relative to what?” In some cases—for example, North Vietnam—one might be able to assert that the country’s will to fight would be objectively high regardless of adversary, but surely even North Vietnam’s will to fight would have differed in important ways if it had been fighting against China instead of South Vietnam and the United States. Moreover, when examining historical cases, the question of strong national will can become tautological if it is not asked relative to an adversary: “Did a country have strong will to fight? Yes, until it stopped fighting.” All governments have some level of will to fight as long as they are engaged in a conflict.

The critical question, then, is: How does the government act in the face of rising costs, changing expectations, and the temptation to act cautiously and defensively, particularly when compared with the adversary government(s)?

A government’s willingness (or lack thereof) to do the following three things is a good overall indicator of the strength (or weakness) of a government’s overall will to fight:

1. *Make political, economic, and military sacrifices.* Examples of sacrifices include being politically rejected by voters or domestic and international allies, imposing personal and nationwide financial hardships in pursuit of national objectives, and imposing hardships on military forces.¹⁵

¹⁵ On the other hand, public passions in favor of war can strengthen will. For example, in 1965, strong public support for continued fighting prevented Pakistan from stopping its war with India, despite early international pressure and low likelihood of success.

2. *Adjust strategy to address changing events and the expectations of costs and success.* The side with stronger will to fight adjusts its expectations and its strategy to persevere in the pursuit of its objectives.
3. *Take risks.* A government often has stronger will if it shows a willingness to risk more of its political, economic, and military resources than it would otherwise have to in pursuit of an aggressive strategy.

So, does the government show a relatively greater willingness to do these things, or does it show relatively weaker national will to fight, with cautious, confused, or reactive decisionmaking and a focus on preserving the political and economic power of its elites at the expense of its national objectives?

Table 2.4 highlights three ways that our dependent variable—national will to fight—can be measured: sacrifice, agility, and risk-taking. In other words, the table shows the manifestations of will to fight that we believe the independent variables influence. Will can be thought of as a country’s motivational investment in some goal that is mediated by adversaries and allies. In that case, one must consider the country’s motivation to invest in some strategic goal, the strategic goal itself, and the capacity for

Table 2.4
Measures of National Will to Fight

Measure	Examples
Sacrifice	Does the government show a relatively greater willingness to make political, economic, and military sacrifices? For example, <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are political leaders risking loss of power (i.e., making unpopular decisions) in pursuit of national security objectives? • Are elites suffering economic hardships? • Is the government imposing sacrifices on its citizens in support of the military and imposing sacrifices on the military in support of national security objectives?
Agility	Does the government show a relatively greater willingness to adjust its strategy to address changing events and expectations of costs, success, adversary capabilities, and adversary will? For example, <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the government deploy more military capabilities (troops and equipment) when adversary resistance is stronger than expected? • Do leaders prioritize their time to maintain the government’s focus on the conflict, including incorporating fresh thinking, strategic red-teaming, and objective analysis? • If expectations of victory decline, do leaders adjust their strategy to make greater sacrifices and take greater risks?
Risk-taking	Does the government show a relatively greater willingness to take risks? For example, <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does it risk more of its political, economic, and military resources than it would otherwise have to in order to pursue an aggressive strategy? • Do leaders take bold steps, despite the political risks of failure? • Does the government put more troops in harm’s way to achieve its objectives?

adversaries and allies to affect the relationship between this investment and the goal, including its effect on the state's expectation of victory.¹⁶

Hypotheses to Help Analyze the Variables in Our National Will to Fight Model

The goal of this project is not to prove a particular hypothesis but rather to analyze evidence about the importance of will to fight by testing several hypotheses, which derive from the variables in our model. Hypothesis 1 is our primary hypothesis, which assumes that increases in the factors we have identified in our model strengthen will to fight and thus improve a government's chances of achieving its conflict objectives, and decreases in those factors have the opposite effect. For example, will to fight should be greater when the stakes are high, when there is strong government cohesion and popular support, when the government has more economic leverage, and so forth. Hypothesis 2 explores our two political context variables, assuming that our will to fight factors are more likely to be effective within certain types of governments and depending on national identity. Hypothesis 3 explores the economic variables in our model, assuming that will to fight is higher in economically resilient countries that effectively use the economic leverage they have over their allies and their adversaries. Hypothesis 4 explores two of the mechanisms laid out in our model, assuming that governments that can use engagement and indoctrination and messaging more effectively to influence will to fight are more likely to be successful. Finally, Hypothesis 5 explores the idea that military capabilities and infliction of casualties result in victory when will to fight is evenly matched among adversaries.

In the next chapter (supplemented by Appendix B), we provide a deeper dive through our case study analysis.

¹⁶ We acknowledge that perceptions, expectations, and reality may be the same or differ to varying degrees. The relationship between these constructs is likely endogenous to national will to fight. Thus, perceptions and expectations—whether realistic or not—are likely to shape will to fight.

Exploring the Model Across the 20th Century

History provides many cases in which the failure of a nation's leaders to accurately assess an adversary's will to fight led to an unexpected loss or required strategic adjustments. Failure to accurately assess and influence will to fight has led to defeats at the tactical, operational, and strategic levels of war. In some cases, such as the Vietnam War, the United States failed to adequately understand will to fight with respect to both its allies and its adversaries.

Table 3.1 provides examples in which governments failed to accurately assess will to fight, resulting in unexpected outcomes.

The cases in this chapter focus not only on will to fight surprises but also on cases that help us explore the model we developed in Chapter Two. Moreover, unlike many case studies, ours do not provide a detailed history of particular countries or wars. Instead, we use historical cases to illustrate each of the variables from our model as applied in real-world scenarios from the past and leading into the present. In addition to the materials described in our literature review in Appendix A, we also provide an extensive list of sources that we used to inform our research; any sources that are directly cited are listed in the references section at the end of the report, and sources that we used to inform each case study are included at the end of Appendix B.

Purpose of the Case Studies

The RAND research team performed an analysis of 15 historical cases to explore the factors, contexts, and mechanisms identified in our literature review that may shape will to fight. The analysis enabled us to apply elements of our literature review findings to actual conflicts to demonstrate why governments persisted in war or not. Within the cases, we used individual turning points (battles or campaigns) to illustrate discreet moments that appeared to indicate sustainment or collapse of resolve. Where possible, we also ensured that the cases explored the relationship between tactical, operational, and national-level factors to determine their linkages. To keep this chapter relatively concise, we limit discussion here to an overview chart that summarizes some key take-

Table 3.1
Examples in Which Failure to Accurately Assess Will to Fight Had Serious Consequences

Conflict (Date)	Assessment	Reality	Result
WW I (1916)	French will break under fire at Verdun	French continued to fight	France helped defeat Germany
WW II (1941)	Germany's Operation Barbarossa will destroy the Red Army	Soviets retreated to Moscow but continued to fight	Allies defeated Nazi Germany in 1945
First Indochina War (1946–1954)	Viet Minh have a limit and will surrender	Viet Minh mobilized tens of thousands from the population to help surround the French in Dien Bien Phu	Viet Minh defeated France
Korean War (1950–1953)	U.S. will liberate North Korea	North Korean and Chinese forces fought hard in the Third Phase Offensive at 38th Parallel	Stalemate between North and South Korea
India-Pakistan War (1965)	Indian soldiers will quickly retreat and reopen negotiations for Kashmir	India expanded the war	International actors forced a return to the pre-war status quo
Vietnam War (1965–1975)	North Vietnamese Army (NVA) will break in 1967	NVA persisted	NVA conquered South Vietnam; United States was strategically defeated
First Chechen War (1994–1996)	Russian forces will take Grozny	Chechen rebels continued resistance	Stalemate between Russia and Chechen rebels
Kargil War (1999)	Indian forces will back down if Pakistan seizes dominant terrain	Indian forces fought until Pakistan withdrew	Circumstances prompted a return to the status quo
Islamic State incursions (2011–2014)	Iraqi Army is ready to fight	Islamic State defeated the Iraqi Army	U.S. partner was defeated
Afghanistan conflict (2011–present)	U.S. can depart Afghanistan in 2011	Taliban persisted against the Afghan government	U.S. forces remain in Afghanistan
Yemen Civil War (2015–present)	Yemeni government can defend Sana'a	Houthi rebels defeated the Yemeni government	U.S. partner was defeated

aways from the case studies, and we briefly unpack each of our variables through a short narrative and chart with illustrations from particular cases. For our most dedicated readers, the case selection process and additional details about our case illustrations are in Appendix B.

Case Study Summary

Table 3.2 provides an overview of the cases we selected, along with the key attributes they exemplify. The variables prevalent throughout the case study examinations sometimes had positive effects and sometimes negative effects on national will to fight. The +, -, and +/- indicators in Table 3.2 are meant to demonstrate where our team concluded that these variables had positive or negative effects, or whether the same variable had both positive *and* negative effects. For example, the autocratic governments of Italy and Austria-Hungary during WW I provided stable governance but were minimally accountable to their citizens. This meant that Italians and citizens of the Austro-Hungarian empire had little say in their governments' decisions to go to war.

As Table 3.2 demonstrates, the contexts that appeared most relevant to our analyses were government type and economic resilience. About half of our cases' economies were categorized as dependent on outside support.

Factors most often influencing will to fight included political stakes and popular support. In the cases we examined, will to fight was consistently greater where level of popular support was high. For instance, Soviet leader Joseph Stalin manipulated national identity, promoting ideological (Soviet) fervor and traditional Russian nationalism among his citizens to rally support for the war. Adolf Hitler's invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941 handed Stalin a just war with existential stakes that he could leverage to strengthen popular support. Civil-military relations and allied strength and support also featured prominently as influential factors in our cases—for example, with Italy and France in WW I and in the Iran-Iraq war.¹

The most-influential will to fight mechanism in our cases appeared to be indoctrination and messaging, including the extensive use of indoctrination to strengthen national identity. For example, Russia during the Second Chechen War used its influence over domestic media to portray the stakes of war as higher than they were in reality.² Engagement was also cited frequently as an influential mechanism. This was perhaps most evident in WW I, as France, Austria-Hungary, Germany, and others recognized the need to rely on their allies for legitimacy, resources, manpower, and operational support throughout the war.

The factors from our model that came up *least* frequently as influential factors were economic leverage and military capabilities. When applying this model to future conflicts, it will be important to consider whether these variables are significant in those cases, even though they were not as frequently cited in our examination of historical cases. For instance, intelligence analysts may need to keep these variables in mind when assessing partner and adversary will to fight even if historians and political scientists have not yet accounted for them.

¹ See, for example, John Gooch, "Italy During the First World War," in A. R. Millett and W. Murray, eds., *Military Effectiveness*, Vol. 1: *The First World War*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

² Emil Pain, "The Second Chechen War: The Information Component," *Military Review*, Vol. 80, No. 4, August 2000.

Table 3.2
Overview of Case Studies and Key National Will to Fight Variables

Country (or Countries) and Conflict Analyzed	Key Contexts	Key Factors	Key Mechanisms	Takeaways
Austria-Hungary, WW I	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Govt.: autocratic (+/-) Economy: dependent (+/-) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stakes (+) Allies (+) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Economic pressure (-) 	Austria-Hungary was ultimately defeated, but high stakes and strong allies maintained will.
France, WW I	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Govt.: democratic (+) Economy: resilient (+) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stakes (+) Civil-military relations (+) Allies (+) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Economic pressure (+/-) Indoctrination and messaging (+) Engagement (+) 	The government fought but moderated offensives in 1917 until the army recovered; effective engagement strengthened allied support.
Germany, WW I	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Govt.: totalitarian (-) Economy: resilient (+) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Civil-military relations (-) Popular support (+/-) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indoctrination and messaging (+/-) 	The government fought until military losses and dissent at home weakened will by late summer 1918.
Italy, WW I	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Govt.: autocratic (+/-) Economy: dependent (-) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Civil-military relations (-) Popular support (-) Allies (-) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Economic pressure (-) Indoctrination and messaging (-) Engagement (-) 	Autocratic government and poor civil-military relations forced Italy to use coercion to keep soldiers fighting; ineffective engagement weakened allied support.
Russia, WW I	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Govt.: autocratic (+/-) Economy: resilient (+/-) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cohesion (-) Popular support (-) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indoctrination and messaging (+) 	Russia fought until 1917, when elite cohesion and popular support collapsed.
France, WW II	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Govt.: democratic (+/-) Economy: resilient (+) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Civil-military relations (-) Popular support (-) Cohesion (-) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Economic pressure (-) 	Poor civil-military relations, popular support, and cohesion weakened will to fight; there was a military coup in June 1940.
Germany, WW II	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Govt.: totalitarian (+) Economy: resilient (+) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stakes (+) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indoctrination and messaging (+) 	The government fought until the Allies crushed the ability to resist.
Soviet Union, WW II	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Govt.: totalitarian (+/-) National identity (+) Economy: resilient (+) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stakes (+) Popular support (+) Civil-military relations (-) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indoctrination and messaging (+) 	Coercion, national identity, and indoctrination were key to keeping soldiers fighting and the population supportive, despite Soviet leadership and training failures.

Table 3.2—Continued

Country (or Countries) and Conflict Analyzed	Key Contexts	Key Factors	Key Mechanisms	Takeaways
North Korea, Korean War (1950–1953)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Govt.: totalitarian (+) Economy: initially resilient, then dependent (+/-) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cohesion (+) Allies (+) Popular support (+) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indoctrination and messaging (+) 	North Korea was better trained and prepared early in battle and had more-effective use of indoctrination to encourage soldiers' loyalty.
South Korea, Korean War (1950–1953)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Capabilities (+/-) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cohesion (-) Popular support (-) Allies (+) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engagement (+) 	Strong U.S. support overcame early weaknesses in cohesion and popular support.
India and Pakistan, India-Pakistan War (1965)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conflict duration: < 1 year (+) Economy: dependent (-) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Popular support (+) Stakes (+/-) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engagement (-) Indoctrination and messaging (+) 	Both sides had limited will to fight; the end of war returned circumstances to the status quo.
North Vietnam, Vietnam War (1965–1975)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Govt.: totalitarian (+) Economy: resilient (+) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cohesion(+) Allies (+) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indoctrination and messaging (+) 	Relentless, unbreakable will overcame capability weaknesses.
South Vietnam, Vietnam War (1965–1975)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Govt.: democratic/ autocratic (-) Economy: dependent (-) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stakes (+) Cohesion (-) Allies (+/-) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engagement (-) 	A focus on regime survival hindered will to fight; dependence on United States and ineffective engagement led to collapse after 1973 U.S. withdrawal.
Iran and Iraq, Iran-Iraq War (1980–1988)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Govt.: autocratic (-) Economy: resilient (+) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stakes (+) Allies (+) Civil-military relations (-) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engagement (+) 	Poor civil-military relations had a negative effect, which was offset only when stakes were high (i.e., defense of the homeland).
Russia, Chechen Wars (1994–2009)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Govt.: autocratic (+/-) Economy: dependent (+/-) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stakes (+/-) Popular support (+/-) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indoctrination and messaging (+) Casualties (+/-) 	Despite low Russian will to fight in the First Chechen War, the growing autocratic control, a strengthening economy, and the ability to use information to paint the Second Chechen War as an existential struggle for Russia strengthened will.

NOTE: The symbols in parentheses after each variable indicate our conclusion about the effect the variable had on the conflict. "+" = positive effect; "-" = negative effect; "+/-" = both positive and negative effects.

Unpacking Our Seven Factors

In this section, we explore the factors from Chapter Two's national will to fight model by using examples from our case studies. Similar sections exploring the contexts and mechanisms from our model follow, and additional details for all the variables are in Appendix B.³

Political Factors

Political factors shape a government's wartime decisions. Our model focuses on five of these factors, while our case studies illustrated them in action. The first political factor is the perceived **stakes** that war has for the nation and its leaders. Several experts we interviewed agreed with the proposition that "the most important variable at the national level is the perception of threat, and whether it is existential."⁴

These stakes may vary in three ways. Existential stakes exist when perceptions are that defeat would end society as the population knows it—for example, through a long-term occupation, partition, or destruction of a nation's system of governance—or likely result in ruin for elites. Vital stakes exist when the perception is that strategic defeat would prevent a government from achieving a grand strategic goal. Important stakes are connected with the probability that a loss would inhibit a government's progress toward its economic or security goals. Real-world assessments must consider that stakes for the nation may differ from stakes for elites and thus may have nuanced effects on will to fight. Regardless, we assume that existential, vital, and important stakes have the capacity at some level to shape a government's decision to enter a war or continue fighting once a war begins. These stakes also have the capacity to shape how a country's citizens view conflict. For example, Nazi Germany's invasion of the Soviet Union raised the stakes of this conflict: If the Soviets lost, the result would have been the end of their communist government. In comparison, the stakes were lower for the Soviets during the Winter War when they invaded Finland, where the existence of the Soviet Union was not threatened.⁵

Table 3.3 shows four examples of stakes from our case studies.

³ While there is extensive literature about each of these conflicts, we limit our discussion to short descriptions as viewed through the lens of our will to fight model. The tables in this chapter provide a small number of examples for each model variable, with additional details in Appendix B.

⁴ Retired military officer and military strategy expert, interview with the authors, August 2017.

⁵ Roger R. Reese, *Why Stalin's Soldiers Fought: The Red Army's Military Effectiveness in World War II*, Lawrence, Kan.: University Press of Kansas, 2011; Roger R. Reese, "Motivations to Serve: The Soviet Soldier in the Second World War," *Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, Vol. 20, No. 2, 2007; and Roger R. Reese, "Lessons of the Winter War: A Study in the Military Effectiveness of the Red Army, 1939–1940," *Journal of Military History*, Vol. 72, No. 3, 2008.

Table 3.3
Political Factor Examples: Stakes

Conflict	Country	Details
WW I	Austria-Hungary	Perceptions that avenging the death of Archduke Franz Ferdinand and maintaining the empire were vital stakes motivated the country's will to fight.
WW II	Soviet Union	Perceptions of defending the motherland against brutal Nazi Germany motivated the citizens' will to fight.
Iran-Iraq War	Iran, Iraq	Iraqi and Iranian will to fight was much stronger when the stakes were perceived as existential.
Chechen Wars	Russia	Russians' view of their national security risks influenced the will to fight.

The second political factor is the **cohesion** of the government and elites. In many nation-states, there are clusters of elites that hold varying degrees of power.⁶ We define this type of cohesion as the shared sense of *purpose* within a group of government leaders and elites that helps to produce a consensus to fight in war. When elites agree that a conflict is worth the costs and have high expectations of victory, national will to fight should be strengthened. Cohesion among government leaders and elites may, in turn, strengthen popular support for the conflict. There is some evidence that external conflict will increase cohesion within a country.⁷ The logic is that conflict generates a sense of in-groups and out-groups that, in turn, increases a sense of national cohesion. If cohesion is high (e.g., opposing political factions all support fighting), then more citizens will likely view the conflict as legitimate and thus be supportive. For example, the Nazis were able to counteract negative views of WW II by generating common symbols around the Führer, senior government officials, and senior military officers.⁸ When cohesion is low, citizens may view this fragmentation as a sign of elites' uncertainty about the conflict. Thus, cohesion—particularly when combined with popular support—reduces the political risks and obstacles for governments to continue fighting. Table 3.4 shows three examples of government and elite cohesion from our case studies.

Popular support for a war is the third political factor. National will to fight and expectations of victory will generally be stronger when a majority of a population supports a conflict, or when the opposition to conflict is muted or perceived as radical. Governments can channel popular support during wartime in a variety of ways,

⁶ Robert Alan Dahl, *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition*, New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1973.

⁷ Arthur A. Stein, "Conflict and Cohesion: A Review of the Literature," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 20, No. 1, 1976.

⁸ Edward A. Shils and Morris Janowitz, "Cohesion and Disintegration in the Wehrmacht in World War II," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 12, No. 2, 1948.

Table 3.4
Political Factor Examples: Cohesion

Conflict	Country	Details
WW I	France	German aggression unified political elites to support national will to fight.
WW II	France	Elite divisions about the role of the military—and the war in general—undermined national will to fight.
Korean War	North Korea	Elite support for Kim Il-sung and his decision to invade South Korea promoted national will to fight.
Vietnam War	North Vietnam	North Vietnam's leaders shared a common vision of victory that reinforced a continuing national will to fight against foreign powers.

but populations can also push governments to change course. According to RAND's Michael Linick,

nations tend to underestimate the cost of war both in personnel and money at the outset, but once they are involved, there's an almost perverse appetite to continue to find a favorable solution that might not be there. In democracies specifically, at some point it takes the people pushing the government to walk away rather than the government finding the will to walk away willingly.⁹

At times, it is up to citizens to influence the nation's will to *not* fight. Although cases vary, in general, democracies rely more on perceptions of legitimacy, while autocracies and totalitarian states require some combination of perceived legitimacy and coercion. In a democracy, a supportive population may also contribute to the government's expectation of victory when the government does not have to spend effort on convincing its citizenry of the value of remaining engaged in a war. Table 3.5 shows three examples from our case studies.

Table 3.5
Political Factor Examples: Popular Support

Conflict	Country	Details
WW I	Italy	Lack of popular support for the primary objective of the war undermined will to fight over time.
WW II	Germany	Nazi ideology led to a strong base of hard-core supporters, which, combined with repression, strengthened will to fight.
1965 India-Pakistan War	India, Pakistan	Popular support made conflict termination difficult.

⁹ Michael Linick, interview with the authors, Arlington, Va., August 29, 2017.

The next political factor is **allies**. This factor moves our unit of analysis beyond the internal functioning of nation-states to relationships between two or more nation-states. The cases we reviewed suggest that states with strong allies, whether these relationships are real or perceived, will have greater confidence and expectations of victory and thus a stronger will to fight. When allies are weak or allied support is low, then national will to fight tends to be low. Table 3.6 shows three examples from our case studies.

The last political factor is **civil-military relations**, which describes the interaction between the civilian and military leaders and institutions in a country. The cases we reviewed suggest that when military and civilian leaders are more confident in each other's authority and expertise, they will support each other and will to fight increases. Effective civil-military relations encourage the military to be flexible and evolve its proficiencies to engage in a variety of security operations (counterinsurgency, combat, logistics, etc.). Effective civil-military relations also allow the national command authority to make good decisions on what to do with military forces—in particular, to appropriately balance civilian and military outcomes for the benefit of the country overall (e.g., economic growth, security, protection of culture). For example, when civil-military relations are effective, military strategy and political objectives will be better aligned, with the military being more confident that it will get the resources and other support it needs to succeed and government leaders being more confident that they understand the costs, benefits, and risks of military actions. In this way, it is also important to note that effective civil-military relations help national decision-makers determine when the costs of continued fighting outweigh the benefits and the conflict should be terminated. Table 3.7 shows three examples of the effect of civil-military relations on some of the cases we examined.

Table 3.6
Political Factor Examples: Allies

Conflict	Country	Details
Vietnam War	North Vietnam, South Vietnam	Strong and enduring Chinese and Soviet support for North Vietnam strengthened will; U.S. support for South Vietnam was stronger but created dependency. When U.S. support collapsed, South Vietnamese will to fight weakened.
1965 India-Pakistan War	Pakistan	Pakistan's miscalculations about allied support influenced its decisions to initiate and continue fighting; once reality dawned, Pakistan's will to fight declined.
Iran-Iraq War	Iran and Iraq	Iran was largely isolated, while Iraq benefited from relationships with the United States, the Soviet Union, Europe, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and the United Arab Emirates.

Table 3.7
Political Factor Examples: Civil-Military Relations

Conflict	Country	Details
WW II	Soviet Union	Civil-military relations evolved under Stalin from tense to mutually beneficial, thus strengthening will to fight.
Vietnam	South Vietnam	The government deliberately undercut military effectiveness of units that it feared could lead a coup.
Iran-Iraq War	Iran, Iraq	In each country, civilian leader distrust of their own militaries undermined national will to continue fighting.

Economic Factor

Our sole economic factor was the economic **leverage** that a government has over other countries during a conflict. Economic leverage relates to the capacity of a state to pressure its adversaries with minimal repercussions for its own economic well-being. A country that has leverage over an adversary is likely to perceive itself as having relative economic power; thus, it may be able to starve its adversary's military and population of resources (and support its own) in a long-term conflict. As we discuss later, however, it is also possible that leverage will only strengthen an adversary's will to fight over the long term if that country's own economy is resilient and its government is effective in applying economic pressures. In other words, leverage is potential power that must be employed effectively to be useful. Leverage may relate to the interests of those inside a country's economic system: The people holding these interests may have positions of power in government, own private corporations, or influence employment within an ally's or adversary's labor market. We broadly focused on the economic levers that allow governments to impose significant economic pain on their adversaries. Table 3.8 shows three examples from our case studies.

Military Factor

We treated **capabilities** as a special variable in the model, along with casualties, because these two variables can be predictors of victory when the national will to fight between two or more adversaries is about evenly matched. For example, one could argue that at the peak of WW II, both sides sustained extremely high will to fight, thus requiring the Allies to basically grind down Germany and Japan through attrition to achieve victory. Capabilities and casualties are also different from our other variables in that an overwhelming advantage in these two categories—the two traditional indicators of military power—can overwhelm other will to fight variables.

Unfortunately, however, as we discussed in Chapter One, capabilities and casualties are often what analysts try to measure when they are *not* accounting for will to fight. For example, the defeat of France early in WW II could easily be misperceived as a triumph in German material capability. The German military certainly had some capability advantages, particularly its air superiority and armored mobility. France's

Table 3.8
Economic Factor Examples: Leverage

Conflict	Country	Details
WW II	Soviet Union, Germany	Nazi Germany had some leverage over the weaker Soviet economy.
Vietnam War	North Vietnam, South Vietnam	The United States had leverage over the North Vietnamese economy through bombing, although it was ultimately unsuccessful in breaking North Vietnam's will to fight. The United States and China also had leverage over South Vietnam and North Vietnam, respectively, with mixed results.
1965 India-Pakistan War	India, Pakistan	India and Pakistan had minimal economic leverage over each other, but their allies had economic leverage over them, especially U.S. leverage over Pakistan.

military, however, particularly when paired with the 400,000-strong British Expeditionary Force, was quite formidable in terms of manpower, training, and equipment. While many experts now agree that it was superior German doctrine and tactics that doomed the French, we would argue that Germany's will to fight was the foundation of its innovative, aggressive doctrine.¹⁰ Moreover, we contend that it was the *lack* of French will to fight that prevented French forces from fighting effectively, even by the standards of their admittedly slower, methodical doctrine. As the German general Erich Marks noted about the French in June 1940, "the change in men weighs more heavily than that in technology."¹¹

Although they are different in some ways from the other variables in our model, capabilities and casualties are similar to our other variables in that they can influence will to fight and the other variables. As discussed in Chapter Two, strong capabilities increase a government's confidence and expectations of victory and therefore should strengthen will to fight. Strong capabilities can also provide similar confidence to elites (strengthening cohesion), citizens (strengthening popular support), and allies (strengthening allied support).

Table 3.9 shows three examples of military capabilities from our case studies.

¹⁰ See Jasen J. Castillo, *Endurance and War: The National Sources of Military Cohesion*, Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2014; and Williamson Murray and Allan Millet, *A War to Be Won: Fighting the Second World War*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000.

¹¹ MacGregor Knox, *Common Destiny: Dictatorship, Foreign Policy, and War in Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

Table 3.9
Military Factor Examples: Capabilities

Conflict	Country	Details
WW I	Italy	Italy's will to fight strengthened as allies began to compensate for Italy's own capability weaknesses.
WW II	Soviet Union	Soviet will to fight was sustained as the Soviet Union strengthened its military capabilities over time.
1965 India-Pakistan War	India, Pakistan	Advantage in military capabilities shifted between India and Pakistan; the two countries were mostly evenly matched, which weakened will to fight on both sides.

Unpacking Our Four Contexts

We define *context* as the background conditions within which particular factors are likely to be more or less relevant. Contexts are less likely to change than factors or mechanisms, so variation in these conditions occurs in the longer term.

We defined *political context* by a country's type of government. Further, we defined *national identity* as the way in which governments and citizens perceive themselves and identify themselves as the same or different from others.¹² National identities are typically based on ascribed characteristics (i.e., what someone is), including ethnicity, ideology, national origin, or religion. Governments can leverage this to strengthen national will to fight. We defined *economic context* by the degree to which a country's economy is self-sufficient, dependent on other states, or resilient. Finally, we defined *military context* by the number of years a country was fighting in a conflict.

Political Contexts

The first of our political context variables is **government type**. Our model has three categories to identify each country's government type: autocratic, totalitarian, or democratic. Autocratic governments have a leader or small group of political elite that monopolizes power and prohibits political opposition. Totalitarian governments wield absolute control over most aspects of the society. Finally, democratic governments wield power through the rule of law, institutions, and the will of the people. We propose that type of government, along with how well it channels a feedback loop between elites and the general public, has the capacity to shape expectations of will to fight.

These three government types have important differences in their power structures and strategies for political survival during war. We relied, in part, on insights from "selectorate theory"—as outlined in Bruce Bueno de Mesquita and colleagues'

¹² Rogers Brubaker, "Religion and Nationalism: Four Approaches," *Nations and Nationalism*, Vol. 18, No. 1, 2012.

*The Logic of Political Survival*¹³ and amended by Bueno de Mesquita and Alastair Smith in 2009¹⁴—to unpack the differences between government types and derive implications for the will to fight. We describe this theory and the related literature in more detail in Appendix A.

Simply put, selectorate theory indicates that each type of regime provides incentives for a determined pursuit of military victory, but with important differences in how. Victory is especially attractive for democratic regimes because a democratic leader—once engaged in conflict—will have a hard time providing the public goods sought in war without obtaining victory.¹⁵ Thus, mature democracies fighting for high national stakes should have particularly strong will to fight. Autocratic and totalitarian regimes, on the other hand, may be able to retain office even after military defeat by providing key supporters with private goods. Yet autocratic and totalitarian leaders are likely to fight as hard as leaders of democracies when they perceive a higher risk of being deposed if they lose the war.¹⁶ They are also less subject to popular will, although they will try to generate public support through indoctrination of the population and generate public acquiescence through coercion in order to minimize the risk of uprisings. Totalitarian regimes have greater control over society than do autocratic ones (or those with a mix of democratic and autocratic traits) and thus should also have particularly strong will to fight.

Table 3.10 shows examples of each government type from our case studies.

Table 3.10
Political Context Examples: Government Type

Conflict	Country	Details
WW I	Austria-Hungary, Italy, France	Austria-Hungary and Italy (autocratic governments) relied on coercion to maintain will to fight, while France (a democracy) invested in the military to strengthen will.
WW II	Germany, Soviet Union	These totalitarian governments had significant levels of popular support for war but also relied on severe coercion.
Vietnam War	North Vietnam, South Vietnam	Both governments relied on a mix of coercion and popular support, but North Vietnam's more autocratic regime enforced and inspired stronger will to fight. South Vietnam wavered between democratic and autocratic structures, which negatively influenced will to fight.

¹³ Bueno de Mesquita, 2005.

¹⁴ Bruce Bueno de Mesquita and Alastair Smith, "Political Survival and Endogenous Institutional Change," *Comparative Political Studies*, Vol. 42, No. 2, 2009.

¹⁵ See, for example, H. Rizvi, *Military, State and Society in Pakistan*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014, p. 115.

¹⁶ Bueno de Mesquita, 2005, p. 264.

The second type of political context variable in our model is **national identity**.¹⁷ These identities affect the way people in a country view themselves compared with others. The function of these identities is to construct a sense of similarity with or difference between groups of people. Typically, the sources of these national identities include ethnicity (e.g., Russian), nationality (e.g., American), and religion (e.g., Christian). Some research finds that conflict with other countries has the capacity to activate the salience of a national identity.¹⁸ Specifically, conflict leads people to mobilize their energies toward a group—typically of people like them.¹⁹ We propose that channeling these energies toward a national identity gives leaders of countries the capacity to mobilize their people for war. National identities carry social and cultural significance for people, which may become a driver for a society's will to fight. Table 3.11 shows three examples of countries that leveraged national identity to influence national will to fight.

Economic Context

In the model, economic **resilience** refers to a country's internal economic strength, combined with the level of foreign ties necessary to sustain its wartime economy. For our analysis of the cases, strong economic resilience meant that a government's economy was sufficient to supply its military and population with wartime requirements. Weak economic resilience—in other words, economic dependency—meant that a government had to rely on external actors for economic support to sustain its military efforts and its citizens. In economic terms, it means that these countries usually had less productive capacity and less elastic demand for imports.²⁰ Such was the case for

Table 3.11
Political Context Examples: National Identity

Conflict	Country	Details
WW I	France	War generated a defensive nationalism within France that strengthened will to fight.
WW II	Soviet Union	The government leveraged distinct Soviet and Russian national identities to reinforce popular support for the war.
Second Chechen War	Russia	A rising sense of Russian nationalism increased national will to defend the motherland.

¹⁷ Brubaker, 2012.

¹⁸ Stein, 1976.

¹⁹ Lewis Coser, *The Functions of Social Conflict*, New York: Free Press, 1956.

²⁰ Jon Harkness, "Marshall, Lerner & Botha: Canada's Economic Sanctions on South Africa," *Canadian Public Policy/Analyse de Politiques*, Vol. 16, No. 2, June 1990.

Italy during WW I, Pakistan in its 1965 war, and Chechnya during its conflicts with Russia later in the 20th century. Because these countries had relatively low economic resilience, they struggled to support their military forces and were susceptible to external pressures, all of which weakened their will to fight.²¹ We characterized states with resilient economies as ones in which the government and society may benefit from external economic ties but can sustain long periods of isolation. For example, William Kaempfer and Anton Lowenberg note that very large countries do not experience a substantial drop in welfare when external economic ties are severed.²² Table 3.12 shows three examples from our case studies.

Military Context

The **conflict duration** variable addresses the extent to which the length of time of a conflict might influence will to fight, with the assumption that longer conflicts potentially cause war weariness (i.e., exhaustion and dejection caused by a long conflict) and thus erode will to fight. For our case studies, we classified the duration of conflicts into one of three categories. *Short* conflicts lasted less than one year. *Medium*-length conflicts lasted between one and five years. *Long* conflicts lasted more than five years. Table 3.13 shows three examples from our case studies.

Table 3.12
Economic Context Examples: Resilience

Conflict	Country	Details
WW I	Italy	A weak domestic manufacturing base created economic dependencies that undermined domestic will to fight.
1965 India-Pakistan War	Pakistan	Pakistan's weak economy forced dependence on foreign assistance, which undermined will to fight.
First Chechen War	Russia	A weak domestic economy with limited resilience undermined will to fight.

²¹ Pakistan's limited military supplies made it susceptible to Western pressure for a ceasefire. For example, Pakistan's reliance on U.S. spare parts for aircraft made recovery after a major air battle more difficult than for India even though Pakistan won the air battle. See Farooq Bajwa, *From Kutch to Tashkent: The Indo-Pakistan War of 1965*, London: Hurst, 2013, pp. 278–279.

²² William H. Kaempfer and Anton D. Lowenberg, "The Political Economy of Sanctions," *Handbook of Defense Economics*, Vol. 2, 2007.

Table 3.13
Military Context Examples: Conflict Duration

Conflict	Country	Details
WW I	Austro-Hungary	This medium-duration conflict, when combined with heavy casualties, wore down will to fight.
WW II	Germany	This long-duration conflict did not break German will to fight, but when it was combined with heavy casualties and capability losses, the German government was destroyed.
Vietnam War	North Vietnam, South Vietnam, United States	This long-duration conflict wore down will to fight of South Vietnam's primary ally (United States) but not of the North Vietnamese government, which benefited from many other will to fight variables being in its favor.

Unpacking Our Four Mechanisms

As discussed in Chapter Two, mechanisms are ways that a government can attempt to influence the factors in our model and thus influence will to fight. The following explanations of our mechanisms describe our interpretation of how they operated in the cases we examined for this study.

Political Mechanisms

We focused on two political mechanisms that have the capacity to affect national will to fight. The first is **engagement**, which we define as the degree to which a government leverages bilateral and multilateral relationships to bolster its own will to fight and that of allies or to weaken the will to fight of adversaries. This mechanism relates to many of the factors in our model. For example, allied strength and support is a factor that defines the capacity of a country to leverage its alliances. Engagement as a mechanism is concerned with whether a country uses the capacity of its allies to affect national will to fight, and whether allied support increases the country's confidence and expectation of victory. In many of our cases (e.g., Germany in WW II, North Korea, and North Vietnam), it was clear that engagement was especially important before a conflict started so that the countries could strengthen alliances, weaken their future adversaries, and collectively prepare themselves for the challenges of war. These governments reached out to their allies both diplomatically and through military-to-military ties to align their strategies and plans while also trying to disrupt the ties among their adversaries through intimidation, incentives, or deception. Table 3.14 shows four examples from our case studies.

The second political mechanism from our model focused on how information—in the form of **indoctrination and messaging**—can be used to inform, influence, and persuade various populations. For the purposes of this study, we use the terms *indoctrination* and *messaging* in related but distinct ways, with the former term focused

Table 3.14
Political Mechanism Examples: Engagement

Conflict	Country	Details
WW I	Austria-Hungary, France, Italy	Leaders relied extensively on leveraging their alliances to strengthen collective will to fight.
WW II	Soviet Union	Relations changed from alliance with Nazi Germany to alliance with the United States and United Kingdom.
Vietnam War	North Vietnam, South Vietnam	North and South Vietnam leveraged ties with foreign powers that provided them resources to support their respective national wills to fight.

on internal, domestic use and the latter aimed at international actors.²³ We use *indoctrination* to mean the process by which principles, values, and ideologies are inculcated within a country's government, elite, general population, and military to strengthen will to fight. This can take place through formal instruction, information-sharing, internal controls over information, discussion, and other means. We use *messaging* to mean the planned distribution of information and propaganda to shape the attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors of various groups overseas to strengthen partner will to fight and weaken adversary will to fight. Messaging during conflict often seeks to shape foreign views regarding the feasibility of victory or the justness of the cause. Themes can be abstract, involving political and ideological messages, or may focus on practical considerations, such as safety, family, and economic security.

As with engagement, indoctrination and messaging can be particularly important in both the lead-up to a conflict and as a conflict stretches on. Changing perceptions allows a state's leaders to change the impact of other factors without necessarily changing the empirical reality of the factor.²⁴ For example, a state may have relatively modest stakes in a conflict, but if state propaganda promotes an internal perception of much higher stakes, that perception may be all that matters. Similarly, if indoctrination efforts foster the perception that government and elite cohesion or popular support are greater than they are, the state may be able to maintain national will to fight based on the perceptions rather than the reality. This could even influence the state's expectation of victory. Such manipulation of perceptions can include some risk, of course. If the state routinely lies to its population about, say, casualties, there may be considerable backlash when the truth emerges. Then again, sometimes perceptions can become reality. These mechanisms can be used to change some factors (such as

²³ Disagreements over terminology in this field abound (ironically), so we have tried to use fairly general terms and apply them in a way that simply helps the reader think about how the use of information can help influence national will to fight. For a useful overview of some of these concepts, see Christopher Paul, *Strategic Communication: Origins, Concepts, and Current Debates*, Santa Barbara, Calif.: Praeger, 2011.

²⁴ Anatol Lieven, *Pakistan*, London: Penguin, 2012, pp. 67–69; Bajwa, 2013, p. 366.

cohesion or popular support) or to mobilize aspects of national identity. Some methods of indoctrinating a population (such as censorship, the employment of political officers, or other forms of compliance monitoring) can be used only under certain forms of government. Less-manipulative forms of indoctrination are used in almost all societies to strengthen nationalism, explain national policies, and promote particular political views.

Most of the discussions of messaging in our case studies focused on the narrative for why a country was fighting and how people domestically and abroad perceived this purpose. Table 3.15 shows five examples of indoctrination and messaging efforts from our case studies.

Economic Mechanism

For the purposes of our study, we defined economic **pressure** as a government's use of sanctions or other methods to influence another country's decisionmaking during war. This pressure usually takes the form of trying to negatively impact an adversary's economy to weaken its will but could also involve economic measures to strengthen an ally's will to fight or to encourage it to settle a conflict. Strong economic leverage over an adversary (see our discussion of economic factors earlier) and strong economic resilience (see economic contexts earlier) should strengthen a government's will to fight, but these economic advantages ultimately become most valuable through the effective application of economic pressures.

The conventional view on how sanctions work is that economic damage inflicted on the ruling elite and the core support group of the target country will force its lead-

Table 3.15
Political Mechanism Examples: Indoctrination and Messaging

Conflict	Country	Details
WW I	France	Following the Franco-Prussian War, the Third Republic promoted French national identity and patriotism. During the war, political and military leaders could rally the public based on these latent sentiments.
WW II	Soviet Union, Germany	The Soviets and Germans indoctrinated their own people and militaries to generate a collective purpose for the war.
Korean War	North Korea	North Korea used indoctrination of its own people and messaging in South Korea to promote a narrative of why the countries were fighting.
Vietnam War	North Vietnam	The Viet Cong used three-man cells to cultivate loyalty and reinforce responsibility to comrades and party to continue fighting; indoctrination and messaging were central to North Vietnam's war strategy.
1965 India-Pakistan War	Pakistan	False narratives undermined national will to fight.

ership to change its policy course (in this case, weakening its will to fight) in the face of increased costs.²⁵ This view assumes a proportional relationship between economic deprivation and political change.²⁶ The idea is that the economic pain inflicted on citizens and key groups will cause them to pressure their government to make the policy changes demanded by the sanctioning body and, in this case, end the war.²⁷

While the damage of sanctions and other measures that weaken an adversary's economy is rarely disputed, the transmission mechanism between economic damage and a nation's will to fight is less well understood. An early scholar of economic sanctions noted that economic hardship caused by external factors is often followed by increased political integration within the target nation—a “rally-around-the-flag” effect—and may give rise to a new economic elite that benefits from the increased isolation, thus strengthening will to fight.²⁸

The empirical literature we used for our cases did not focus extensively on economic mechanisms, but a more focused economic analysis could provide additional insights. Table 3.16 shows two cases of economic pressure from our case studies.

Military Mechanism

As we described earlier, capabilities and casualties are special variables that could be predictors of victory when will to fight between two or more adversaries is about evenly matched. **Casualties** directly influence will to fight, as well as some of the other variables in the model. When a military inflicts many casualties on an adversary, it can increase a government's confidence and expectations of victory and thus should strengthen will to fight. It can also strengthen confidence and thus will to fight among elites, citizens, and allies, with the opposite happening for the side suffering dispro-

Table 3.16
Economic Mechanism Examples: Pressure

Conflict	Country	Details
WW I	Italy, Austria-Hungary	Italy inflicted economic pressure on Austria-Hungary by blocking food exports, which dampened popular support for the war in Austria-Hungary and thus partially weakened will to fight.
1965 India-Pakistan War	India, Pakistan	Economic pressure from great powers (especially the United States and the Soviet Union) weakened will to fight in both India and Pakistan.

²⁵ For more on the conventional view, see Jonathan Kirshner, “The Microfoundations of Economic Sanctions,” *Security Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 3, 1997.

²⁶ Johan Galtung, “On the Effects of International Economic Sanctions, with Examples from the Case of Rhodesia,” *World Politics*, Vol. 19, No. 3, 1967.

²⁷ Andrew Mack and Asif Khan, “The Efficacy of UN Sanctions,” *Security Dialogue*, Vol. 31, No. 3, 2000.

²⁸ Galtung, 1967.

portionately. Our cases, however, found that this was not always the case. Suffering casualties can make the stakes of a conflict feel higher among government officials, the military, and the general population and thus strengthen will to fight on the side that appears to be losing.²⁹ It can also combine with national identity to stimulate feelings of patriotism and duty and thus strengthen will to fight. As with many of our variables, casualties do not follow a consistent “if . . . then” pattern and must be analyzed in the complex contours of each conflict. Table 3.17 highlights one of the most prominent examples from our case studies of how casualties influenced (and did not influence) national will to fight.³⁰

Conclusion

As described in this chapter and in Appendix B, we used historical cases to illustrate the factors, contexts, and mechanisms from our national will to fight model. We discussed the ways in which each variable appeared to be related to will to fight, as well as the ways in which the variables interacted with each other. The exercise helped reinforce the central role that several of these variables play across regions and across time. We discuss our findings in greater detail in Chapter Five, but several insights stood out particularly well and are worth highlighting here.

Stakes, cohesion, popular support, and civil-military relations are factors that appear again and again in both strongly positive and strongly negative ways. For instance, high stakes tended to increase will to fight, while lower stakes decreased it. The relevance of allies was highlighted slightly less frequently, but when it mattered—for example, with both sides in WW I, WW II, and Vietnam—it mattered a lot.

Government type also mattered a lot, although how it mattered varied considerably. Totalitarian governments, such as Germany in WW II, were able to use their

Table 3.17
Military Mechanism Example: Casualties

Conflict	Country	Details
Vietnam War	North Vietnam, South Vietnam	High numbers of casualties weakened South Vietnamese government will to fight in some quarters but had far less influence on North Vietnamese will to fight, which had many other will to fight variables in its favor.

²⁹ Pakistan defeated Indian elements at Biar Bet in the Rann of Kutch region and captured equipment. This increased India's will to fight and willingness to expand the early skirmishes into a larger war (Bajwa, 2013, p. 80).

³⁰ Although our research did not include analysis of U.S. national will to fight, casualties were obviously a very prominent component of U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War from several angles.

overwhelming control to strengthen many of our model's factors—such as cohesion, popular support, and civil-military relations, all of which can influence a country's expectation of victory and will to fight. Authoritarian countries with weaker control (e.g., Austria-Hungary and Italy in WW I) and countries that wavered between authoritarian and democratic approaches (e.g., South Vietnam) struggled to control these same factors.

Finally, all of the mechanisms from our model proved relevant in at least some of our cases, but indoctrination and messaging was the most prominent in most of them. A nation's ability to indoctrinate its military and its population, reinforcing feelings of national identity or particular ideologies, often had strong influences on such factors as popular support, cohesion, and civil-military relations. Similarly, the use of messaging to influence will outside one's borders (e.g., by North Vietnam) could have powerful effects on will to fight. Spreading false information could backfire, however, as in Pakistan's case (see Appendix B).

The preceding review focused on the historical examples of national will to fight that our team analyzed for this report. Looking ahead, the U.S. Army faces challenges from two notable adversaries: North Korea and Russia. Although we considered both countries through a historical lens, we thought it prudent to address the implications that each country may have for future U.S. security, with an eye toward lessons learned from history that can shape future approaches. That is, we sought to capture the context and means for examining future will to initiate and to sustain or terminate a conflict. In the next two chapters, we provide a deep-dive analysis of these two cases.

The Korean Peninsula: Will to Fight and the Arc of History

In this chapter, we consider the will to fight of North Korea (officially the Democratic People's Republic of Korea) and South Korea (officially the Republic of Korea [ROK]), both historical and prospective. We proceed by summarizing the findings of our application of the national will to fight framework to the behavior of North and South during the Korean War (1950–1953), followed by a description of how the belligerents' contemporary will to fight factors, context, and mechanisms have changed today. We conclude with a net assessment of the observed trends.

An analysis of a state's national will to fight during a conflict should be able to account for when belligerents chose to go to war, when they sought peace, when major war objectives or strategy changed (i.e., agility), or other significant changes in observed belligerent tolerance for risk and sacrifice. We assess changes in national will to fight and other variables based on revealed preferences derived by the timing of key events and expressed preferences drawn from archival evidence of what key actors' preferences and motivations were. We use the measures identified in Chapter Two to characterize changes in variable values.

In the Korean War, we find that North Korea began with important national will to fight advantages that eroded as the war went on, eventually giving South Korea a significant advantage. The most important factors were popular support, cohesion, and allies. In a new conflict on the peninsula, key factors would likely include stakes, cohesion, capabilities, and allies; furthermore, allies could influence South Korea's expectation of victory, a key theme.

Korean War

Our analysis of the Korean War begins with a brief description of the conflict, followed by a description of how our dependent variable—national will to fight—changed for both sides over the course of the conflict. We then describe our findings from applying our framework to the history of the Korean War, identifying which independent variables drove our national will to fight outcomes.

At 4:00 a.m. on June 25, 1950, North Korea invaded South Korea, seeking to reunify a Korea divided by U.S. and Soviet agreement. Both North Korea and South Korea saw dramatic turns of fortune during the opening months of the war, followed by a relatively static war of attrition until the conclusion of hostilities in an armistice in 1953.¹ This level of variance in warfighting conditions for both sides gives ample opportunity to observe the national will to fight performance of participants. Close to 10 percent of Korea's population had become casualties by the war's end, so the will to fight of both sides was certainly stressed.² An important obstacle to assessing outcomes in this case is that neither North nor South Korea had decisive influence on its own side's decision to settle the conflict—allies did. This obstacle can be overcome through a careful process that traces key leader preferences and actions, based partly on sources released following the conclusion of the Cold War.

In the first phase of the conventional conflict, lasting just two months, South Korean and U.S. forces on the peninsula suffered terrible losses, the disintegration of major units, and a frequently disorderly retreat to a final defensive perimeter in the southeastern-most corner of the peninsula along the Nakdong River—what came to be known as the Pusan Perimeter. By the conclusion of the first phase, the best of North Korea's forces had been significantly attrited as they impaled themselves with suicidal zeal on the finally consolidated defensive lines of South Korean, U.S., and other allied United Nations (UN) forces (hereafter collectively referred to as UN forces).

In the second phase, from early September to early November 1950, UN forces conducted an amphibious envelopment, landing at Incheon to seize Seoul, bypassing and cutting off North Korean forces operating to the south. UN forces still in Pusan were then able to punch through the weakened North Korean forces, which essentially collapsed after losing 40 percent of their men.³ UN forces pursued North Korean forces nearly to the Yalu River when Chinese forces counterattacked, drawing the UN's wild rush north to a halt.

In the third phase, both sides initially achieved significant movement south and north of the 38th parallel through attack and counterattack, but by February 1951, it was clear that neither side was likely to conclude the war through a decisive military victory.⁴ By June 1951, fighting settled into a protracted stalemate just north of the 38th parallel in the east and south of it in the west, leading the Soviets to propose a ceasefire. Although the stalemate was characterized by harrowing battles, little terri-

¹ Clay Blair, *The Forgotten War: America in Korea 1950–1953*, New York: Anchor, 1989.

² Charles K. Armstrong, "The Destruction and Reconstruction of North Korea, 1950–1960," *Asia-Pacific Journal*, Vol. 7, No. 0, March 16, 2009.

³ Donald W. Boose and James I. Matray, eds., *The Ashgate Research Companion to the Korean War*, Farnham, UK: Routledge, 2014.

⁴ Allan R. Millett, *The War for Korea, 1950–1951: They Came from the North*, Lawrence, Kan.: University Press of Kansas, 2010.

tory changed control before the armistice was signed after an additional two years of combat and negotiations.⁵

National Will to Fight

After decades of Japanese occupation during the first half of the 20th century, Koreans in both the North and South were passionately committed to independence. Both sides felt that full independence would occur only with the restoration of a unified Korea. In the initial phase of the Korean War, both the North and South Korean governments had firm policy commitments to the forcible reunification of the peninsula. However, the North enjoyed important national will to fight advantages over the South, resulting chiefly from popular and allied support. The North's popular support helped it avoid the rebellions and insurgencies that beset the South, while greater allied support allowed it to better prepare for the war that the governments of both North and South wanted.⁶ The greater social and allied unity on the North's side enabled it to firmly commit to war. If these factors had been reversed, there's little reason to doubt that the South would have invaded the North.

The North's initial advantage in national will to fight did not change until the stalemate on the ground removed any expectation that the North would make any significant additional territorial gains and led the United States to seek advantage in negotiations through massive bombings of the North that took a terrible toll on the civilian population and eroded will to fight.⁷ The United States dropped more tons of bombs on Korea than it did in the Pacific during WW II.⁸ The destruction of North Korean dams caused massive floods and damage to North Korean agriculture, threatening the North with starvation.⁹ By February 1952, Kim Il-sung wanted an

⁵ Blair, 1989.

⁶ Boose and Matray, 2014.

⁷ The United States started strategic bombing attacks against North Korean cities and industrial zones during the first months of the war, essentially running out of targets by October 1950. The focus of the air campaign gradually turned to air interdiction. The air campaign resumed its focus on civilian targets in spring 1952. The attacks did not focus on food supply until spring 1953. Air interdiction waxed and waned as an area of focus throughout the war. For more on the limits of these air campaigns, see Robert A. Pape, *Bombing to Win: Air Power and Coercion in War*, Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1996.

⁸ As Armstrong (2009) writes,

By the fall of 1952, there were no effective targets left for U.S. planes to hit. Every significant town, city and industrial area in North Korea had already been bombed. In the spring of 1953, the Air Force targeted irrigation dams on the Yalu River, both to destroy the North Korean rice crop and to pressure the Chinese, who would have to supply more food aid to the North. Five reservoirs were hit, flooding thousands of acres of farmland, inundating whole towns and laying waste to the essential food source for millions of North Koreans.

⁹ Pape, 1996.

armistice and told Mao Zedong bluntly that he had “no desire to continue the war.”¹⁰ Soviet ambassador V. N. Razuvaev reported that Kim felt that “delaying negotiations was not beneficial, because the U.S. Air Force was continuing to inflict damage on [North Korea].”¹¹

In an important sense, North Korea had lost the national will to fight because of a change in experience and expectation of the balance of capabilities and casualties on the peninsula. The stakes of the war were no longer unification, which now seemed deeply unlikely, but rather debates over marginal issues, such as the return of prisoners of war (POWs). Unfortunately for combatants and the Korean people, Kim did not have the power to unilaterally agree to allied terms. North Korea had given up operational control of its forces after their collapse (i.e., loss of capability) and granted a veto over any peace agreements to China as the price of China entering the war.¹² The war dragged on until after Stalin's death, and then—U.S. President Dwight D. Eisenhower's threat to expand the scope of the conflict resulted in a change in Soviet and Chinese policy.¹³

By contrast, South Korea's Syngman Rhee remained committed to forcible unification to the very end of the conflict. U.S. and allied air superiority and the relatively static ground combat rendered South Korea relatively safe for civilians. Whether Rhee would have remained committed if the South had been subjected to similar bombings (and nuclear threats) is unknowable. Both the United States and the communists were concerned about the United States' ability to constrain Rhee's behavior to the proposed terms of the armistice. In one attempt to disrupt the 1953 armistice negotiations, Rhee ordered the release of 27,000 North Korean POWs who did not wish to return north. Ultimately, Rhee's consent was bought through the offer of a formal U.S. military alliance, continued ROK Army expansion, and financial aid.¹⁴

Table 4.1 summarizes the national will to fight variables (organized into factors, contexts, and mechanisms) from the Korean War.

In the next sections, we explain how these variables contributed to the belligerents' national will to fight.

¹⁰ Shen Zhihua, “Sino-North Korean Conflict and Its Resolution During the Korean War,” trans. by Dong Gil Kim and Jeffrey Becker, *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, No. 14/15, 2003, p. 19.

¹¹ Zhihua, 2003, p. 19.

¹² Boose and Matray, 2014.

¹³ Underscoring his lack of autonomy, Kim again sought an immediate armistice after Stalin's death in March 1953 but was overruled by Peng Dehuai (leader of the North Korean and Chinese combined forces) with Mao's support. About 44 percent of U.S. casualties occurred after negotiations began, although the final armistice terms in 1953 were not greatly different from those settled in 1951. See Elizabeth A. Stanley, “Ending the Korean War: The Role of Domestic Coalition Shifts in Overcoming Obstacles to Peace,” *International Security*, Vol. 34, No. 1, 2009; Boose and Matray, 2014; and Zhihua, 2003, p. 19.

¹⁴ Boose and Matray, 2014.

Table 4.1
Summary of National Will to Fight Variables, Korean War

	North Korea	South Korea
Factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Initially, stakes were vital (unification), then existential, and finally (when a full victory seemed unlikely) just important (POW disposition).</i> • Elites were factionalized but cohesive on war policy. • Military was at risk of factionalization and subordination to China. • <i>Popular support was strong.</i> • <i>Allied support was strong.</i> • The industrial advantage was lost. • <i>Initial military capability advantage was lost during the war.</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Initially, stakes were existential, then vital (unification).</i> • Elites were factionalized, and the regime became more authoritarian to maintain control. • Military was at risk of politicization but was effectively indoctrinated during the war. • <i>Initially mixed popular support grew during the war.</i> • <i>Initially mixed allied support grew during the war.</i> • South Korea was economically dependent on the United States throughout the war. • <i>South Korea gained military capability parity on the ground during the war; asymmetric air advantage became crucial later in the war.</i>
Contexts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Totalitarian 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Authoritarian democracy
Mechanisms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The government used indoctrination (including through political organization). • There was effective diplomatic engagement with allies until it was subordinated after military disaster. • <i>The war resulted in military and civilian casualties and destruction.</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unpopular policy and performance made indoctrination challenging. • Ineffective engagement initially grew more effective toward the end of the war. • <i>The war resulted in military and civilian casualties and destruction.</i>

NOTE: Key variables are in italics.

Factors

Changes in relative **capabilities** and both **popular** and **allied support** over the course of the war explain most of the changes in national will to fight. The balance of capabilities had an important direct effect on the expectations of leaders in both North and South Korea and influenced their views of what the stakes of the conflict were. That capability balance was a direct function of allied support, so we place much of our focus there. Government and elite **cohesion** played an important indirect role in influencing popular and allied support.

Popular Support

Kim Il-sung was successful at consolidating political control of the North, while Syngman Rhee was much less successful in the South. This allowed North Korea to focus on building forces and capabilities for a war with South Korea. Moreover, North Korea seriously overestimated the level of popular support that it would receive in the South, thus overinflating its expectations of victory. Collectively, these factors gave North Korea important national will to fight advantages, increasing its willingness to accept the risk of invading South Korea. North Korea's advantage in popular support eroded and became much less significant after the onset of the conflict.¹⁵

South Korea suffered a series of insurgencies and even security service mutinies, driven partly by the new government's failure to make adequate policy and personnel changes (particularly in the Korean National Police) after the Japanese occupation ended but also by dissatisfaction resulting from government corruption and spiraling inflation.¹⁶ Perhaps most dramatically, between 30,000 and 80,000 South Koreans may have been killed on Cheju Island in 1948 by security forces putting down a rebellion. The rebellion originated in opposition to the establishment of a separate South Korean state, seen as ratifying the division of the Korean peninsula.¹⁷ These rebellions diverted policy focus and the development of South Korean military forces from preparing for conventional operations. On the eve of the Korean War, South Korean forces were organized, trained, equipped, and postured for counter-guerilla operations—not an existential war with North Korea. When North Korea invaded, only four ROK Army divisions were assigned to defend the 38th Parallel. Three of the other four divisions were still conducting counter-guerilla operations.¹⁸

South Korean political order remained contested throughout the conflict. Although the worst of the insurgency had been suppressed before the onset of the Korean War, insurgent activity continued throughout the war. Rhee's personal popularity appears to have increased during the war, although this is difficult to judge by the imperfect elections held during the war, marred by Rhee's control of paramilitary forces and police.¹⁹ The conflict itself was a crucible reshaping what nationalism meant in South Korea, intensifying support for the new state. Thus, although popular sup-

¹⁵ James Fearon and David Laitin, "The Two Koreas," draft paper, Palo Alto, Calif.: Stanford University, July 5, 2006; William Stueck, *The Korean War: An International History*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1997; and Boose and Matray, 2014.

¹⁶ Boose and Matray, 2014.

¹⁷ Hwang Su-kyoung, "South Korea, the United States and Emergency Powers During the Korean Conflict," *Asia-Pacific Journal*, Vol. 12, No. 5, January 30, 2014.

¹⁸ Roy E. Appleman, *South to the Naktong, North to the Yalu: United States Army in the Korean War*, Washington, D.C.: Center for Military History, U.S. Army, 1992.

¹⁹ Boose and Matray, 2014.

port may have grown during the conflict, internal political strife weakened the South Korean national will to fight, especially early in the conflict.

North Korea did not suffer any insurgencies comparable to what occurred in the South. Kim Il-sung's regime drew its stability from his legitimacy as a counter-Japanese guerilla, his political savvy and ruthlessness in dealing with other North Korean communist factions, populist policies (including land reform and punishment of those who collaborated with the Japanese), and Soviet support and understanding of North Korean conditions.²⁰ During the Soviets' occupation of northern Korea after WW II, they had brought thousands of Koreans who had been living in the Soviet Union and allowed for thousands more (disarmed) ethnic Korean Chinese Communists to return to North Korea. In contrast to the U.S. occupation of southern Korea, the Soviets also recognized the authority of indigenous people's committees and were largely successful in facilitating a united front among the four main communist factions, which strengthened will to fight.

The North Koreans wildly overestimated the level of popular support they could expect in the South. Kim Il-sung had been told to expect 200,000 South Koreans to rise in rebellion against their government when he invaded.²¹ This initial misperception, the belief that they would be greeted as liberators, likely artificially enhanced the North Korean will to fight.

Cohesion

The continuing lack of political cohesion within the South after the onset of the conflict constituted a significant distraction from the war. To a lesser extent, Kim Il-sung's concerns with potential political challenges from other North Korean communist factions, particularly those with a stronger relationship with China, imposed their own distractions. In both cases, lack of cohesion undermined the belligerents' national will to fight, demonstrated through limits to their willingness to sacrifice political control to achieve unity of effort within their respective alliances.

In South Korea, at the elite level, Rhee's poor relationship with the National Assembly led to a constitutional crisis in May 1952. Rhee declared martial law in Pusan (then seat of the Republic of Korea's government) after the National Assembly refused to alter the constitution to provide for direct presidential elections. Rhee ordered the detention of 50 opposition politicians and ultimately had them confined until they passed his constitutional amendment.

The crisis took on operational implications when Rhee demanded that ROK Army troops be pulled from the front to aid in the crackdown.²² He sought to politicize the

²⁰ Fearon and Laitin, 2006.

²¹ Boose and Matray, 2014.

²² Doris M. Condit, *History of the Office of the Secretary of Defense*, Vol. 2: *The Test of War, 1950–1953*, Washington, D.C.: Office of the Secretary of Defense, 1988.

ROK Army's senior generals, prioritizing political loyalty over competence, but, from the ROK Army reform period through the remainder of the conflict, the most-senior generals proved themselves able professionals.²³ Moreover, the rapid expansion of the officer corps overwhelmed the capacity of different political factions to shape the political character of junior and mid-level officers.²⁴ Civil-military relations in South Korea might have eroded will to fight (especially in comparison with North Korea) if the military's politicization had degraded the quality of the officer corps, but this does not appear to have been the case.

Elite factionalism presented a significant threat to North Korean stability, but that factionalism never spilled into the street, making it the dog that did not bark.²⁵ Throughout the war, Kim continued to consolidate control, purging political rivals for operational failures. The greatest risk to elite unity came when Mao demanded operational control over North Korean forces as part of China's agreement to intervene. As a result, Kim was faced with a situation where most of the Korean People's Army (KPA) generals were from the rival Yan'an faction (veterans of the Chinese civil war), including the deputy commander of the combined forces. In response, to secure his own institutional control of the KPA, Kim established KPA party committees and a political commissar system that continues to this day.²⁶

Allies

Initially, North Korea enjoyed a significant national will to fight advantage derived from superior allied support. Over time, this advantage eroded as the United States committed itself to the war, strengthening the South Korean military. The U.S. asymmetric capability in airpower during the conflict gave South Korea a significant advantage, using both air interdiction and countervalue (i.e., strikes against nonmilitary targets, such as civilian infrastructure) targeting to make the stalemate on the ground more painful for North Korea than the South.²⁷ This reduced North Korea's national will to fight, as expectations of what was militarily feasible declined and the perceived stakes of the conflict seemed to collapse from unification to the final disposition of (Chinese) POWs and keeping the United States in a quagmire advantageous to the Soviet Union, which further reduced the North's appetite for sacrifice.²⁸

²³ Bryan Robert Gibby, *Fighting in a Korean War: The American Advisory Missions from 1946–1953*, Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State University, 2004.

²⁴ Choong Nam Kim, "The Impact of the Korean War on the Korean Military," *International Journal of Korean Studies*, Spring/Summer 2001.

²⁵ Stueck, 1997.

²⁶ Boose and Matray, 2014.

²⁷ Karl Mueller, "Strategies of Coercion: Denial, Punishment, and the Future of Air Power," *Security Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 3, 1998.

²⁸ Millett, 2010; Stueck, 1997.

Prior to the war, North Korea received far superior support from the Soviet Union than South Korea did from the United States. In part, this was an effect of U.S. domestic pressures to reduce defense spending, but it also reflected a trust deficit in the relationship between Syngman Rhee and then-U.S. President Harry Truman, stemming back to U.S. reconstruction efforts at the end of WW II. Neither Stalin nor Truman wanted a war on the Korean peninsula to result in WW III. While Stalin felt confident that North Korea would not unilaterally begin a war on the peninsula without his authorization, the United States did not have the same confidence in Rhee's reliability.²⁹ The concern was not unfounded; many (perhaps most) of the 1949 border incidents were initiated by the South.³⁰

North Korea and the Soviet Union were able to overcome the principal-agent dilemma, while South Korea and the United States were not. The Soviets' confidence in their relationship with North Korea gave them the confidence to make serious investments in North Korea's conventional capabilities. U.S. anxieties over South Korean behavior led U.S. leaders to attempt to restrain Rhee by limiting the capabilities provided to the ROK Army.

Soviet support for the development of North Korean military forces was unambiguous. When the Soviet 25th Army departed North Korea in 1948, they left behind all of their weapons for the new North Korean forces, enough for 120,000 soldiers. The Soviet Union provided North Korea with tanks, self-propelled artillery, and small arms. North Korea drew extensive support from China as well, particularly in the form of ethnic Korean units and veterans of China's civil war. Officer training began as soon as the Soviets occupied North Korea. Many North Korean military leaders had already learned about combined arms tactics during combat against Japan or Chinese nationalists.³¹ The result was an organizationally mature KPA capable of conducting conventional combat operations.

By contrast, the ROK Army was essentially equipped with small arms, mortars, and light artillery. Moreover, the army had equipment for only 50,000 of 95,000 men.³² As a result, the ROK Army lacked the armor and heavy artillery required to seriously contest North Korean forces during the first year of the war. The ROK Army's institutional problems were deeper than equipment, though. South Korean soldiers repeatedly showed themselves to be courageous fighters, many willing to conduct suicidal attacks against the North Korean T-34 tanks armed with little more than rifles and Molotov cocktails, but the ROK Army suffered significant unit and officer training deficits that were not seriously addressed by the United States until a year after the

²⁹ Condit, 1988.

³⁰ Bruce Cumings, *Origins of the Korean War*, Vol. 2: *The Roaring of the Cataract, 1947–1950*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1990.

³¹ Gibby, 2004.

³² Kim, 2001.

conflict had begun. Barely half of ROK Army units had completed company-level training, and only five of 22 regiments had trained battalions. No unit training above the battalion level occurred before the war. These capability weaknesses likely reduced confidence and thus will to fight at every level.

The resulting advantages in capabilities enjoyed by the North gave it reasonable grounds to expect victory—expectations inflated by an inaccurate anticipation of widespread Southern support for communist intervention—which enhanced its national will to fight and ultimately led to the invasion. By contrast, the South's national will to fight was constrained by the recognition of shortfalls in its own capabilities, which rendered the South unwilling to do more than conduct low-level military provocations, most prominently in 1949.³³

As the conflict stabilized into a long-term stalemate, the ROK Army committed to deep institutional reform under U.S. military guidance, including leader selection and development and unit training. U.S. Lt. Gen. Matthew Ridgway coerced these changes, refusing to support Rhee's desire to expand the ROK Army's size or provide its units with greater firepower until the reforms took place, but these reforms could not have been successful if the ROK Army had not embraced them. By 1952, the ROK Army had proven its tactical proficiency in combat, and by 1953, it held responsibility for two-thirds of the front, increasing the confidence of the South Korean government and its U.S. ally and thus strengthening will to fight on both accounts.³⁴

Strong allied support may have had some pernicious effects. Corruption was a problem for the South Korean military and government before the start of the war, but some sources claim that it grew worse as the United States increased its materiel support during the war.³⁵ The flood of resources coming from the United States, coupled with poor accounting and accountability procedures, increased the benefits and reduced the expected costs of corruption.³⁶

Government and military corruption no doubt had a significant effect on troop morale and efficacy. In one infamous case from 1951, during the retreat of UN forces from Chinese counterattack, 1,000 reserve enlisted men died of "starvation, illness, and exposure" after their resources had been misappropriated by the national reserve's leadership. This national reserve force was led by officers appointed by Rhee from his own right-wing paramilitary forces. In the wake of this scandal, the minister of

³³ Boose and Matray, 2014.

³⁴ Gibby, 2004.

³⁵ Kim, 2001.

³⁶ Records of South Korean corruption are much easier to come by than records of North Korean corruption, but this may simply be an artifact of the closed nature of the North Korean regime. As a result, we cannot judge whether either side enjoyed a significant advantage on this issue.

national defense was fired and 11 national defense forces leaders were court-martialed. After a four-day trial, five of the court-martialed were sentenced to execution.³⁷

This level of corruption certainly must have had deleterious effects on morale and readiness; however, had it been addressed before the onset of the war, the ROK Army would not have been much better situated to prevent the North Korean invasion, because of the profound disparity in capabilities. U.S. forces did not suffer from corruption but performed no better until consolidating in Pusan. Task Force Smith is only one example of U.S. forces collapsing in disarray during the withdrawal south. The Rhee regime suffered from corruption throughout the war and after. Despite this, the ROK armed forces successfully conducted transformative reforms and expansion in the midst of war. The ability of the ROK Army to successfully fight against Chinese forces by the end of the conflict suggests that, although high-level corruption may have degraded military readiness, it was not of sufficient scale to have a decisive effect on South Korea's will to fight.³⁸

Contexts

The context variables identified here principally affected the belligerents' national will to fight indirectly, through the factors elaborated on in the previous section. **Government type** had its greatest influence on national will to fight indirectly through its effect on popular support and elite cohesion. The **conflict duration** did not have significant impact on either North or South Korea directly but did have some effect indirectly through allied strength and support. Stalin saw advantages to bogging down the United States in Asia, while the American public, which had little appreciation for the conflict to begin with, grew increasingly dissatisfied with its costs. Neither the North's nor the South's **economy** was particularly resilient under the strain of war. Similar to the issue of duration, given the resource constraints placed by Congress on the defense establishment, the U.S. government was reluctant to continue committing resources to a conflict in a region that they considered to be of secondary importance relative to Europe.

Mechanisms

Among the mechanisms identified in this case study, **engagement** appears to have played a crucial role in influencing will to fight at both the onset and conclusion of the conflict. **Indoctrination** was likely an important enabler of popular support (particularly in North Korea). The effect of **casualties** was muted by North Korea's loss of autonomy over war policy.

³⁷ Boose and Matray, 2014.

³⁸ A reasonable counterargument is that the original constitutional order of the Republic of Korea was fatally damaged by Rhee's authoritarian moves to consolidate power, which were undoubtedly aided by corruption. While this is certainly of profound significance to the history of South Korea, this issue is different from will to fight.

Early in the conflict, the infliction of casualties no doubt stressed both sides' will to fight, but it was only as the stalemate dragged on that U.S. forces' ability to inflict casualties throughout the depth of the peninsula had a decisive effect on North Korea's national will to fight. By that time, North Korea no longer had the autonomy to negotiate an armistice without Soviet and Chinese consent. North Korea may have suffered close to 650,000 military and 1.5 million civilian casualties (22 percent of the population).³⁹ South Korea suffered close to 590,000 military and 1 million civilian casualties (8 percent of the population). This level of civilian death created war weariness on both sides, which eroded will to fight.

Allied support for both North and South Korea also influenced will to fight and was ultimately driven by the geopolitical considerations of each side's allies, sometimes overwhelming more-local interests and preferences. However, North Korea almost certainly benefited at the onset of the conflict from Kim Il-sung's persistent diplomatic engagement with the Soviet Union and China. Rhee's relationship with the United States was more problematic, but, at the end of the conflict, his hardball engagement almost certainly resulted in more favorable terms for South Korea, situating the country for a more secure future. Kim Il-sung's own intra-alliance engagement was essentially ineffectual after he ceded control of North Korean forces to China.⁴⁰

North Korea's use of indoctrination was more successful than South Korea's, although distinguishing the effects of indoctrination and popular policies is problematic at best. North Korea's political project was more populist in character and was able to leverage grass roots organizations, while South Korea's colonial institutions and the anti-communist policies of the United States were necessarily antagonistic to them.⁴¹ Before the conventional phase of the conflict broke out, South Korea purged its armed forces of many communist and antigovernment factions, while North Korea enjoyed dependable military cadres from the Chinese civil war and counter-Japanese partisans. After the onset of the conflict, South Korea successfully increased the professionalism of its force, while Kim Il-sung appears to have focused on increasing the political reliability of the KPA.⁴² A mix of indoctrination and domestic policy played an important role in affecting elite and popular cohesion. When successful, national leaders were able to avoid additional strains on the national will to fight. When unsuccessful, leaders in North and South Korea were sometimes forced to decide between military efficacy and political control. Typically, they favored political control, even at

³⁹ Armstrong, 2009. Estimates of the number of North Korean casualties vary widely, and North Korea does not report official figures. Armstrong (2009) estimates that 12–15 percent of the North Korean population was killed during the war.

⁴⁰ Stueck, 1997.

⁴¹ Boose and Matray, 2014; Stueck, 1997.

⁴² Gibby, 2004; Boose and Matray, 2014.

the risk of reduced expectations of military victory, indicative of an eroded national will to fight.⁴³

Case Summary

At the onset of the conflict, both North and South Korea were committed at the policy level to the forcible unification of the peninsula, reflecting widely held postcolonial commitments to independence on both sides. North Korea initially enjoyed substantial national will to fight advantages derived from greater popular and allied support. The greater popular and allied support translated into both quantitative and qualitative military capability and institutional advantages. The resulting military capability and institutional advantages disappeared during the second phase, as time passed and U.S. and other UN reinforcements arrived, increasing allied support for South Korea. The significance and scale of North Korea's popular support advantage declined after the onset of war. The capability advantage in air dominance that South Korea enjoyed through superior allied support during the third phase of the conflict left North Korea at a profound disadvantage, which ultimately eroded its national will to fight.

Contemporary National Will to Fight

The sources of national will to fight for North and South Korea have changed dramatically since the Korean War. The significance of national will to fight advantages today depend on the type of conflict being fought: limited provocation and counter-provocation, conventional war, or nuclear war. Key factors across these scenarios include stakes, cohesion, and allied strength and support; expectation of military victory is a key theme.

National will to fight is a relative and context-dependent characteristic, rendering generic characterizations of a state's national will to fight problematic. A scenario involving objectives, options, and risks is needed. Characterizing national will to fight as high or low only makes sense relative to an adversary and works best when considered within the parameters of a potential conflict. A nation with a low will to fight in one scenario involving low stakes may have a much higher will to fight in a scenario where the stakes are existential. We identify three types of possible conflicts on the peninsula that are distinct enough from one another to have meaningfully different implications for national will to fight.

Here, we briefly review national will to fight in provocation and nuclear scenarios before looking in greater depth at will to fight in conventional war. The outcome of a limited cycle of provocation and counter-provocation does not have the same significance for belligerents as a conventional war (unless it escalates), while analysis of

⁴³ Boose and Matray, 2014; Stueck, 1997; Zhihua, 2003, p. 19; Millett, 2010.

national will to fight during a nuclear war suffers from a thin empirical record. Examining national will to fight in the context of a conventional war allows us to examine a broad range of factors that have important policy implications. We continue to use variables drawn from our national will to fight framework to assess the contemporary case on the Korean peninsula.

Limited Provocations: Stakes and Cohesion

In a limited conflict of provocation and counter-provocation (e.g., strikes on key industrial facilities or isolated military units), the South's much greater socioeconomic success creates many more pressure points for the North to target than are available to the South.⁴⁴ The North's political and military elite have a much narrower range of concerns than the South, creating an asymmetry of stakes in the conflict that reflect both economic and political disparities. Differences in regime type make South Korean leaders more sensitive to popular preferences and support, which can have unpredictable effects on national will to fight. However, it seems likely that the elite commitment to the current regime is much weaker in the North than in the South.⁴⁵ If a cycle of provocations went particularly poorly and escalated in an uncontrolled fashion, a coup is far more likely in the North than in the South.⁴⁶ The South's national will to fight may be more vulnerable to coercion on marginal issues (e.g., propaganda dissemination), but the North is fundamentally more fragile.

During limited conflicts and provocations, China may denounce North Korea's leadership but will likely sustain whatever level of trade with North Korea that China believes is necessary to ensure the North Korean regime's survival and preserve a buffer between U.S. forces and China (unless China believes it can engineer a North Korean coup).⁴⁷ This confidence in some minimal level of Chinese support will likely make North Korea more tolerant of risk, enhancing its national will to fight. Nonetheless, sanctions will likely still be an important lever for dealing with this class of crises.

Nuclear War: Stakes, Cohesion, and Allies

The presence of North Korean nuclear weapons fundamentally changes the character of the context in which we examine national will to fight. The North is developing an asymmetric advantage that presents an existential threat not just to the South Korean government but also to South Korean society as a whole. Moreover, North Korea also

⁴⁴ Ken E. Gause, *North Korea's Provocation and Escalation Calculus: Dealing with the Kim Jong-un Regime*, Arlington, Va.: CNA, 2015b.

⁴⁵ Ken E. Gause, *North Korean House of Cards: Leadership Dynamics Under Kim Jong-un*, Washington, D.C.: Committee for Human Rights in North Korea, 2015a.

⁴⁶ Kim Ki-Joo, "The Soldier and the State in South Korea: Crafting Democratic Civilian Control of the Military," *Journal of International and Area Studies*, Vol. 21, No. 2, 2014.

⁴⁷ Sean Illing, "China's North Korea Problem Is Worse Than Ours," *Vox*, August 10, 2017.

seeks to use intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) to offset another key source of South Korea's national will to fight—U.S. support. The defense investments and concepts highlighted in South Korea's 2016 White Paper appear to reveal a concern over the dependability of U.S. support during a crisis, as well as a commitment to creating unilateral options for responding to North Korean nuclear capabilities.⁴⁸ This strategic agility and resolve suggest a high level of national will to fight.

If a nuclear exchange between North Korea, South Korea, and the United States is unrestrained, then ultimately South Korea and the United States will likely sustain their national will to fight and physically annihilate North Korea's ability to continue the war (although the costs to all parties, in terms of civilian and military lives, would be high). If a nuclear war on the peninsula is strategic, characterized by restraint and targeting based on bargaining strategies, then the question of national will to fight becomes important again. Tolerance for risk and sacrifice, artifacts of a national will to fight, are an important element in brinkmanship.⁴⁹ As in the case of limited provocations, the South has many more vulnerable targets than the North and may prefer negotiations to the loss of major cities. However, elite cohesion in North Korea may be severely strained if key actors believe that Kim Jong-un is driving North Korea toward annihilation, and a coup may cut short the nuclear bargaining.

Given the centrality of nuclear weapons to North Korean strategic thinking, it seems implausible that a conventional war along the lines of the 2003 invasion of Iraq could take place without rapidly escalating into a nuclear conflict. However, if South Korean and U.S. preemptive strikes against nuclear targets were particularly effective, or if North Korea's nuclear inventory is particularly limited or unreliable, important differences in national will to fight advantages would present themselves, and the effect of national will to fight would come to more closely resemble the conditions of a conventional war.

Conventional War: Stakes, Cohesion, Capabilities, and Allies

The North has strong reason to believe that it would not fare well during a conventional conflict with South Korea and the United States.⁵⁰ Despite the indoctrination of the North Korean public, elites involved in strategic decisionmaking almost certainly are more pessimistic in their expectations of victory. Lessons learned from observing U.S. interventions in Iraq and Libya are likely important motivations for the North's

⁴⁸ South Korea's most important concepts and investments include preemptive strike capabilities (Kill Chain), missile defense (Korea Air and Missile Defense), and countervalue strike capabilities (Korean Massive Punishment and Retaliation). See Ministry of National Defense, *2016 Defense White Paper*, Seoul: Republic of Korea, 2017.

⁴⁹ Thomas C. Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2008.

⁵⁰ Michael E. O'Hanlon, "Stopping a North Korean Invasion: Why Defending South Korea Is Easier Than the Pentagon Thinks," *International Security*, Vol. 22, No. 4, 1998.

pursuit of nuclear weapons.⁵¹ However, the vulnerability of South Korea's population and industrial centers to North Korean retaliation would likely make a war with the North comparably appalling to the South, negatively affecting the South's expectation of a victory worth the cost. Most observers think it is unlikely that either North or South would start a conventional war intentionally, but many remain concerned that a conventional conflict might be initiated unintentionally through a process of escalation arising from provocations and miscalculation.

In the event of a conventional conflict, key factors affecting national will to fight include stakes, cohesion, military capabilities, and allies. During the Korean War, the most critical factors affecting the advantage in national will to fight were popular support and allied strength. Popular support is unlikely to play as important a role in the next conflict. Although South Korea's now consolidated democracy likely has a much more resilient basis of support than the North's autocracy, neither side is likely to see an insurgency that could dramatically divide national will to fight during major combat operations. Regime type reinforces this insensitivity to popular support in the North. In the South—even though it is, in principle, more sensitive to changes in popular support because it is a democracy—a conventional conflict would likely be relatively brief in duration, significantly less than one year (although stability operations might last much longer).

Stakes

In the event of a conventional conflict, one strategy North Korea might pursue is to maintain a stalwart defense along the Korean Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) against South Korea, at least until U.S. ground reinforcements begin arriving several weeks later, while conducting strikes against increasingly sensitive targets, or with increasingly lethal weapons, seeking to coerce South Korea into ceasing the conflict. North Korea's long-range artillery could barrage Seoul with chemical munitions. Furthermore, North Korea's ballistic missiles can easily range every city on the peninsula, rendering all potentially vulnerable to nuclear blackmail.

If North Korea demonstrated a resilient capability to target major population centers as the conflict wore on, South Korea's political leadership may find it difficult to justify continued fighting if doing so would likely result in millions of additional civilian casualties. If North Korea employed the majority of its weapons of mass destruction early in the conflict, leaving the South with nothing more to fear but much to retaliate for, then the South would likely retain its national will to fight because of the differences in how its tolerance for sacrifice and risk are stressed under these different scenarios. Under these conditions, even if South Korea is confident in its expectations of an ultimate victory, consideration of marginal costs measured in hundreds of thousands of lives could have a significant impact on its national will to fight.

⁵¹ Joseph S. Bermudez, Jr., "KPA Lessons Learned from Foreign Conflicts," *KPA Journal*, Vol. 1, No. 9, September 2010.

Cohesion

As an autocracy, North Korea undoubtedly suffers less dissent than South Korea when Kim Jong-un commits to a particular policy. However, South Korea almost certainly enjoys an advantage in elite cohesion over the North with respect to core questions of regime legitimacy.

A key determinant of any conflict outcome is whether North Korea's elites will remain loyal to Kim Jong-un if they perceive that North Korea is likely to lose—thereby limiting elite expectations of victory—or even simply suffer significant losses. North Korea's elites have substantial incentives to fear for their families and own lives if the North Korean regime collapses.⁵² North Korea is a notoriously closed society, rendering any prediction suspect, and no consensus exists among analysts regarding the stability of the Kim regime.⁵³ This could ultimately erode North Korea's will to fight in certain scenarios.

Kim Jong-un's behavior since becoming Supreme Leader in 2011 indicates deliberate efforts to coup-proof his regime.⁵⁴ Senior military commanders are frequently rotated. And key political figures seen as particularly close to China have been executed or assassinated in recent years, including Kim Jong-un's uncle and half-brother. This would seem to indicate that Kim is concerned that an increasingly impatient China might search for alternative partners to lead North Korea.

South Korean democracy today is strikingly different from Syngman Rhee's time. Although corruption remains a concern for South Koreans and full civilian control of the military remains contested, the prospect of a coup is unlikely.⁵⁵

Given that Kim Jong-un himself appears to suffer significant doubts over the loyalty of North Korean elites, and given the firm consolidation of South Korean democracy over the past two decades, South Korea draws important national will to fight advantages from elite cohesion. Having cohesion allows actors to accept greater strategic and operational risks without fear of a coup, which strengthens national will to fight.

⁵² Bruce W. Bennett, *Preparing North Korean Elites for Unification*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-1985-KOF, 2017.

⁵³ "Defectors Think Most North Koreans Approve of Kim Jong Un," NPR, 2013; Ken E. Gause, *North Korean Leadership Dynamics and Decision-Making Under Kim Jong-un: A Second Year Assessment*, Alexandria, Va.: CNA, 2014; Choe Sang-hun, "North Korean Defector Says Kim Jong-un's Control Is Crumbling," *New York Times*, January 25, 2017a; Choe Sang-hun, "As Economy Grows, North Korea's Grip on Society Is Tested," *New York Times*, April 30, 2017b.

⁵⁴ Gause, 2014; Gordon G. Chang, "North Korea's Generals Could Turn Against Kim Jong Un," *Daily Beast*, February 11, 2016.

⁵⁵ Kim, 2014.

Capabilities

Neither side has a clear advantage in national will to fight based on military capability or the related expectation of victory. Expectation of victory for each side is not a function of relative military capability and capacity. Rather, it reflects the difficulty of the task that each side faces and each country's assessment of the opponent's own will to fight, among many other factors. The North's armed forces likely suffer significant readiness, capability, and leadership deficits relative to their South Korean counterparts, but the South Korean military is likely to be confronted with the much more challenging task of conducting offensive operations against the well-prepared defenses of a numerically superior enemy.⁵⁶

North Korean troops may suffer serious readiness and morale deficits stemming from insufficient spares, fuel, and other critical resources, perhaps even having to spend portions of the year growing their own food.⁵⁷ However, North Korean forces may have an accrued training advantage because their conscriptions last for ten years for men, while South Korean men are conscripted into the army for only 21 months.⁵⁸ Meanwhile, South Korea's armed forces have wrestled with hazing and suicide among conscripts, suggesting unresolved discipline issues.⁵⁹ That said, in surveys, South Korean youth still display a strong sense of national pride and commitment to national security, though somewhat lower than previous generations. In one survey, 27 percent of those aged 20 to 29 reported that they would join the military if the country went to war.⁶⁰

In a conventional war, the South's superior capabilities would increase its expectations of military victory over the North, which might provide a will to fight advantage, if only temporarily. South Korea continues to modernize its armed forces' equipment, while North Korea's armed forces have seen little modernization outside of niche areas since the end of the Cold War. As an example, the South Korean K-2 Black Panther tanks are comparable in capability to modern U.S. tanks, while North Korea's most modern tank, the Pokpung-ho, is largely based on Soviet T-62s and T-72s—systems U.S. forces decisively overmatched in 1991 during Operation Desert Storm.⁶¹

South Korea's national will to fight would be significantly tested crossing the DMZ during a conventional war with North Korea. South Korean soldiers would con-

⁵⁶ There is a consensus in the literature that North Korea could not successfully invade South Korea (O'Hanlon, 1998).

⁵⁷ IHS Markit, *Jane's World Armies*, London, 2015.

⁵⁸ Kim Yoo-sung, "Trying Not to Starve in the N. Korean Army," *NK News*, September 9, 2015; Ministry of National Defense, 2017.

⁵⁹ Choe Sang-hun, "Outrage Builds in South Korea in Deadly Abuse of a Soldier," *New York Times*, August 6, 2014.

⁶⁰ Kwangsik Kim, "Historical Awareness of the Post-War Generation in Korea and National and Social Responsibility," *Korean Journal of Defense Analysis*, Vol. 22, No. 4, 2010.

⁶¹ IHS Markit, 2015.

front dense fortifications that North Korea has spent more than 60 years constructing, along with numerically superior forces. Depending on the time of year, much of the terrain may not be traversable by armor. North Korea would almost certainly employ its large stocks of chemical munitions against invading forces. South Korean forces attacking across the DMZ would experience high casualty rates in combat that has more in common with WW I than with recent conflicts.

South Korea's military leadership seems more likely to exercise initiative and flexibility than the North's, which enhances the South's national will to fight by providing it with greater strategic flexibility. South Korean military personnel sometimes attend U.S. military schools; annually participate in combined military exercises with U.S. units; and, in some instances, are integrated into combined tactical units with U.S. forces (e.g., the U.S. Army's 2nd Infantry Division). These interactions contribute to the South Korean armed forces' stature as a modern and professional military.⁶² By contrast, the system of political oversight and coercion in the North Korean military likely reduces the level of initiative and flexibility exercised because even an unauthorized troop movement can result in an officer being purged.⁶³ The Korean Workers' Party has political officers in a chain of command parallel to the military's running throughout the KPA.⁶⁴ As one analyst observed, "in North Korea, will to fight is built on an enormous myth. Puncturing bits of myth does not mean that you are going to break it. Coercion is very effective—but when you remove the coercion, will to fight collapses."⁶⁵ There is some evidence that the level of ideological conformity among North Korean youth has eroded in recent decades, particularly following the famines of the 1990s.⁶⁶ North Korean ideological commitment would likely be bolstered by U.S. participation in the conflict, enflaming nationalist sentiments, and ultimately boosting the North's national will to fight.

Moreover, after the 2010 sinking of the ROKS *Cheonan* by a North Korean submarine and the subsequent North Korean shelling of Yeonpyeong Island the same year, South Korea's senior military leadership appears to have conducted a serious reassessment of strategy and approach to North Korean provocations, seeing the incidents as military failures.⁶⁷ As a result, South Korean senior military and political leaders have become more risk-tolerant, adopting a bias for aggressive response to provocations that

⁶² Ministry of National Defense, 2017.

⁶³ "Discipline of N. Korean Army Seriously Degraded," *Korea Herald*, January 12, 2017.

⁶⁴ Joseph S. Bermudez, Jr., *The Armed Forces of North Korea*, London: I.B. Tauris, 2001.

⁶⁵ Expert from the Centre for Historical Analysis and Conflict Research, UK, interview with the authors, September 2017.

⁶⁶ Jieun Baek, *North Korea's Hidden Revolution: How the Information Underground Is Transforming a Closed Society*, New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2016.

⁶⁷ Kim Duk-ki, "The Republic of Korea's Counter-Asymmetric Strategy: Lessons from ROKS *Cheonan* and Yeonpyeong Island," *Naval War College Review*, Vol. 65, No. 1, 2012, p. 55.

may carry over into conventional war.⁶⁸ The strategic advisability of reducing crisis stability on the peninsula as North Korea increases its nuclear inventory and yields may be debatable, but it does signal a robust national will to fight.

Allies

South Korea would likely enjoy important advantages in allied support during a conventional war. These advantages would bolster the nation's sense of legitimacy, more directly enhancing the South's will to fight and its expectations of victory. Prior to the onset of the conflict, substantial differences might exist in U.S. and South Korean policy preferences, but the close operational integration of U.S. and South Korean forces demonstrates a far deeper U.S. commitment to supporting South Korea during conflict than North Korea could expect from anywhere, including China.⁶⁹ However, as noted earlier, U.S. participation in the conflict would likely enflame nationalist sentiments in the North, enhancing national will to fight there.

North Korea will likely design its operations to create exploitable gaps between U.S. and South Korean forces at the operational level—for example, by striking intermediate staging bases (e.g., the two bases on Guam) and sea ports of debarkation (e.g., Busan Naval Base). The North's investments in ICBMs are clearly intended to create a strategic gap between U.S. and South Korean interests. Kim Jong-un wants both South Korean and U.S. leaders questioning whether the United States is willing to sacrifice Los Angeles to help South Korea. This strategy would aim to reduce allied support but also directly reduce South Korea's expectations of victory, undermining its national will to fight.

China may intervene militarily to establish its own buffer zone within a collapsing North Korea and has options for complicating South Korean and U.S. military operations (e.g., posturing S-400 air defense systems nearby), but China is unlikely to deliberately enter into a direct conflict with the United States to preserve Kim Jong-un's regime.⁷⁰ From North Korea's perspective, China may be able to play a valuable diplomatic role if the Kim regime seeks early conflict termination and a restoration of the status quo ex ante, bringing North Korea's interests into alignment with China's.

⁶⁸ Abraham M. Denmark, *Proactive Deterrence: The Challenge of Escalation Control on the Korean Peninsula*, Washington, D.C.: Korea Economic Institute, 2011.

⁶⁹ Choe Sang-hun, "Allies for 67 Years, U.S. and South Korea Split Over North Korea," *New York Times*, September 4, 2017c.

⁷⁰ Bruce W. Bennett, *Preparing for the Possibility of a North Korean Collapse*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-331-SRF, 2013.

Conclusion

South Korea has important advantages in national will to fight during conventional conflicts, but during limited provocations or threat of nuclear war, North Korea's advantages take on greater significance. Key variables shaping advantages in national will to fight across these scenarios include stakes, cohesion, military capabilities, and allied support, as described below. Policymakers should be sensitive to the levers that both North and South have available to influence these factors. Key levers include military concepts and expectations of victory, personnel policy, indoctrination and messaging, and diplomacy.

- *Stakes*: A key advantage for North Korea is its ability to hold South Korean population centers at risk through conventional and nuclear weapons. The development of North Korean ICBMs extends this problem to the U.S. homeland. To the extent that South Korea and the United States can develop military concepts and capabilities that limit risks to major population centers, the strain on South Korean will to fight will be reduced. The U.S. Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) system and South Korea's current Korea Air and Missile Defense and Kill Chain programs are examples of efforts to address the right threats; however, in the short term, it does not appear that the technology exists to prevent massive casualties from being inflicted upon Seoul in the event of a major conflict on the peninsula. Many South Koreans seem to recognize this and would thus view the onset of any major war as a catastrophe.⁷¹ Marginal changes in military capability are unlikely to assuage these views of a major war but may ameliorate concerns regarding provocations or limited attacks.
- *Cohesion*: Potentially low North Korean elite cohesion may constitute an important national will to fight vulnerability. Military concepts and capabilities, as well as information operations, could be used to exacerbate tensions among North Korean elites. The South's Korean Massive Punishment and Retaliation initiative is a good example of how to increase the perceived risks of conflict to North Korean elites.⁷² This sort of approach could be complemented by information operations that emphasize these risks to senior North Korean military leaders (comparable to information operations conducted during Operation Desert Storm). Conversely, positive incentives could be used through the adoption of attractive policies for the postwar treatment of North Korean elites (e.g., early retirement, pensions, eligibility for advisory positions, loans).⁷³ Messages and the

⁷¹ Han Kang, "While the U.S. Talks of War, South Korea Shudders," *New York Times*, October 7, 2017; and "Most South Koreans Doubt the North Will Start a War: Poll," Reuters, September 8, 2017.

⁷² Ministry of National Defense, 2017.

⁷³ Bennett, 2017.

means of delivery could be developed to focus on key groups of elites rather than more-diffuse efforts at undermining the legitimacy of the Kim regime among the general public. Information operations and policies would be more credible if begun years in advance of the conflict rather than during a crisis.

- *Capabilities*: South Korea could signal a stronger national will to fight by fully funding Ministry of National Defense modernization plans to enhance military capabilities, which are regularly funded below planned levels. Enhanced capabilities could increase South Korea's confidence in its military superiority, thus increasing its expectations of military victory. Developing solutions for military personnel shortfalls that have arisen out of demographic changes is a far more politically challenging hurdle. The ROK armed forces are attempting to offset falling end strength through accelerated modernization, but there are limits to what this can achieve. Other options for addressing shortfalls include expanding the duration of conscriptions or expanding conscription to include women. In 2015, North Korea made the decision to require women to serve in the military for six years—a response to its own demographic challenges stemming from the terrible famine that North Korea suffered during the 1990s.⁷⁴ These enhancements could increase national will to fight levels by enhancing leaders' expectations of military victory.

As noted earlier, however, there is no plausible set of investments that either side could make in the short term that would render a major war less than catastrophic for both countries. South Korea's expectations of military victory in a major war are likely already reasonably high, but conditions on the peninsula make translating a military victory into a policy victory nearly impossible during a major war. Investments in capabilities that address more-limited provocations and attacks may have a greater effect on expectations of victory, thus rendering South Korea less vulnerable to North Korean coercion.

- *Allies*: North Korea and China have drifted far from the relationship that Mao asserted was as close as “lips-to-teeth,” unless we mean that one occasionally bites the other. Nonetheless, how the United States and South Korea manage crisis diplomacy will have an important effect on the number of problems China chooses to make for the allies. The dilemmas likely to be most stressful to the U.S. and South Korean alliance will come in the form of questions about when preemptive strikes are appropriate and what constitute appropriate war termination criteria. The new administrations of the allies need to work through these issues at both the policy and operational levels to ensure that the alliance enhances South Korean national will to fight when appropriate without unintentionally destabilizing the peninsula.

⁷⁴ Choi Song Min, “North Korea Introduces ‘Mandatory Military Service for Women,’” *The Guardian*, January 31, 2015.

These variables and levers should be integrated into broader strategies and concepts. If treated in isolation, they may fail to achieve the desired effects. In some cases, as with certain information operations or preemptive strike concepts (i.e., Kill Chain), these levers may reduce crisis stability on the peninsula.

Russian Will to Fight and the Arc of History

Russia is an easy country to mythologize. With vast resources of land and people, and a history that bends toward authoritarian rule, it is easy for both Russians and Americans to lionize Russian military might. In a speech to the Russian people commemorating Defender of the Fatherland Day during the 2012 presidential election, Russian President Vladimir Putin hailed the Russian nation as genetically predisposed toward victory.¹ His choice of words seemed to simultaneously connote great sacrifice and great triumph, as well as a sense of immediacy despite the absence of any present danger to the nation. Surely this extreme view of Russian will to fight and to win is a caricature, a piece of propaganda to rally the masses. But beneath that exaggerated image lies some measure of truth. Russia has endured staggering losses, societally and militarily, and continued to fight on.

In this chapter, we explore Russian will to fight across its contemporary history and conclude with a portrait of potential Russian will today and thoughts about how to address it. As Table 5.1 shows, some aspects of Russia's will to fight have been remarkably stable across historical eras. Items marked in red are those where the relationship functions in the opposite direction from what we would expect: In WW I, high stakes failed to stoke support for war, and in both Chechen Wars, high casualties inflicted served only to invigorate enemy will to fight. When Russia operates in the context of a weak state, as in WW I and the First Chechen War, it has a much more difficult time utilizing mechanisms to build will domestically. While allied strength and support is an important factor in many of the cases we examined, it tends not to factor in discussions involving Russia. Although Russia has fought with allies, its national mindset is that Russia is alone and cannot rely on outsiders to save it. Thus, the presence or absence of allies tends to have minimal influence on Russia's will to fight.

One of the most powerful forces in building Russian will to fight is nationalism, which we discuss through an understanding of the context of identity and through the ways in which it is operationalized—namely, through higher popular support, elevated perceptions of stakes, and acceptance of a more militarized civil-military rela-

¹ "Putin Tells Stadium Rally 'Battle' Is on for Russia," BBC News, February 23, 2012.

Table 5.1
Summary of Key Variables in Historical Russian Will to Fight

	WW I	WW II	First Chechen War	Second Chechen War
Factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Declining popular support • Declining cohesion • High stakes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Popular support • Poor civil-military relations • High stakes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low popular support • Strong cohesion • Weak civil-military relations • Low stakes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High popular support • Strong cohesion • Strong civil-military relations • Perceived high stakes
Contexts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fractured autocratic regime • Strong ethnic and nascent statist identities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Autocratic regime • Strong ethnic identity, weak statist identity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government type transitioning • Weak statist identity, moderate ethnic identity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Autocratic regime • Strong ethnic identity, moderate statist identity
Mechanisms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internal: indoctrination • External: economic blockade 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internal: indoctrination • External: messaging 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • External: casualty infliction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internal: indoctrination • External: casualty infliction

tionship. The key mechanism through which nationalism is transformed into will to fight is propaganda, or indoctrination of the population. It is worth noting up front that two words express the notion of homeland in Russian and represent the major ways we will discuss identity: *rodina* and *otechestvo*. The term *rodina* best translates to “motherland”; it is an atavistic term, conjuring a sense of home that is connected to the land rather than to the state, and is frequently used with the term *Rus*, which denotes linguistic, ethnic, and cultural Russia.² We refer to this concept here as *ethnic nationalism*, although this is an oversimplification. By contrast, *otechestvo* is best translated as “fatherland,” and its use is often official, tied to expressions of duty to the state.³ These two visions of Russia, as motherland and fatherland, provide an extraordinary flexibility when appealing to nationalist impulses, and this study shows that they are both used to great effect in popular indoctrination. The cultural, ethnic nationalism has often had stronger appeal, but it is exclusionary. In a multi-ethnic nation-state, such appeals can backfire, leaving Russia’s minorities, who have always been a key part of its fighting force, out in the cold. Tight control over media today gives the government the ability to push one central narrative, excluding all others.

² Faith Wigzell, “Nikolai Leskov, Gender and Russianness,” in Peter I. Barta, ed., *Gender and Sexuality in Russian Civilisation*, London: Routledge, 2013, p. 107.

³ Wigzell, 2013.

World War I

Factors

In 1905, a mere nine years before WW I, Russia went through its first revolution. Sparked by its defeat in Korea at the hands of Imperial Japan, an event few expected, this early and massive uprising achieved some political gains. It would take the Russian Army two years to restore order. The revolution demonstrated that there was a well-spring of opposition to the regime, demanding economic and political liberalization. It also demonstrated that there existed elite frustration about the regime's incompetence in conducting the war.⁴

Russia went to war in the summer of 1914, bolstered by a wave of nationalism. The threat posed to Holy Mother Russia papered over the country's long-running ailments. The revolution of 1905, which had forced the regime to create the Duma, seemed a distant memory. It would not be an overstatement of the enthusiasm for war in the summer of 1914 to note that the country's population rallied behind Tsar Nicholas II, creating short-lived elite **cohesion** among its otherwise fractured wealthy and educated classes. Russians embraced the call to defend their homeland and its ethnic brethren in Serbia against Germany. The **stakes** seemed high enough for patriot and revolutionary alike to set aside differences.⁵ In the interim, the combination of elite cohesion and high stakes provided sufficient will to fight to allow Russia to continue.

However, three years of defeats at the hands of Germany tore at this newfound **popular support** and **cohesion**. After nearly 300 years, Russians were once again losing battles and land to the Germans.⁶ Support for the war was, in the end, conditional: The country's willingness to fight depended on success. WW I was not an open-ended commitment. The people of Tsarist Russia would not endure great pain indefinitely. Instead, the longer the war seemed to continue without an end in sight, the more fragile the country's cohesion and expectation of victory became. As failures stacked up abroad, domestic strife increased under the antiquated and unresponsive Tsarist government. The intelligentsia were preoccupied with revolution, and the desire for Russia to withdraw from the war and an ever-declining willingness to fight were all too clear as the February Revolution in 1917 broke out. Failure in war reminded both regime supporters and opponents of the long-standing ailments threatening the Romanov autocracy. The calculation of the Russian people changed after steady losses, with the Russian people deciding to address inequities at home rather than victory abroad. With the loss of popular support and elite cohesion, Russia's will to fight plummeted.

⁴ Abraham Ascher, *The Russian Revolution: A Beginner's Guide*, London: Oneworld, 2014, p 18.

⁵ William G. Rosenberg, "Reading Soldiers' Moods: Russian Military Censorship and the Configuration of Feeling in WW I," *American Historical Review*, Vol. 119, No. 3, 2014, p. 720.

⁶ Andreas Kappeler, *The Russian Empire: A Multi-Ethnic History*, New York: Routledge, 2014, p. 348.

No matter how many ministers and generals Tsar Nicholas hired and fired, there were few bright spots in Russia's conduct of WW I. It resembled a more protracted, costly, and humiliating version of the Japanese-Russo War. Russian industry failed to produce enough armaments for an industrial war.⁷ Russian infrastructure struggled to supply the armed forces and urban centers with food.⁸ Russian generals could not reverse losses. Russian manpower was not in infinite supply. And most importantly, the Russian monarchy could not restore the confidence of elites in the aristocracy, the bureaucracy, and the support of the general population.⁹

By March 1917, food riots in Russia's major cities, especially Moscow and St. Petersburg, triggered a larger uprising. The cascading insurrections overthrew Tsar Nicholas in favor of a Duma-led provisional government. Under the leadership of Alexander Kerensky and with the aid of allied foreign investment, this government continued the war with a series of failed offensives in summer 1917. This decision to fight on doomed the Kerensky government, which was, in turn, overthrown by Vladimir Lenin's Bolsheviks during the November 1917 revolution.¹⁰ In a nice touch, it was Kaiser Wilhelm II (emperor of Germany and king of Prussia) who helped Lenin travel safely from his exile in Switzerland to the Finland Station in St. Petersburg.

Contexts

At the outset of WW I, Russia was living under the **authoritarian rule** of the tsar, with a small traditional elite and a large peasantry. The arrival of the Industrial Revolution gave Russia an economic boost but also dragged it into the modern age and fractured traditional authoritarian rule. At the outset of the war, Russia was grappling simultaneously with three challenging tasks that, for most countries, would have evolved over an extended process of state formation: developing a modern state system with a constitution and civil rights, developing a *modus vivendi* among its many nationalities, and contending with a rising intelligentsia that threatened revolt.¹¹ Russia's newly industrializing **economy** abetted these problems because it threw traditional class roles into chaos. It led to increased urbanization and therefore interaction among classes, even as it promised increased prosperity. However, consecutive years of terrible wartime losses in personnel, resources, and territory exposed the hollow foundations of Tsarist

⁷ James Sheehan, *Where Have All the Soldiers Gone? The Transformation of Modern Europe*, Boston, Mass.: Houghton Mifflin, 2008, p. 72.

⁸ Sheehan, 2008, p. 88.

⁹ Ascher, 2014, p. 5.

¹⁰ Xiuyuan Li, "The Kerensky Offensive: A Desperate Operation That Backfired," student paper, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, undated; and Alexandra Kollontai, "Our Tasks," *Rabotnitsa*, No. 1–2, 1917.

¹¹ Kappeler, 2014, p. 328.

Russia and eroded the army from beneath.¹² Meanwhile, Russia had a strong sense of nationalist **identity**, driven in this period by the more land- and ethnicity-based vision of identity. This sustained the country during the early days of the war. But as society modernized rapidly, there arose pressure to develop a modern, egalitarian, communist state; this movement gave birth to the contemporary statist identity in Russia. This identity arose in tension with the *rodina*-based identity.

The fractured nature of the political system and the process of modernization created internal conflict as factions in the society mobilized for internal struggle. It became impossible to simultaneously mobilize many of the people to support the war, resulting in flagging will to fight.

Mechanisms

The nature of the Russian state's collapse from within meant that it lacked the mechanisms to bolster national will at home. The Mother Russia **indoctrination** efforts (see, for example, Figure 5.1) were helpful but could not surmount existing societal divides. Externally, the Russian government fared little better. The allies of Tsarist Russia imposed **economic pressure** through an economic blockade on Wilhelmine Germany that took a heavy toll on German domestic morale starting in winter 1917. One of the German motives for war was to become self-sufficient (and, hence, economically resilient against a blockade) by conquering large swathes of Russia's frontier provinces, such as Poland and Ukraine. Had this been successful, it could have been a mechanism to depress the enemy's will, shifting the relative balance of will between Russia and Germany. However, the allied blockade failed to alter this relative balance because, as it was achieving maximum bite, Russia dropped out of the war because of the internal factors previously mentioned. This allowed the Kaiser's government to rally the German people for one more push. Through the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, Germany achieved much of its eastern war aims but had to garrison large parts of newly won Russian territories with soldiers that were desperately needed in the Western Front offensives of 1918.

World War II

Factors

As discussed in the next section, the context of deep ethnic identity and weak Soviet statist identity combined to achieve a high degree of **popular support** for WW II. This was further bolstered by Nazi Germany's invasion, which threatened the existence of the fledgling Soviet state. These **heightened stakes** gave Stalin the opportunity to leverage Russian nationalism to thwart Nazi aggression on the Soviets' Western Front.

¹² David R. Stone, *The Russian Army in the Great War: The Eastern Front, 1914–1917*, Lawrence, Kan.: University Press of Kansas, 2015, p. 231.

Figure 5.1
Russian WW I Propaganda Poster



SOURCE: "Rossiia i Eia Voin [Russia and Her Wars]," Hoover Institution Library and Archives, Poster RU/SU 151, 1918.

RAND RR2477-5.1

External attack served to channel support for the Russian ethno-nationalist identity into support for the Soviet state and its defense. Consequently, the military became an important institution in Soviet society. Before WW II, Soviet **civil-military relations** were tense. Some early communist revolutionaries held ambivalent views of militaries, which they viewed as tools of oppression by past regimes. Stalin's purges of military leaders during the 1930s further eroded civil-military relations. Due to necessity after Operation Barbarossa in 1941, the Soviets began funneling resources into their military as they mobilized for war. Consequently, some Soviet citizens viewed the military as an opportunity for social mobility. Such a view was especially true for Soviets who were victims of persecution under Stalin. Some of these victims believed that military service was a way to gain legitimacy in the new Soviet system.¹³

Contexts

The Soviet Union was far from a cohesive entity at the outset of WW II. Between 1917 and 1945, the state spent approximately 48 percent of its existence in a revolution, a civil war, or a fight with foreign states.¹⁴ Unsurprisingly, some Soviet citizens questioned whether this new experiment in socialism would continue to exist. The **totalitarian** nature of the Soviet state under Stalin served as an important context enabling the nation to be mobilized for war. **Economically**, the country was on a war footing well before the outbreak of WW II, with the highest peacetime defense spending of any Allied nation.¹⁵

Amid the upheaval of the state, the government sought to mobilize statist **identity** for war. Statist Soviet nationalism had roots in Marxist-Leninist ideology. Marxism is an evolutionary theory that assumes that socioeconomic systems transition from one stage to another (e.g., feudalism, capitalism, socialism, communism).¹⁶ Some of the Soviet people viewed WW II as a clash between past stages (e.g., capitalism) and future, modern stages (e.g., socialism and eventually communism). This ideological frame became a way for the Soviet state to generate national will to fight among some of its communist loyalists.

Government elites and urban workers largely identified with Soviet nationalism.¹⁷ In general, both populations were optimistic about the future of the "unique experi-

¹³ Reese, 2011.

¹⁴ During these 29 years, the Soviets spent about seven years fighting the Russian Civil War (1917 to 1923), two years fighting the Finnish in the Winter War (1939 to 1940), and five years fighting the Germans (and other axis powers) (1941 to 1945). Thus, the Soviets spent 14 of this 29-year history in a war, which equals 48.3 percent of the state's existence.

¹⁵ Mark Harrison, "Resource Mobilization for WW II: The U.S.A., U.K., U.S.S.R., and Germany, 1938–1945," *Economic History Review*, Vol. 41, No. 2, May 1988, p. 174.

¹⁶ Richard D. Wolff and Stephen A. Resnick, *Contending Economic Theories: Neoclassical, Keynesian, and Marxian*, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2012.

¹⁷ Reese, 2011, p. 104.

ment” toward communism that was the Soviet state. As in WW I, they viewed war as a clash between the ideologies of the past—feudalism, fascism, and capitalism—and a future of socialism and eventually communism.¹⁸ This ideology became a force to increase public support as the Soviet state battled internal foes (such as monarchists and Bolsheviks) and external adversaries (such as Finland and Germany).

Rural populations, especially nonnative Russians, largely identified with ethnic nationalism.¹⁹ The Soviet Union was a young and relatively dysfunctional state, and this dysfunction would undermine the perceived legitimacy of Soviet leadership. Hitler gave Stalin a just war after Germany invaded the Soviet Union in 1941. Stalin used this invasion to his advantage by appealing to Russian nationalism to garner popular support for war.

Mechanisms

As in Russia's other conflicts, the government in WW II mobilized nationalist sentiment through **indoctrination**. While the war is enshrined in Russian memory using statist propaganda (*otechestvo*), Soviet propaganda during the war seemed primarily to focus on the more traditional nationalism of the motherland (*rodina*), as seen in Figure 5.2. Russian employment of commissars with combat units gave conscripts a stark choice: Risk death in combat or face certain death from the political officer.

Externally, the Soviets did try diplomatic engagement with Nazi Germany to prevent war by signing the Molotov-Ribbentrop (Soviet-German) Non-Aggression Pact in 1939, but they did not appear to employ external engagement as a tool to sap German will during the conflict. It is possible that some propaganda was directed toward the Germans as well. Certainly Stalin's “not one step back” order to create blocking detachments would have underscored for German citizens that the Soviet Union had unlimited resolve.

More concretely, during the war, the Soviets set up a large system of POW camps for military, economic, and political reasons. The Soviet POW camps were organized by nationality so that they could tailor their **messaging** based on prisoners' nationality.²⁰ The Soviets wanted to collect military intelligence from these POWs, rely on their human capital for various state industries, and convert ethnic Germans and Japanese to communism. The latter was a way for the Soviets to potentially spread communism to foreign countries. This effort was not intended to influence will to fight during WW II but rather to influence the long-term security environment.

¹⁸ Reese, 2007, p. 273.

¹⁹ Reese, 2011, p. 141.

²⁰ Kermit G. Stewart, *Russian Methods of Indoctrinating Captured Personnel: World War II*, Washington, D.C.: Office of the Chief of Military History, Department of the Army, 1952.

Figure 5.2
Soviet WW II Propaganda Poster



SOURCE: "Boets, Rodina Zhdet Etogo Dnia! [The Defender of the Motherland Waits for This Day!]" Hoover Institution Library and Archives, Poster RU/SU 2102, 1943.

RAND RR2477-5.2

First and Second Chechen Wars

Factors

Leading up to the First Chechen War (which spanned December 1994 through August 1996), there was a chaotic regime transition in Russia, which created an atmosphere of turmoil and personalism. There was **strong cohesion among elites** but only in the sense that, as state industries were handed off to individuals, elite cronies looked out for each other.²¹ Political divisions correlated to serious divisions over the war and per-

²¹ Vladimir P. Averchev, "The War in Chechnya and a Crisis of Russian Statehood," in Mikhail Tsytkin, ed., *War in Chechnya: Implications for Russian Security Policy*, Monterey, Calif.: Naval Postgraduate School, 1996, p. 73.

mitted widespread opposition on the eve of war. By the Second Chechen War (which spanned 1999 to 2009 in various forms), Putin's growing consolidation of power limited dissent and forged strong elite cohesion, with the central government in control.

In the post-Soviet upheaval, the Russian military was, though dysfunctional, one of the most wholly intact institutions in the country.²² As such, without the function of the military's political officers to hold the forces in check, taboos against military involvement in politics faded away.²³ This was characterized by **adversarial civil-military relations** and a senior military leadership at the outset of the First Chechen War that was willing to speak out in strong terms for its point of view, which, for the most part, staunchly opposed the use of military force in Chechnya.²⁴ In military leaders' assessment, a deep awareness of the economic difficulties facing the military (discussed later) were combined with a reluctance to use military force inside the borders of the country to make intervention in the First Chechen War an unfavorable idea, which lowered will to fight that war.

By the time the Second Chechen War began, Putin had already begun to radically centralize and consolidate power in the country. In a stunningly short span of time, Putin rose from obscurity to the role of acting president, then elected president, and weakened the institutions that placed checks on his authority.²⁵ The single issue that Putin used to galvanize this extraordinary takeover was the war in Chechnya.²⁶ By the time Putin decided to return the Russian Army to Chechnya, the military had begun to turn ideologically toward "national patriotism."²⁷ This, fused with Putin's promises for a strong Russia and the rising fears of terrorism from Chechnya, gave Putin greater advantage in rallying military will. While military leaders had sensed opportunity in the chaos of political fallout, it was this **civil-military alliance** with Putin that promised to safeguard the military's future.

The First Chechen War arose out of a fear that allowing Chechnya independence would fundamentally jeopardize the integrity of the Russian Federation, but it is also true that then-Russian President Boris Yeltsin was confident in his expectations of victory. Yeltsin believed that a great country "must swat aside its enemies" and that

²² Neil Malcolm and Alex Pravda, "Introduction," in Neil Malcolm, Alex Pravda, Roy Allison, and Margot Light, *Internal Factors in Russian Foreign Policy*, Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1996, pp. 15–16.

²³ Neil Malcolm, Alex Pravda, Roy Allison, and Margot Light, *Internal Factors in Russian Foreign Policy*, Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1996, pp. 231–232.

²⁴ John B. Dunlop, *Russia Confronts Chechnya: Roots of a Separatist Conflict*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998, p. 201.

²⁵ Michael McFaul, "Putin in Power," *Current History*, Vol. 99, No. 639, October 2000, p. 307.

²⁶ McFaul, 2000, p. 307.

²⁷ Roy Allison, "Military Factors in Foreign Policy," in Neil Malcolm, Alex Pravda, Roy Allison, and Margot Light, *Internal Factors in Russian Foreign Policy*, Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1996.

an easy victory by Moscow would solidify his position.²⁸ Similarly, at the outset of the Second Chechen War, Putin pursued a single-minded policy intent on building unity through victory in war. In this respect, the dynamics here are somewhat different from those of most of the other cases in this report. Both Yeltsin and Putin had hoped to use discretionary wars to build popular support—in other words, to use the promise of easy war to build high will to fight and thereby support for their respective governments. As will be discussed in the remainder of this chapter, Yeltsin was unsuccessful, but Putin enjoyed much greater success because underlying factors had changed and Putin employed several new mechanisms that gave a better result.

In the First Chechen War, amid confusing signals about independence and economic collapse, the war in Chechnya was for **low stakes**—and perceived to be so by the population. Chechnya was no military threat, and the war was widely seen as discretionary. Yeltsin had opportunities to preempt war through negotiations with Chechen leader Dzhokhar Dudayev but chose not to pursue them, believing instead that a war would demonstrate the strength and vitality of the new Russian Federation.²⁹ But the population, exhausted from economic and political crisis, had no stomach for a war it did not have to fight. During the period between the two wars, Russia's attitude toward Chechens changed profoundly. The moderate portions of the Chechen independence movement were squeezed out after the First Chechen War. Aslan Maskhadov, president of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria, was beset by rivals (such as militant commander Shamil Basayev) and a coalition of Islamist-leaning warlords who had gained power in the wake of the 1994 war.³⁰ The impression conveyed to Russians was that Islamist terror was on their doorstep. In 1999, an incursion led by Basayev into the province of Dagestan, just east and north of Chechnya, raised fears of Chechen militancy. But it was a series of apartment bombings in Moscow and Dagestan that struck fear into the minds of the Russian people. Although Putin immediately blamed the bombings on Chechen terrorists, the case is an unsolved mystery, and there is some evidence to suggest that elements of the Russian government may have been behind it.³¹ Were that the case, it would mean that the government had a keen understanding of the value of public will to enter into war and how it can be manipulated by raising stakes. The anger unleashed by the bombings was the catalyzing event that allowed the rest of the Russian public to see Chechens as the “other” and to frame the struggle as “us versus

²⁸ Allison, 1996, p. 223.

²⁹ Matthew Evangelista, *The Chechen Wars: Will Russia Go the Way of the Soviet Union?* Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2002, pp. 22–37.

³⁰ Julie Wilhelmsen, “Between a Rock and a Hard Place: The Islamisation of the Chechen Separatist Movement,” *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 57, No. 1, January 2005, p. 35.

³¹ John B. Dunlop, *The Moscow Bombings of September 1999: Examinations of Russian Terrorist Attacks at the Onset of Vladimir Putin's Rule*, Stuttgart, Germany: Ibidem, 2014.

them.” The public perceived **far higher stakes** in the lead-up to the Second Chechen War, even though Russia’s core security interests had not significantly changed.

The most salient aspect of Russia’s **low public support** for the First Chechen War was the media’s narrative. When the Soviet Union dissolved, so did control over the media. A newly liberalized press was eager to champion the cause of the Chechen, whom the media romanticized as a noble freedom fighter. Absent a strong central narrative, journalists tended to question the status quo.³² Many journalists embedded with forces and brought back tales of human rights abuses and a military on the brink of collapse. Chechen fighters were better equipped to give timely statements to the press than were Russian government representatives.

The Second Chechen War came with a very different public reaction. Shifting public perception of the stakes of the war enabled Putin to galvanize **public support** for his government. While the economic situation in the country remained desperate and the government chaos-filled, the view of early success in Chechnya helped Putin win election as president in 2000. Although both Putin and Yeltsin had hoped to rally support through war in Chechnya, Putin was able to take advantage of a shifting context to see it through, as seen in Table 5.2. In addition, as we discuss later, control of **information** (via the media) served as an important mechanism in the Second Chechen War.

Table 5.2
Russian Public Opinion on Chechnya, 1995 and 1999

	October 1995 (%)	November 1999 (%)
Military actions are necessary to prevent the collapse of Russia.		
Agree	20	53
Disagree	65	21
Best solution to the Chechen problem is to		
Conduct military actions until the Chechen fighters are completely destroyed	3	63
Withdraw forces from Chechnya and fortify its borders with Russia	52	14

SOURCE: Pain, 2000, p. 60.

³² Laura Belin, “Russian Media Policy in the First and Second Chechen Campaigns,” *Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, Vol. 13, No. 4, 2000.

Contexts

Around the mid-16th century, Russia began to develop a relationship with the north Caucasus that quickly evolved into colonization.³³ The conquest of the region predated even the existence of the Russian Empire, giving Chechnya, Dagestan, and the rest of the north Caucasus a special place in the expansionist imaginations of Russia. By the same token, the historic desire of the Chechen people for independence is longstanding, and centuries of Chechen fighters have taken up the cause. The Chechen case struck directly at problems of Russian **identity**. As it has for centuries, Chechnya in the early 1990s represented both Russian exceptionalism and a challenge to Russia's sense of self:

Is theirs a superior culture, destined to rule, or a besieged one destined to flail forever at relentless enemies burrowing in from every direction? . . . Those worries are heightened in a period of humiliation and dislocation like the one Russia is going through. Having lost one huge empire and set of beliefs (without entirely understanding why), it now fears to lose even the smaller empire, the Russian Federation itself, which has never before been a country with its current borders.³⁴

Russia at this time had little in the way of statist identity to fall back on, with the failure of the Soviet state, and even its typically strong land-based identity was challenged by the fact that Chechnya was seen as a historic part of Russia now attempting to secede. Like a skeleton, the communist party infrastructure had supported the Soviet body politic. But after the fall of communism, that supporting structure disappeared, leaving chaos and power-seeking in its wake.³⁵ There was upheaval in the early 1990s in the fight between conservatives and reformers and between then-Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev and Russian President Yeltsin. In this era, Russia was a nation unmoored, its government in a **political transition** emerging from communism into a bad experience with freewheeling capitalism and subsequent **economic crisis**. Amid the resulting chaos, Yeltsin saw a war in Chechnya as an easy way to prove Russia's continued strength and resist attempts to chip away at Russia's borders. The political fracture and depressed statist identity that arose from the collapse of the Soviet Union resulted in a very low level of will to fight at the national and popular levels in the First Chechen War. At the national level, the government lacked the political authority and competence to mobilize the war effort.³⁶ At the popular level, Russians had low levels

³³ Michael Khodarkovsky, "Of Christianity, Enlightenment, and Colonialism: Russia in the North Caucasus, 1550–1800," *Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 71, No. 2, 1999.

³⁴ Steven Erlanger, "The World; Demons in Russia's Mind Arise Again—in the Flesh," *New York Times*, December 18, 1994.

³⁵ Malcolm and Pravda, 1996, p. 15.

³⁶ Malcolm and Pravda, 1996, p. 15; John B. Dunlop, "Sifting Through the Rubble of the Yeltsin Years," *Problems of Post-Communism*, Vol. 47, No. 1, January 2000.

of commitment to the fight because they felt disconnected from their political institutions and economically deprived.³⁷

While the Second Chechen War continued to evince low will to fight on the part of Russian forces, what had changed was significant and, as we will see, highlights important dynamics underlying Russian national will. Putin had already begun to act to centralize the government under an **authoritarian** regime, and, although conditions remained bad economically, rising oil prices were helping to jumpstart the economy. At the national level, public support for the war had been stirred by outcry at terrorist acts blamed on Chechens, and public perceptions were reinforced by a press that was more fully under government control and by a rapidly centralizing government. Russian **identity** received a jumpstart from these nationalist messages that helped it achieve almost a redemptive quality, in essence, that Russia was a great nation and must behave as one. Political centralization and strengthened ethnic identity combined to significantly boost will to fight. Although the Russian military never achieved more than qualified success in its wars in Chechnya, when seen in contrast to each other, the wars provide an interesting case study of the effect that changing underlying societal conditions and changing policies can have on will to fight.³⁸

Mechanisms

As in WW I, the context of the weak Russian state made it difficult for the government to utilize national mechanisms to bolster popular support during the First Chechen War. By the Second Chechen War, the situation had changed drastically (see Table 5.2).

Popular support shifted largely as a result of the utilization of a key mechanism: indoctrination in the form of state control of media narratives. Like the rest of the population, members of the media had been stirred by the perceived stakes of the conflict, along with a rising sense of nationalism and what Emil Pain calls “the militarization of the mass consciousness.”³⁹ The state had also increased its mechanisms to control the media, founding the Russian Information Center to screen information coming out of the war zone. The center ensured that there was a single, clear narrative coming out of the Second Chechen War and curtailed the number of embedded journalists allowed in Chechnya.

Censorship of information was both a public and a private endeavor: Boris Berzovsky, owner of numerous Russian media outlets, was himself pro-government and enforced a pro-war party line in his publications and broadcasts. A key aspect of cen-

³⁷ Elaine Sciolino, “Soviet Disarray: Chaos Looms Over Soviets, Gates Says,” *New York Times*, December 11, 1991; Malcolm and Pravda, 1996, p. 16.

³⁸ See, for example, Pavel Felgenhauer, “The Russian Army in Chechnya,” *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 21, No. 2, June 2002.

³⁹ Pain, 2000, p. 59.

sorship was to imply that the war was easy and was being capably handled by military forces. For example, a special issue of a widely read Russian weekly magazine, *Ogoniok*, showed the media's support for the state's interests in Chechnya in 2000. It contained articles featuring attractive women who were part of the military effort and a letter from a Russian father to his son fighting in Chechnya.

External mechanisms for sapping Chechen will were similarly lacking in the First Chechen War, again because of the state's political and economic fragility at the time. As discussed earlier in this section, when Yeltsin had the opportunity to employ diplomatic engagements, he refused, assuming that war could unify the Russian state. This was true of Putin at the outset of the Second Chechen War as well. Although the military inflicted **casualties** on Chechens in the first war, it is unclear whether this was consciously done to break Chechen will. The scale of devastation of the second war makes it clear that this mechanism was more consciously applied in the latter conflict. In the Second Chechen War, the Russian Army employed tactics that killed such vast numbers of civilians that it was clear the tactics were intended to break the national will of the Chechen people.⁴⁰ But the Russian government badly misjudged the nature of the conflict and the Chechen people. Those tactics unified an otherwise fractured Chechen polity and spurred it to continue to fight.

Russia Today

Factors

The government type in Russia (described in the next section) relies on **strong elite cohesion** in the form of an oligarchy. This cohesion facilitates a close interrelationship between state and industry following the privatization of industry after the fall of communism. The **close civil-military relationship** of the central state with the power ministries has raised the level of prestige and trust in the military. While conceiving a deep distrust of government, the Russian people nevertheless voice strong **public support** for Putin. Only 47 percent of respondents in a public opinion poll approved of the actions of government, yet 84 percent approved of Putin personally.⁴¹ That approbation extends to the military: Sergey Shoygu, minister of defense, is the second most trusted man in Russia after Putin, according to the same poll. That is far ahead even of the Russian Orthodox Church's head, Patriarch Kirill, who came in tenth. In another poll by the same organization, respondents were asked about their greatest sources of pride as Russians. The armed forces ranked third, with 37 percent of votes, behind

⁴⁰ Anna Politkovskaya, *A Small Corner of Hell: Dispatches from Chechnya*, Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 2007.

⁴¹ Levada-Center, "Approval Ratings," press release, December 2, 2016a.

only Russia's national wealth and Russian history.⁴² The high level of trust placed by the population in its authoritarian leader demonstrates a deep interrelationship in this case between the context of authoritarian rule and the factor of popular support.

Contexts

Although the war in Chechnya was a challenge for the Russian military, Putin's rise to power swept the country up in an optimistic wave of patriotism and nationalism. After the privation of the 1990s, the boom years that followed restored the faith of the Russian people in the historical greatness of their nation. But that triumph has come with a shift to **authoritarianism** under Putin, first as president, then prime minister, and then again as president.⁴³

The particular construct of Putin's authoritarianism is militaristic in nature. At the military's nadir after the First Chechen War, Putin "arrived as a savior, promising to restore the power and status of Russia's force structures."⁴⁴ This he did. The elevation of the so-called power ministries within Putin's government manifested itself in two forms: the consolidation of coercive instruments of state power, which had been broken up at the end of the Soviet period, and the introduction of former senior military leaders into high levels of government. This gave the Russian government a distinctly hard, coercive edge.⁴⁵ Because the elevation of Russia's status as a global power is a key foreign policy goal of Russian leadership, it is natural that a close civil-military relationship would result.⁴⁶ As in the past, this close relationship in a centralized state should tend to strengthen Russian will to fight.

The authoritarian state system as developed in Russia lends itself to a reverence for Russian greatness. Scholars debate the degree to which **nationalist identity** has shown itself to be important in post-Soviet Russia, but as Pål Kolstø argues, "the apparent discrepancy among those who assert and those who deny the significance of Russian nationalism stems from the differing definitions employed."⁴⁷ Nationalism

⁴² Multiple responses were allowed in the poll. Of note, pride in the armed forces post-dates the start of operations in Syria. Before that conflict began, the armed forces were ranked seventh in 2014 and tied for sixth in 2015. Levada-Center, "National Pride," press release, May 29, 2017c.

⁴³ William Zimmerman, *Ruling Russia: Authoritarianism from the Revolution to Putin*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2014, pp. 222–224.

⁴⁴ Brian D. Taylor, *State Building in Putin's Russia: Policing and Coercion After Communism*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2013, p. 70.

⁴⁵ Mark Urnov, "'Greatpowerness' as the Key Element of Russian Self-Consciousness Under Erosion," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, Vol. 47, No. 3–4, September 2014, p. 320.

⁴⁶ Tuomas Forsberg, Regina Heller, and Reinhard Wolf, "Status and Emotions in Russian Foreign Policy," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, Vol. 47, No. 3–4, September 2014, p. 265.

⁴⁷ Pål Kolstø, "The Ethnification of Russian Nationalism," in Pål Kolstø and Helge Blakkisrud, eds., *The New Russian Nationalism: Imperialism, Ethnicity and Authoritarianism 2000–2015*, Edinburgh, Scotland: Edinburgh University Press, 2016, p. 21.

in Russia is often seen as ethnic nationalism, and there are extreme forms that are certainly ethno-centric in nature. However, today, as it has been historically, nationalism in Russia is a movement with many strands. Beyond ethno-nationalists, much of the nationalist expression in Russia has been statist: that the common identity of Russia is rooted in its government and national history, not its ethnic makeup. This mirrors the distinction between *rodina* and *otechestvo* discussed earlier in this chapter, though with updated connotations. Although some have argued that this factionalism is a weakness, in the wake of the Soviet Union, these strands appeared to make nationalism in Russia more robust.⁴⁸ Russian leadership has signaled both these forms of nationalism in public discourse.⁴⁹ After being abandoned by ethnic ultranationalists in 2012, Putin has advocated what Peter Rutland describes as a recycled version of Soviet nationalism, declaring Russia a “civic nation,” with ethnic Russians as the nation’s nuclear identity and its minorities locked into a close orbit.⁵⁰ This identity both placates minority ethnic groups and provides justification as needed for some expansionary conflict or to defend a way of life that Putin has repeatedly held to be a sort of Russian exceptionalism. This provides a more inclusive sense of Russianness than at many periods in the past, and this more flexible sense of national identity may be a potential source of social mobilization in war. In 2016–2017 polling, the Levada-Center found that 58 percent of Russians surveyed supported conscription, the highest figure since reporting began in 1997.⁵¹ With the long history of conscription evasion detailed in previous chapters, it is particularly noteworthy that in the same survey, 61 percent of respondents said that if a family member were drafted, he should serve rather than evade the draft.

Mechanisms

Mark Urnov argues that, because Russia lacks good soft-power skills and tools, it substitutes hard power to build prestige domestically—for example, “to raise the rating of trust in the government with the help of a ‘small victorious war’” in Ukraine.⁵² There is a reciprocal relationship between war to build unity and propaganda to build support for war. This is very much the same use of war as a device for building nationhood that we saw in both Chechen wars.

⁴⁸ Astrid S. Tuminez, *Russian Nationalism Since 1856: Ideology and the Making of Foreign Policy*, Rowman & Littlefield, 2000; and Pål Kolstø and Helge Blakkisrud, eds., *The New Russian Nationalism: Imperialism, Ethnicity and Authoritarianism 2000–2015*, Edinburgh, Scotland: Edinburgh University Press, 2016.

⁴⁹ Helge Blakkisrud, “Blurring the Boundary Between Civic and Ethnic: The Kremlin’s New Approach to National Identity Under Putin’s Third Term,” in Pål Kolstø and Helge Blakkisrud, eds., *The New Russian Nationalism: Imperialism, Ethnicity and Authoritarianism 2000–2015*, Edinburgh, Scotland: Edinburgh University Press, 2016, p. 250.

⁵⁰ Peter Rutland, “Putin’s Nationality Dilemma,” *Moscow Times*, January 29, 2012.

⁵¹ Levada-Center, “Российская Армия (Russian Army),” press release, February 20, 2017a.

⁵² Forsberg, Heller, and Wolf, 2014, p. 265.

The regime calls on some familiar tropes to channel its nationalist leanings into support for the use of force. The government has crafted a narrative of **indoctrination** that keeps the memory of WW II fresh in the minds of the population. The older generation directly felt the impact of the Great Patriotic War because it involved their parents and other relatives. But youth today, who may lack even direct experience with communism, have no such visceral link to the events of the past. To compensate for this, the government has actively worked to keep the collective memory of WW II alive. The narrative is carefully crafted by the state to portray Russia, alone and unaided by the rest of the world, fighting bravely and ceaselessly against a foreign invader.⁵³ This is an effort to use indoctrination both to change perceptions about the reality of the situation and to mobilize aspects of **national identity**. One example of what a former Duma deputy called the “quasi-religious cult of ‘victory’” is the annual march of the “Immortal Regiment” on Victory Day.⁵⁴ What began as a grassroots movement became a state event, with 8 million people across the country marching with photos of deceased relatives who had fought in the war, or sometimes just carrying random photos handed to them by march organizers.⁵⁵

This preserves the idea of Russia as an inherently victorious nation, and it develops the idea that Russia is under threat and will not be saved by its allies.⁵⁶ When asked which period in Russian history they find particularly interesting, the largest percentage of respondents—38 percent—said WW II.⁵⁷ Young people today are generally socialized to this tight relationship between past and present greatness:

Russian millennials wished to see their country restored as a hyper-sovereign power that would stand outside the Euro-Atlantic community and resist international legal norms. Most of them believed that Putin had set the country on the right path. They enthusiastically consumed the Kremlin’s steady diet of Soviet nostalgia, xenophobia, homophobia, and anti-Americanism. And the more educated they were, the more likely they were to hold anti-American views.⁵⁸

⁵³ Former DoD official, interview with the author, Washington, D.C., August 4, 2017.

⁵⁴ Svetlana Prokopyeva, “Russia’s Immortal Regiment: From Grassroots to ‘Quasi-Religious Cult,’” Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, May 12, 2017.

⁵⁵ Prokopyeva, 2017.

⁵⁶ Igor Zevelev, *Russian National Identity and Foreign Policy*, Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, December 2016, p. 18.

⁵⁷ Levada-Center, “Russian History,” press release, April 3, 2017b.

⁵⁸ Sarah E. Mendelson, “Generation Putin: What to Expect from Russia’s Future Leaders—Reviews & Responses,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 94, 2015, pp. 150–151.

The memory of WW II also serves to elevate Putin to heroic status. As Elizabeth Wood writes, Putin has taken care to weave his personal story through the nation's historical observance:

This identification of the person with the holiday and the victory creates an iconic character for Mr. Putin's rule (whether as president or prime minister). The nation is great because of its role in WW II, and Putin is great because of his association with the war.⁵⁹

The state mechanism for disseminating this narrative is carefully managed and consolidated. The control of the media that Putin gained during the Second Chechen War has been further developed into a sophisticated propaganda apparatus. Contemporary propaganda provides "a single vision of contemporary Russia, which has been disseminated insistently via the majority of the mass media, including all the national TV channels" and which even includes its own manufactured opposition, to provide a "façade of pluralism."⁶⁰ As seen in Figure 5.3, propaganda today is often focused on President Putin personally, highlighting his vigor and machismo and demonstrating his embodiment of national values.

While the Great Patriotic War was one of existential stakes, more-recent wars have clearly not been. But the government continues to use themes of external threat and inability to depend on others to develop a narrative to support war. For example, the conflict in eastern Ukraine (which began in 2014) was described as an American encroachment and the conflict in Syria (begun in 2015) as "fighting [terrorists] there before we fight them here."⁶¹ Crimea was seen as rightfully Russian; the government framed the conflict for the population as part of Russia's rightful territory and the Russian incursion as desired by the population. A social media campaign, #КрымНаш (OurCrimea), showed Russia-leaning images of Crimea, for home consumption (Figure 5.4).

Perhaps it is in the nature of every government to frame its conflicts in the most essential terms. But for wars that are something less than existential, or even for discretionary wars, national will is rooted in a different set of premises. In a departure from the past, national will for Russia today is premised on limited objectives with the avoidance of entanglement, as well as the perception of easy success. These are wars for the Russian people to proudly support but without having to sacrifice or preoccupy themselves with war to win. For example, 64 percent of Russians surveyed reported

⁵⁹ Elizabeth A. Wood, "Performing Memory: Vladimir Putin and the Celebration of WW II in Russia," *Soviet and Post-Soviet Review*, Vol. 38, No. 2, September 2011, p. 176.

⁶⁰ Miguel Vázquez Liñán, "Putin's Propaganda Legacy," *Post-Soviet Affairs*, Vol. 25, No. 2, 2009, p. 138.

⁶¹ Former DoD official, interview with the authors, Washington, D.C., August 4, 2017.

Figure 5.3
Contemporary Photographs of Vladimir Putin



SOURCE: Office of the President of the Russian Federation (CC BY 4.0) (top); Office of the Prime Minister of the Russian Federation (CC BY 4.0) (bottom).

NOTE: Images show Putin at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, February 2017 (top), and Putin tranquilizing a tiger, August 2008 (bottom).

RAND RR2477-5.3

Figure 5.4
Contemporary Russian Propaganda



SOURCE: @Kremlin_Russian, "'Our President,' Says Graffiti of Putin in Sevastopol," filed with hashtag #КрымНаш (OurCrimea), Instagram, August 20, 2017.

RAND RR2477-5.4

knowing “a bit about current events in Syria” but not closely following the war.⁶² The government tries to prevent overburdening its population during these discretionary wars by utilizing contracted soldiers over conscripts and disseminating propaganda that conceals Russian losses and promotes Russian bravery.⁶³ Interestingly, the strategies favored are different in different places: In Syria, the government has used small numbers of soldiers and hired private military contractors, such as Wagner Group; in Ukraine, it has focused on obscuring death tolls.⁶⁴ While still maintaining a policy of secrecy around numbers of casualties, as it did in places like Afghanistan, Russia today may also celebrate the fallen as heroes—for example, Senior Lieutenant Alexander Prokhorenko, the “Palmyra Man,” who called in an airstrike on his Syrian location rather than be taken prisoner by Islamic State militants.⁶⁵ In each case, Russia is careful to keep the toll of war within what one expert called the “absorption capacity” of the Russian people.⁶⁶ The Russian politico-military alliance has created in the population the expectation of victory. When the conflict is easy to win, this can help bolster will to fight, but when victory eludes expectations, this may depress will. Thus, Russian will to fight appears to be very strong but has not really faced any substantive challenge to that strength.

Conclusion

Russian will to fight has historically been powerful, transcending governments and surmounting some societal divisions. It is formidable, but it is not immutable. As Russia straddles traditional historical narratives and modern military organizing principles, it is in a place of strength. Here, we discuss mechanisms that the United States and its allies may use to influence Russian will, as well as the possible consequences of employing those mechanisms.

To operationalize will to fight, we must join factors, contexts, and mechanisms into a representation of Russia's unique dynamics. The foundational building block of Russian will today is the public's acceptance of an authoritarian, centralized state with a high degree of military involvement. This interrelationship of the *factors* of elite cohe-

⁶² Levada-Center, “Conflict in Syria,” press release, December 12, 2016b.

⁶³ Thomas Gibbons-Neff, “The Unusual Difficulty of Tracking Russia's Dead in Ukraine and Syria,” *Washington Post*, October 27, 2015.

⁶⁴ Olga Oliker, director, and Jeffrey Mankoff, deputy director, Russia and Eurasia Program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, interview with the authors, Washington, D.C., August 9, 2017.

⁶⁵ Lizzie Dearden, “Body of Russian Special Forces Officer Who ‘Ordered Air Strike on Himself’ to Kill ISIS Militants Returned Home,” *Independent*, April 30, 2016.

⁶⁶ Samuel Charap, RAND senior political scientist, interview with the authors, Washington, D.C., August 7, 2017.

sion, civil-military alliance, and popular support and the *context* of government type provide a strong basis for national will to fight and influence state-level expectation of victory. Next, the *mechanism* of indoctrination employs flexible nationalist rhetoric that hedges between ethnic and statist versions of nationalism to increase popular support, a factor, and prime the population for conflict. This is abetted by state control of media narratives. The mechanism of indoctrination also works to describe current conflicts in high-stakes terms, even while pursuing limited objectives to ensure that public acceptance stays strong. The following sections speak to avenues by which these building blocks of will can be influenced by outside forces.

Stakes and Popular Support

Russians today are being fed a steady diet of nationalism based on a historical memory of total war. At the same time, the Russian military is shifting to a more traditionally Western operational model of a high quality, professional army fighting winnable wars for limited objectives. Typical Russian citizens do not have to think about the war in Syria every day, but when they do, it is with feelings of pride and approbation. Increasing the cost of the conflict in Syria or another discretionary war, in lives and in rubles, could cause the Russian people to question the necessity of fighting the war. But this is a double-edged sword: Too much aggression could cause Russians to see the war as something essential. Direct U.S. aggression, for example, would raise the stakes of conflict and boost will. If the conflict in Syria, for example, were to result in increased casualties and quagmire, Russians would likely lose substantial will to fight. However, if the United States were perceived as behind those casualties, the result could easily be the opposite.

In a truly existential war, the Russian government would appeal to the historic fortitude and fatalism of the Russian people and invoke memories of sacrifice associated with the Great Patriotic War. These are formidable themes in Russian national identity and are likely to resonate powerfully with the population. If faced with an existential threat, Russia would most likely begin with a high national will to fight. It is unclear how much the public would be willing to sacrifice in a return to mass conscription and casualties, as well as whether this would have any effect on national support. If soldiers suffered high casualties or abysmal conditions, will could falter. Foreign propaganda, subtly applied, might expose the failures of the government to care for its own.

Civil-Military Relations and Popular Support

Russians today tend to have a dim view of their government, but the army rates comparatively highly in terms of public trust, and personal faith in Putin remains very high. Erosion of that trust could reduce Russian support for war, whether the breach of trust is directly related to the conflict or not. For example, the general mistreatment of conscripts through a hazing system or a loss of faith in President Putin's ability to

manage the economy could cause reduced trust in the government's military endeavors. Likewise, if Putin were to respect Russia's constitutional rules regarding election and to once again run for prime minister, with Dmitri Medvedev or another ally as president, the path to war would be more difficult. Medvedev's approval ratings as president were noticeably lower than Putin's, and he rated fifth among Russia's most trusted leaders, behind the current defense minister, Sergey Shoygu; foreign minister, Sergey Lavrov; and nationalist leader of the Liberal Democrats, Vladimir Zhirinovskiy.⁶⁷ Messaging efforts or support for civil society transparency groups could target trust in Putin personally and other senior leaders and could raise doubts about the legitimacy of these leaders to carry the nation through war.

Cohesion and Popular Support

From WW I through the present, nationalism has been a bedrock of motivation, both nationally and inside the military. But Russian nationalism, as discussed earlier, is not a single ideology. Rather, the two poles of national identity, ethnic and state-based, highlight two different views of Russianness. Right now, the government is balancing these two nationalist impulses, seeking maximal motivation with minimal alienation of non-Russian minorities. But this is an artifact of convenience. As WWs I and II both show, the statist impulse alone has not fueled national will when the war toll begins to rise. This could be especially true today when, as previously discussed, Russians lack a high degree of trust in their government. But resorting to the use of ethnicity to bolster a war effort would break open ethnic fault lines in the country. Russia today faces a demographic challenge: Slavic birthrates have declined relative to those of minorities, particularly Muslim minorities. This shift is mirrored inside the military, where efforts have been made to recruit ethnic Russians, but they are harder to enlist than minorities.⁶⁸ Ethnic differences inside the Russian military cause raucous fights when groups are brought together. In response, the military began to create mono-ethnic units in 2010 to reduce the scope for this type of brawling.⁶⁹ While each unit may have higher internal cohesion now, each will respond differently to appeals to fight for the motherland. Rhetoric that pushes an ethnic definition of Russianness, while it will mobilize Slavic populations, could repel others. Thus, Russia could find itself in a quandary, forced to make a choice between ethnic and statist appeals, both of which have major downsides. In a conflict with Russia, foreign powers would do well to exploit the sense of alienation of ethnic minorities. This could be done through messaging or through diplomatic and economic overtures to minority regions, to reassure them that foreign support would be there should they choose to withdraw from the Russian polity.

⁶⁷ Levada-Center, 2016a.

⁶⁸ Marlene Laruelle, "How Islam Will Change Russia," Washington, D.C.: Jamestown Foundation, September 13, 2016.

⁶⁹ Laruelle, 2016.

Looking Toward the Future

Collectively, this analysis suggests several interventions that U.S. Army and other leaders may pursue to affect Russian will. The first, highlighted in Figure 5.5, shows a chain of causality in which competitors can impose military and other costs on a discretionary conflict with limited objectives. Historical references for this type of intervention include the First Chechen War and Russia's conflict in Afghanistan, where the Russian people did not see the conflicts as vital for Russia, but the costs were high nonetheless. Raising the costs of a low-stakes conflict then have the effect of lowering popular support, as well as reducing the public's acceptance of the authoritarian system and trust in its leader, Putin. An important caution here is that imposing higher costs will only work so long as the perceived stakes are low. In particular, U.S. involvement could raise the perception of the stakes of conflict, thus reinforcing popular support for the central state.

Another set of mechanisms that Russia's competitors could employ is to use messaging (propaganda and other efforts to inform, influence, and persuade) and engagement to address fault lines in Russia's identity-related context of ethnicity and nationalism. This pathway, depicted in Figure 5.6, would employ targeted messages to drive wedges between ethnic Russians and minorities, both in the military and in public life. This would lower popular support and force divisions between elites along ethnic lines, which could alter Russian expectations of victory. At the same time, diplomatic reassurances could be used to reinforce those cleavages, offering support to any minority groups that refuse to fight with the ethnic Russians.

A final mechanism that the United States and its allies could employ to affect Russia's national will is messaging specifically to reduce trust in the military and in government (Figure 5.7). Because Russians typically lack trust in their government, messaging that targets the government may not affect popular support; however, Rus-

Figure 5.5
Causal Chain to Affect Will to Fight When Stakes Are Low

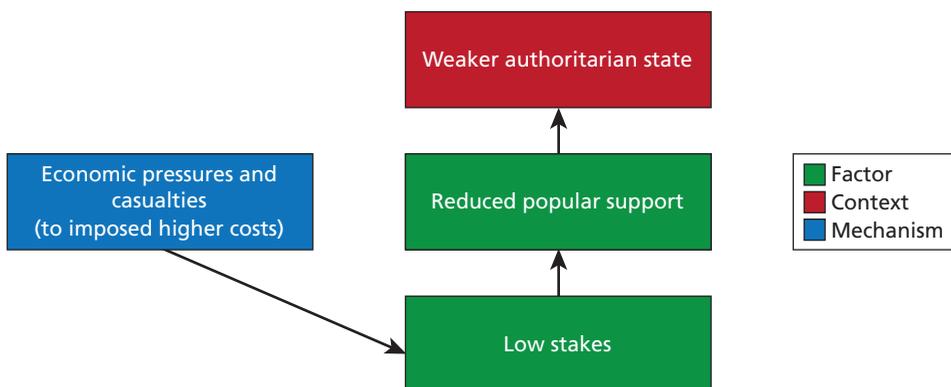


Figure 5.6
Causal Chain to Affect Cohesion and Popular Support

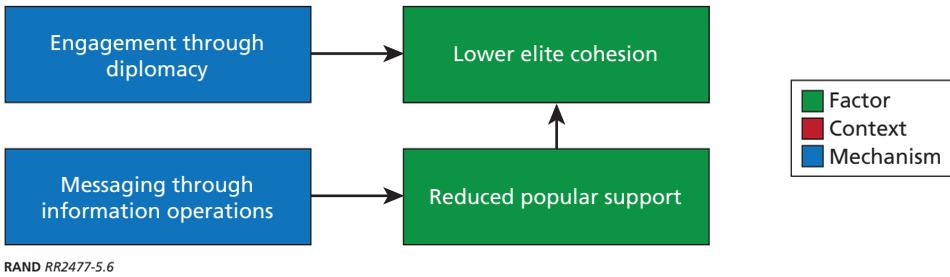
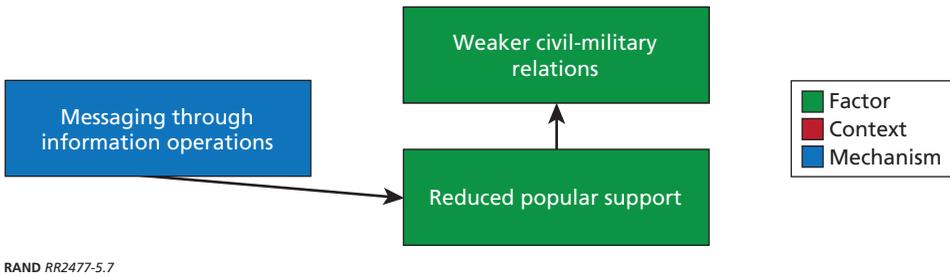


Figure 5.7
Causal Chain to Affect Popular Support and Civil-Military Relations



sians do trust in certain individuals who lead the government, particularly Putin and Shoygu. Messaging that casts doubt on Putin’s trustworthiness, or on the civil-military alliance as having the best interests of Russians at heart, could erode trust and make that alliance less tenable.

To conclude, the expression of will to fight in Russia today is unique but can be explained using the fundamental logic of our model. The data points that reveal these dynamics are openly available to the United States to gather and interpret. Whether Russia becomes a battlefield enemy or remains just a geopolitical rival, it may yield benefits to the analyst to understand the dynamics of Russia’s will to fight, both as a nation and as a military organization. Analysis of this type can cast a spotlight on the enduring strengths and weaknesses of the Russian state and its relationships with soldier and citizen.

Findings and Recommendations

Returning to our opening quotes from Chapter One, was General Giáp correct that human beings are the more decisive factors in war? Based on our research, we would agree—usually, although it is complicated. National will is neither all-powerful nor something that can be measured on a stoplight chart. It is best analyzed relative to an opposing side, it is highly situation-dependent, and it fluctuates over time. An action that strengthens will to fight in one case might weaken it in another. Sometimes a country—Germany or Japan in WW II, for example—has equally high or higher will to fight than its enemies consistently throughout the war and must be militarily destroyed to be defeated.¹ Yet, more often, will to fight is indeed the decisive factor, either because the two sides in a conflict are relatively evenly matched militarily or because the pure force of a nation’s will to fight—as guided and executed by the nation’s leaders and people—outlasts or overcomes a more physically powerful adversary. There is no better example in modern history than General Giáp’s North Vietnamese government and the military forces they guided.

Turning to our second opening quote, General Buck Turgidson certainly would have agreed with Giáp. Although Turgidson was a fictional character in the classic 1964 comedy *Dr. Strangelove*, he and his colleagues (satirically) illustrated many of the will to fight variables analyzed in this report. While the movie was also about the dangers of nuclear weapons, it was primarily about human will, including the risks of strategies (e.g., mutual assured destruction) and technologies (e.g., the infamous Soviet “doomsday machine”) that interfere with the ability to exercise will.² The movie also

¹ In WW II, British will to fight was arguably even more decisive than German will to fight and is a compelling example of the power of a strong national will to fight in a mature democracy.

² The Eisenhower administration’s “massive retaliation” policy—called “mutual assured destruction,” or MAD, by some—and the Soviet Union’s “Dead Hand” or doomsday machine are real-world examples of national will to fight taken to the ultimate extreme of nuclear war planning. See Herman Kahn, *On Thermonuclear War*, New York: Routledge, 2007; and Nicholas Thompson, “Inside the Apocalyptic Soviet Doomsday Machine,” *Wired*, September 21, 2009.

highlights the risks of overemphasizing the value of national will to fight at the expense of necessary and contentious debates about just war and cost-benefit considerations.³

Figure 6.1
National Will to Fight: A Portable Model



RAND RR2477-6.1

³ These debates were indeed contentious in the United States in the 1950s, when the government debated using nuclear weapons in Korea, and again at the time of the movie's release, when the government was debating expanding its involvement in the Vietnam War.

Will to fight is the intersection of human behavior and war. It is therefore complex, dynamic, and difficult to predict and demands careful study. At the national level, this means that leaders must focus on understanding the variables that drive their wartime decisionmaking and that of their allies and adversaries while also remaining sensitive to war's horrific costs.

Figure 6.1 is a graphic visualization of our national will to fight model. The inner circle highlights the centers of gravity within which we organize our four contexts and seven factors. Our four mechanisms make up the outermost circle. We call it a portable model because we believe that the variables can be applied to a wide range of historical and future conflict scenarios. Some variables will be more relevant than others, depending on the particular scenario. And how the variables are unpacked and tailored for the circumstances will vary, but this model provides a useful starting point for discussion.

In this final chapter, we present our overall findings, most of which are based on our analysis of each variable in our national will to fight model and organized around the hypotheses we laid out in Chapter Two. We also provide recommendations to help U.S. Army and other leaders better understand and influence national will to fight in allies and adversaries now and in the future.

Overall Findings

As in our companion study on will to fight at the tactical and operational levels,⁴ our overarching finding is that **will to fight is poorly analyzed and the least understood aspect of war**. To be sure, our literature review (see Appendix A) identified dozens of articles and books that discuss the topic in general terms and provides many citations of relevant works. Among these are several works that dive deeply into particular aspects of will to fight, which are discussed in the first half of our literature review. Of those works, there are an even smaller number of analytic models that examine certain factors that bear on a nation's will to fight. For example, Jasen Castillo's book *Endurance and War* includes a model that tests a theory of military cohesion at the national, operational, and tactical levels using two factors: (1) the degree to which a regime controls society and (2) the autonomy that military organizations possess to train for warfighting.⁵

Comprehensive, rigorous examinations of national will to fight as a concept, however, are severely lacking. Most importantly, applications of that concept to contemporary conflict scenarios are also lacking. While predictive models are likely unrealistic, exploratory models like the one we have developed in this report can be a valuable

⁴ Connable et al., 2018.

⁵ Castillo, 2014.

tool to support the kind of rigorous examinations that Army leaders, policymakers, analysts, and planners need.

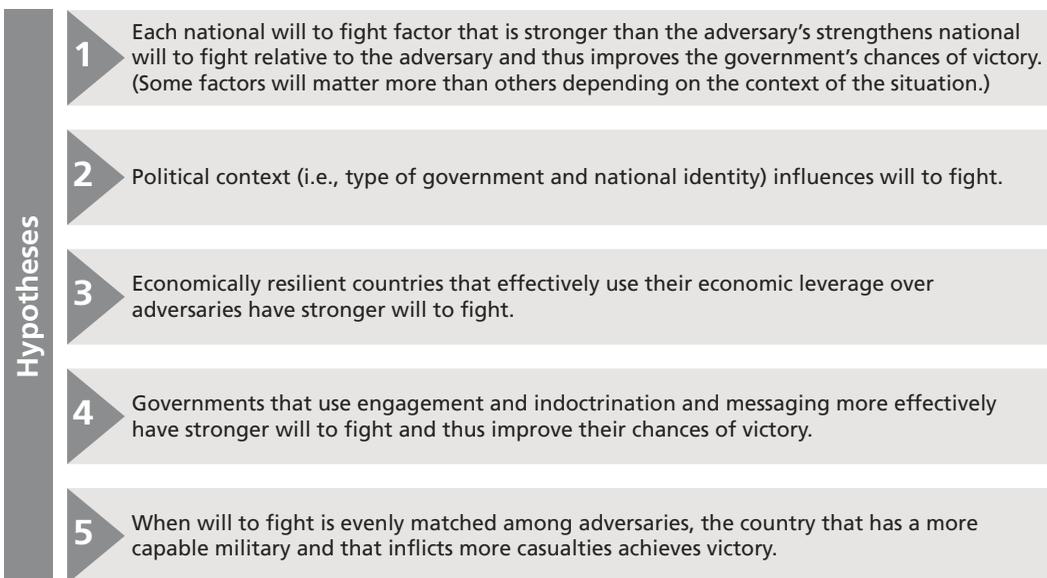
The rest of our findings are organized around the five hypotheses we noted in Chapter Two, which are summarized in Figure 6.2.

Hypothesis 1: Factors

Our first hypothesis centered around the factors identified in our national will to fight model, arguing that **a country with more factors in its favor (e.g., high stakes, strong cohesion, popular support) should have stronger will to fight and thus improve its chances of victory.** Our research indicated that this is true but that improving one's odds is certainly not the same as ensuring victory. Our Soviet Union and North Vietnam cases, for example, illustrated how the factors we identified—especially the political factors—shaped an indomitable will to fight that enabled these governments to withstand almost unimaginable levels of punishment.

We also found that national will to fight could vary during the course of a conflict. In the Korean War, virtually all of our will to fight factors favored North Korea, and indeed those factors contributed to massive early successes. But attrition and significant allied support reversed the momentum to favor South Korea, until the entry of Chinese forces brought the sides to a bloody stalemate. By the end of the conflict,

Figure 6.2
Hypotheses to Help Analyze the Variables in Our National Will to Fight Model



our will to fight factors had strengthened for South Korea, but its allies—particularly the United States—were determined to end the fighting. Indeed, alliances are a crucial aspect of understanding our will to fight factors. Our WW I and WW II cases were particularly complex in that regard, teaching us that assessing will to fight involves multiple variable relationships, each of which must be broken down and analyzed.

Hypothesis 2: Contexts

Our second hypothesis centered around political contexts (i.e., government type and national identity). We found that **context plays an underlying but important role in strengthening or weakening will to fight**. Our research supports the proposition that strong democracies and totalitarian states are better able to maintain will to fight (through very different means) compared with democracies in turmoil or states with a mix of democratic and autocratic traits. The interrelationships among our variables matter, however. Our research showed an interaction effect in the relationship between strong democracies and will to fight: stakes.

As discussed in Chapter Three and Appendix A, when their existential or vital national interests are threatened, strong democracies have powerful and enduring national will to fight. When stakes are questionable, strong democracies' will to fight is more fragile—and increasingly so if casualties are high and conflict duration grows.⁶ The same interaction is not the case for totalitarian societies, perhaps because indoctrination allows leaders to more easily paint the stakes as high.

In the case of the Vietnam war, we saw a strongly democratic ally (the United States) lose its will to fight with South Vietnam as the conflict dragged on. Stakes began to be perceived as insufficiently high to justify the costs, popular support weakened, and even government cohesion began to unravel. As we discussed in Chapters Two and Three, regimes that waver between democratic and autocratic tendencies (e.g., South Vietnam) may struggle to maintain cohesion, popular support, civil-military relations, and even allied support. In fact, with respect to national will to fight, Vietnam serves as an important cautionary tale about the risks of partnerships between strong democratic states and those that are not. A strong democracy should normally have strong will to fight, but if its less-democratic ally is perceived as unreliable or less committed to its own fight, then the alliance may shatter, as officials and citizens of the supporting ally ask why they are sacrifices for such a government.⁷

We found that national identity permeates almost every other aspect of will to fight but can be challenging to analyze without diving into rabbit holes of complex psychosocial research or superficial stereotypes. Our Korea and Russia cases in Chap-

⁶ See Larson, 1996.

⁷ See, for example, Karnow, 1983.

ters Four and Five, respectively, are full of insights about the importance of understanding national identity, appreciating, for example, the legacy of Japanese occupation in Korea; the nuances of nationalist versus political (e.g., Soviet) ideology; and the ways governments can use nationalism and other forms of identity to manipulate their citizens, their military, and even their own ruling coalitions in order to strengthen will to fight. Governments and other organizations frequently try to influence national identity for good or ill, including through what we have called indoctrination and messaging. The implications are significant for strengthening or weakening will to fight and even for strengthening or weakening the very foundations of society. Though difficult to analyze in a way that is both rigorous and useful to policymakers, national identity is an underlying yet crucial variable in our model.

Finally, while our model's variables for context focused on government type, national identity, economic resilience, and conflict duration, context is also important in the broader sense of the term. No amount of modeling can substitute for tailoring one's analysis to the particular case at hand, whether looking back at history or looking ahead at future conflict scenarios.

Hypothesis 3: Economics

Our third hypothesis focused on our model's economic variables. Although we originally focused our attention on sanctions and the economic leverage that one state might have over another, our research indicated that **economics is relevant primarily in terms of alliances and engagement with other countries**. In other words, a country's economic dependency on and support from its allies often matter more than economic pressures from an adversary. For example, national will to fight in WW I, WW II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War arguably had more to do with economic support systems than the economic pressures (including wholesale destruction of industrial production) that adversaries imposed on one another.

Governments should be wary of overestimating their ability to weaken an adversary's will to fight through economic pressures, unless that adversary is truly isolated. On the other hand, as we saw in our India-Pakistan case, governments may be able to use their economic leverage over dependent partners to help bring a conflict to an end.

Hypothesis 4: Political Mechanisms

Our fourth hypothesis focused on two of our model's mechanisms, (1) engagement and (2) indoctrination and messaging, and is perhaps of greatest interest to Army leaders and other government officials. We found that the **effective use of engagement and of indoctrination and messaging can greatly influence will to fight and thus**

should improve the chances of victory. While our research focused on states in conflict, an important finding in several of our cases was that these mechanisms are most effective *before* a conflict begins.

Engagement

As discussed in Chapter Two, we used a broad definition of engagement to include not only international diplomacy but also defense engagement (including military-to-military contacts). We found that engagement efforts can influence most of the factors in our model and thereby strengthen the resolve of partners and bring adversaries to the negotiating table.

In addition to strengthening alliances more generally, diplomats work to ensure that their counterparts perceive the stakes of a conflict (or potential conflict) in the same way. They build relationships with various centers of power and influence in foreign countries, which can affect cohesion and civil-military relations in those countries in time of conflict. Diplomats in democratic countries also work to strengthen democracy in other countries, which our research showed can strengthen the will to fight (and will to not fight, as appropriate) in the countries receiving that support. Diplomats facilitate economic relationships in order to strengthen their own domestic economy and the economies of partner countries but also, at least potentially, to strengthen the economic leverage their country might have over others—for example, in the way that China is sometimes perceived as holding the United States “hostage” by owning U.S. debt.⁸

Defense officials and military leaders also engage their foreign counterparts in ways that can influence perceptions of stakes, cohesion, and civil-military relations—and thus will to fight. They build relationships and provide assistance in ways that help strengthen a partner’s military capabilities, including their defense institutions and human capital. As General Giáp said, human beings are the decisive factor in war (“Human beings! Human beings!”).⁹ We see no reason to believe that technology advances have significantly changed this reality. We found that defense engagement can be a crucial mechanism for strengthening partners’ will to fight at the national level and the tactical and operational levels.

Finally, as was illustrated in almost all of our case studies (including WW I, WW II, Korea, and Vietnam), both aspects of engagement—international diplomacy and defense engagement—must be well under way before a conflict starts. As Germany showed prior to WW II, skillful diplomacy can undermine will to fight in potential adversaries, and internal machinations can take years to come together. France and the other Allied powers, by comparison, had many more stumbles in the lead-up to war,

⁸ Kenneth Rapoza, “U.S. ‘Hostage’ to China and Saudi Arabia, but Only One Seems to Matter,” *Forbes*, April 22, 2016.

⁹ Karnow, 1983, p. 21.

many of which were corrected only during the bitter course of the war at the cost of many lives. Similarly, North Korea and North Vietnam leveraged their ideological and geostrategic links with China and the Soviet Union, respectively, to generate strong national will to fight.

Indoctrination and Messaging

As with engagement, we used a broad definition of indoctrination and messaging, focused on efforts to use the government's powers over information and communication to strengthen will to fight within a country (indoctrination) and externally (messaging). Indoctrination and messaging as a mechanism is particularly important because of its ability to affect the perceptions (and sometimes the reality) of a host of factors, including stakes, cohesion, popular support (particularly stemming from perceived legitimacy), and even casualties and military capabilities. More, this mechanism can be used to mobilize aspects of national identity and possibly change its salience.

In totalitarian countries, indoctrination can work in combination with national identity to increase a population's senses of solidarity, belonging, and consensus. In certain contexts and with a sufficient level of effort, significant portions of a population can be turned into unquestioning fanatics; consider, for example, the dedication of some WW II-era Japanese to their emperor.

During the heyday of global communism, communist countries used a combination of indoctrination and population control to strong effect. Loyalty training in schools and in compulsory meetings for adults, backed by censorship to remove competing voices and points of view, and reinforced by commissars and other forms of internal supervision to impose consequences on the disloyal can add up to a strong set of core perceptions, the belief that these perceptions are both true and widely shared (even if neither is the case), and fear of even appearing to deviate from those perceptions. Such communist indoctrination was certainly present in historical Russia and North Vietnam, as well as in contemporary North Korea.

In democratic countries, internal use of information to influence is less threatening and coercive than full-out indoctrination but can still contribute importantly to national will to fight. Consider historical WW II-era recruiting posters and other propaganda in the United States, which emphasized the threat to the homeland and the importance of citizens (or volunteers) doing their duty for the nation. Japanese and German adversaries were routinely depicted in ways that dehumanized and demonized them.

In addition to building relationships with foreign officials and diplomats, governments can use messaging to reach out directly to the populations of an ally or adversary to influence the level of popular support for a conflict or for aggression against another nation. The cornerstones of public diplomacy have always been fostering awareness and understanding across and between nations, emphasizing similarities, and reducing the prospects for antipathy. Other forms of messaging can also influence national will

to fight. Consider, for example, British propaganda aimed at the United States during WW I. The British used pamphlets, selective news, and film to highlight German atrocities, promoting images of angry and aggressive German forces, and to otherwise share (selective) facts designed to galvanize support for the British and opposition to Germany among Americans. In available historical examples, indoctrination at home and messaging abroad have been used to bolster national will to fight, along with limited examples of the use of such techniques to reduce national will to fight.

Hypothesis 5: Capabilities and Casualties

Our fifth hypothesis addressed two of our military variables: capabilities and infliction of casualties (i.e., attrition). We found that **when will to fight is evenly matched, superior military capabilities and infliction of greater casualties should lead to victory—or stalemate**. Sometimes national will to fight is high from the start of a conflict until the end, helping a country overcome capability shortfalls and high attrition, as with North Vietnam. Or a nation can be ground into submission, with much of its government and military fighting until the end, as with Nazi Germany. In the latter case, the will to fight of Germany's adversaries started out mixed but, over the course of the war, grew to match German will, leading to their eventual victory as attrition ate away at the capabilities and manpower of Germany and its partners. In the cases of the Korean and Iran-Iraq wars, will to fight fluctuated during the conflicts but eventually evened out. In neither case did the difference in capabilities and attrition become large enough that either side had strong expectations of success or at least the prospect of a victory that would warrant the expected risks and sacrifices that lay ahead. We also found that the infliction of casualties in some scenarios was actually more likely to strengthen an adversary's will to fight than to weaken it—for example, with France during WW I and the Soviet Union during WW II.

Recommendations

We used our findings to develop several recommendations that should help leaders improve their awareness and understanding of national will to fight. These recommendations should also provide insights into how leaders can influence national will to fight in allies and adversaries as they react to crises and plan against potential future conflicts.

First, and most importantly, given the emergence of significant international security threats throughout the world, particularly in the Korean Peninsula and near Russia's western borders, U.S. Army and other leaders should **undertake assessments of national will to fight in potential wartime allies and adversaries**. Serious dis-

cussions of allied contributions to potential conflicts tend to focus on the capabilities that an ally can bring to bear, along with a more general discussion of political considerations. Detailed, scenario-based analysis of ally reliability is rare at best. Most U.S. planning assumes either that certain levels of allied troops and equipment will be sustained throughout the course of a conflict or that U.S. forces should rely on minimal allied contributions, regardless of the scenario. Looking beyond their equipment, will adversaries be paper tigers, relentless killing machines, or somewhere in the vast space in between? Most policy discussions, intelligence assessments, contingency plans, and war games continue to be based on military capabilities, while discussions of will to fight—to the extent they occur—focus on deterrence.

How reliable will an ally be once a conflict is well under way? How much staying power does an adversary have under various conditions? If questions like these resonate for policymakers and military planners, then a fundamental change in assessments is needed whereby they consider military effectiveness to be a product of capability and will. As discussed in Chapter Two, the exploratory model in this report is generalizable. It can be tailored and applied to a wide set of conflict scenarios and drive a much-needed dialogue among analysts conducting threat assessments, contingency plans, war games, and other efforts that require an evaluation of how future conflicts might unfold. Specific next steps could include Army-sponsored workshops, table-top exercises, and proof-of-concept war games in Washington, at the Army's Training and Doctrine Command, and overseas.

Second, if leaders wish to incorporate considerations of will to fight into future analysis, they will need to **update strategic guidance documents and military doctrine**. Intelligence analysts, force planners,¹⁰ war planners, and those who manage international engagements and messaging efforts¹¹ all use strategic guidance to help them understand their missions and prioritize their efforts. In addition, the U.S. military relies on doctrine to establish education programs of instruction, principles, and a common frame of reference to guide the vast range of activities the military performs, from the strategic to the tactical.¹² As we discussed in Chapter One, the prominence of will to fight as a concept has varied in U.S. guidance documents and doctrine over the years, with a few general references now appearing after many years of near-absence. While senior leaders can immediately begin a dialogue about incorporating will to

¹⁰ Force planners are analysts who work to identify the capabilities, forces, and overseas posture that a military needs to meet certain mission requirements.

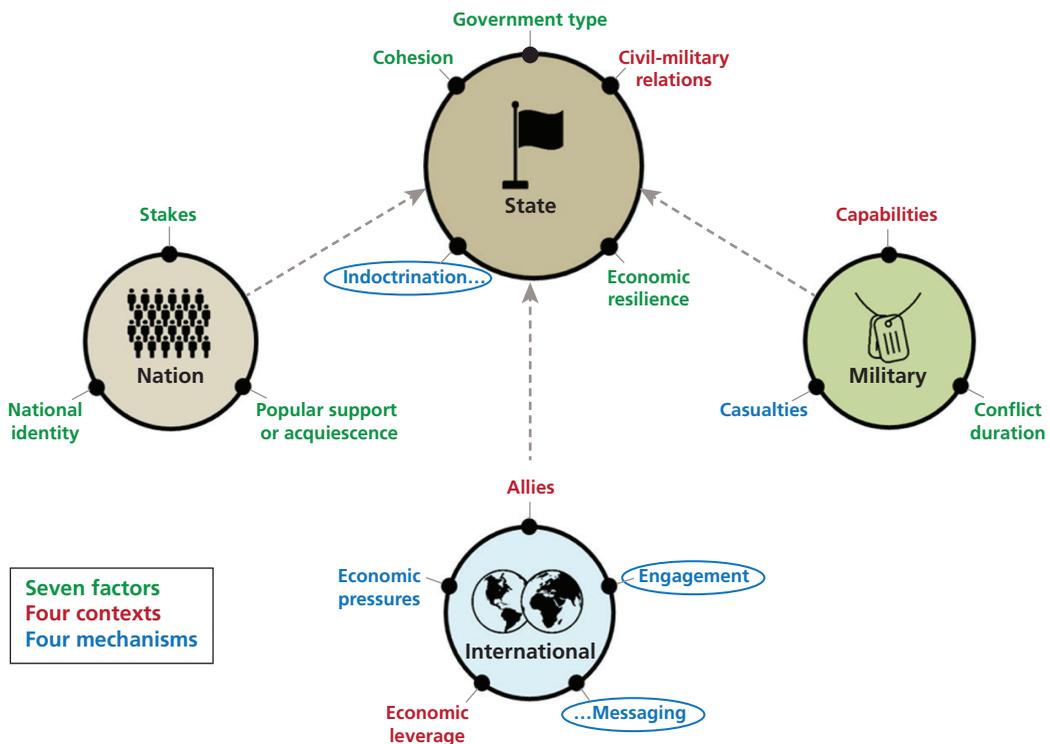
¹¹ Such efforts are referred to variously as “inform and influence activities,” “military information support operations,” or “strategic communication,” or as part of “operations in the information environment” in DoD and “public diplomacy” in the State Department.

¹² DoD defines *joint doctrine* as “fundamental principles that guide the employment of United States military forces in coordinated action toward a common objective and may include terms, tactics, techniques, and procedures” (Joint Chiefs of Staff, *DOD Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, Ft. Belvoir, Va.: Defense Technical Information Center, August 2017).

fight into assessments of potential allies and adversaries, it will take several years to integrate the concept with all its nuances into the many relevant documents across the Army and the U.S. government. If leaders want to shape these efforts, they should start by identifying needed updates in the President's National Security Strategy, State Department country strategies, DoD planning guidance, joint publications, Army field manuals, and everything in between. Additional language in the next Army Field Manual 3-0 (on operations) and the Army Doctrine Reference Publication 5-0 (on the operations process), as well as the development of a DoD Directive, could be useful starting points.

Carrying out our first two recommendations is not a simple matter of sprinkling the term *will to fight* into various workshops and strategy documents. These recommendations require addressing the full range of variables that shape and underlie will to fight—perhaps with our exploratory model, described in Chapter Two and displayed again in Figure 6.3, or perhaps with a similar tool that is tailored to the needs at hand. Our final two recommendations are organized around our engagement and

Figure 6.3
Centers of Gravity and Variables in the National Will to Fight Exploratory Model



NOTE: The (1) engagement and (2) indoctrination and messaging mechanisms (circled) are the most useful variables in our model for guiding action on how to address will to fight.

indoctrination and messaging mechanisms (circled in the figure) because these are the most useful variables in our model for guiding additional short-term action.

For our third recommendation, we suggest that U.S. Army and other leaders **incorporate will to fight considerations into international engagements**, from high-level political discussions to multinational military exercises and tactical training events. As our research showed, alliances play crucial roles on both sides of almost every conflict, and the strength of such support is often subject to influence before and during those conflicts. Frank discussions—usually discreet but sometimes very public—can reduce risks of misunderstanding and change behavior. Strategic engagements can improve understanding of common security interests among allied leaders, their staff, and their militaries. Such engagements can potentially have similar effects with nonallied states and thus weaken their bonds with potential U.S. adversaries, or at least raise questions among elites and militaries in those countries about the extent to which the United States poses a threat or an opportunity. In the same way, engagements centered on will to fight considerations among military units and personnel can have effects at the strategic level over time. More specifically, leaders will need to clarify roles, responsibilities, priorities, and tasks among policymakers in Washington, diplomats, military commanders, staff at military operational headquarters, military attachés, and so forth. Additional language in DoD security cooperation guidance, State Department regional strategies, and Army Field Manual 3-22 (on support to security cooperation) could be useful starting points.

Fourth, the Army can help guide U.S. government efforts to operate more effectively in the information space to **understand and influence the indoctrination and messaging efforts of other countries**. DoD, State Department, and Intelligence Community officials could start by incorporating the concept of will to fight into their analysis of foreign information operations and their interactions with foreign officials and citizens. This can include efforts to understand how other countries portray international security challenges, manage civil-military relations, shape national identity, and shape public perceptions, all through the lens of national will to fight. It can also include efforts to help countries explain to their citizens the common security interests they share with the United States. Through DoD's and the State Department's international engagements and messaging efforts,¹³ U.S. officials can reach out directly to foreign populations to strengthen popular support for such organizations as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, for UN peacekeeping operations, or for allies under threat (e.g., South Korea), thus potentially strengthening popular support for future military operations.

Leaders and planners must be prepared for adversary government efforts to skew the perceptions of their populations and foreign populations to influence will to fight

¹³ DoD often refers to such as efforts as *inform and influence* activities, and the Department of State refers to them as *public diplomacy*.

in ways that are contrary to U.S. interests. Adversary national will to fight can grow stronger than it would be otherwise if there are false perceptions among the adversary's population about U.S. intentions or relative capabilities. U.S. policymakers must be prepared to counter such perceptions. Captive domestic audiences are vulnerable to efforts to manipulate their perceptions, and perceptions can substitute for (or even become) reality. Even when the other factors of national will to fight (such as stakes, cohesion, and popular support) are low, if these factors are *perceived* as being high, then national will may behave as if the factors are actually high. When adversary will to fight is a concern, and where an adversary or potential adversary has invested in internally focused indoctrination and externally focused messaging, U.S. regional strategies and military plans may need to include efforts to counter the consequences of these efforts.

Public affairs and military information support efforts may need to be joined by other U.S. government and allied international broadcasting and information dissemination capabilities in order to point out inconsistencies in adversary propaganda and bring the perceptions of relevant populations (internal or external) back into closer accord with objective reality. This may be one of the most urgent and challenging aspects of will to fight. While it is easy to imagine that the truth would be self-evident and would easily defeat falsehoods when they are exposed as such, this is often not the case.¹⁴ Discrediting false perspectives and promoting the truth requires more than just access to the truth; it takes hard work. Countering the falsehoods inherent in indoctrination requires media and modes of communication to access the affected populations, as well as messengers and interlocutors who the relevant population perceive as credible. U.S. voices, especially official government or military voices, will often not be viewed as credible, especially if the United States has been demonized as part of indoctrination. Even when credible messengers are identified, countering the indoctrination of adversary populations may require a deep understanding of the content of the indoctrination and the narratives it uses.¹⁵

Conclusion

National will to fight is not a new concept: Sun Tzu talked about it more than 2,000 years ago. But it has lain dormant for too long. As U.S. officials think about threats from countries like Russia and North Korea, it is only natural to focus on military capabilities. Weapons and numbers of troops are physical manifestations of a country's

¹⁴ Christopher Paul and Miriam Matthews, *The Russian "Firehose of Falsehood" Propaganda Model: Why It Might Work and Options to Counter It*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, PE-198-OSD, 2016.

¹⁵ Christopher Paul, Kristen Sproat Colley, and Laura Steckman, "Fighting Against, with, and Through Narrative," *Marine Corps Gazette*, forthcoming.

wartime power. Incorporating will to fight into the analysis of actual or potential conflicts will add complexity, subjectivity, and disagreement into strategy discussions and planning, but it will also add rigor and utility.

Quoting Clausewitz (and *Dr. Strangelove*) is a good starting point for a lively debate about will to fight and military strategy, but head nods to the classics must be followed by action. We hope that this report stimulates dialogue among leaders, detailed analysis, and guidance to those whose job should include understanding and influencing the human factors that underlie the “violent struggle between two hostile, independent, and irreconcilable wills” that we call war.¹⁶

¹⁶ U.S. Marine Corps, 1997a, p. 3.

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What drives some governments to persevere in war at any price while others choose to stop fighting? It is often less-tangible political and economic variables, rather than raw military power, that ultimately determine national will to fight. In this analysis, the authors explore how these variables strengthen or weaken a government's determination to conduct sustained military operations, even when the expectation of success decreases or the need for significant political, economic, and military sacrifices increases.

This report is part of a broader RAND Arroyo Center effort to help U.S. leaders better understand and influence will to fight at both the national level and the tactical and operational levels. It presents findings and recommendations based on a wide-ranging literature review, a series of interviews, 15 case studies (including deep dives into conflicts involving the Korean Peninsula and Russia), and reviews of relevant modeling and war-gaming.

The authors propose an exploratory model of 15 variables that can be tailored and applied to a wide set of conflict scenarios and drive a much-needed dialogue among analysts conducting threat assessments, contingency plans, war games, and other efforts that require an evaluation of how future conflicts might unfold. The recommendations should provide insights into how leaders can influence will to fight in both allies and adversaries.



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