



# Understanding the Failure of Afghan Will to Fight



A Short Guide for Current  
and Future Events

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10 pages

Photo [credit](#) for cover page: Afghan National Army soldiers take break during a patrol down a busy road with many known IED hotspots during a multi-day operation Aug. 21 in Alingar District, Laghman province. The PRT, combined with assets from the 45th Infantry Brigade, conducted a cordon and search in a village thought to be home to IED makers and Taliban fighters. MSgt Ryan Crane

Opinions presented in this **analysis** do not necessarily reflect the analyses, opinions, or interpretations of evidence of any organization to which the author has previously belonged, or to which the author may presently belong. Thank you to my friends who provided much-needed edits. Please see: Ben Connable, et al., *Will to Fight: Analyzing, Modeling, and Simulating the Will to Fight of Military Units*, 2018, at [www.rand.org](http://www.rand.org) for more information on will to fight.

I started writing this analysis as the Taliban were on the outskirts of Kabul on August 13, 2021, and as the United States desperately evacuated its embassy personnel in a disheartening reenactment of Operation Frequent Wind. Events have outpaced my ability to make this a practical analysis for Afghanistan policy. Today, Afghanistan is a Taliban Islamic emirate, and Afghanistan's security forces do not exist.

Therefore, my **purposes** here are more general: **(1)** to help to explain why Afghan will to fight broke; **(2)** to help explain the meaning of will to fight and why it matters for our understanding of war; and **(3)** to help people assess will to fight of any of our remaining partner military forces in the absence of effective or transparent government analysis.

I wrote this quickly to help inform the current debate. All errors are mine. As I wrapped up my final draft, the President of the United States finished his [speech](#) on the Afghanistan withdrawal. In it, he said this of our former Afghan partners:

We gave them every tool they could need. We paid their salaries, provided for the maintenance of their air force, something the Taliban doesn't have. Taliban does not have an air force. We provided close air support. We gave them every chance to determine their own future. What we could not provide them was the will to fight for that future.

In his tone, President Biden expressed his disgust with Afghan political and military will to fight. His expectations were not aligned with practical, possible outcomes in great part because both he and his staff did not understand the nature of human will in war.

## American Disappointment with Afghan (and Iraqi) Will to Fight

Most Afghan military and political leaders were fighting, surrendering, running, saving their families, or dying, and were therefore not able to watch the August 13<sup>th</sup> CNN interview with Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs John Kirby. In this [interview](#), Kirby expressed his disappointment with Afghan will to fight:

What has been disconcerting to see has been there hasn't been that will, that political leadership, the military leadership, and the ability to push back on the Taliban as they've advanced...I think the international community would like to see more will, more political will and military leadership on the ground in Afghanistan.

Given the paucity of recent American will to fight in Afghanistan—including the fact that the fairly short-notice American withdrawal abandoned the Afghans in the middle of the fighting season—some Afghans might find this statement ironic. Many have previously remarked that they had expected more political will and military leadership from the



international community, particularly considering the many promises of support made by NATO and, unilaterally, American leaders, over the past twenty years.

Perhaps more importantly for American foreign policy, Kirby's statements reflect a broader confusion about the nature and meaning of human will. He is not alone in expressing consternation about [will to fight](#). In the same interview, Kirby stated:

What we couldn't predict was the lack of resistance they were going to get from Afghan forces...Because quite frankly the Afghan forces have all the advantages they need, they've got more troops, they've got more equipment, they've got an air force. Money can't buy will, will has to be there. The ability to exert leadership, to exude leadership on the field, that has to be there.

Kirby's misunderstanding and frustrations echo those of American political and military leaders from at least the Vietnam War and Iraq War eras. In 2014, after our well-armed, well-equipped, and well-trained Iraqi partners collapsed in the face of irregular Islamic State fighters, then Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter made comments that were eerily similar to those made by Kirby. It is worth watching this [May 2015](#) and this [August 2021](#) video clip back to back. Here are Carter's most salient comments:

The Iraqi forces just showed no will to fight. They were not outnumbered, and in fact they vastly outnumbered the opposing force. And yet they failed to fight, they withdrew from the site...that says to me, and to most of us, that we have an issue with the will of the Iraqis to fight [the Islamic State] and defend themselves.

Both of these experienced, senior leaders—one a defense secretary, the other a retired military flag officer—conveyed surprise, frustration, and confusion as they tried to understand will to fight. They also revealed a strategically crippling blind spot in American interpretations of war: As Americans, we tend to value things we can count, count things we value, and discount things of value which we cannot count.

In other words, American military officers and political leaders fixate on tangible, quantifiable metrics because these things are comfortably familiar (number of tanks, planes, troops, enemy killed), and because they can be easily—if inaccurately and misleadingly—translated for the American public into metrics of progress.

Human will is frustratingly ephemeral, so it is generally ignored in assessments. So over 20 years in Afghanistan, the U.S.-led coalition measured military success primarily in terms of numbers of Afghan soldiers trained, numbers of operations conducted, number of weapons delivered, etc.

This comfortable Vietnam War-era approach to understanding war is also illogical and inconsistent with most historical and modern theories of warfare. Top-level American military doctrine is predicated on the idea that human will is the most important factor in war. Given this fact, it makes little practical sense that American efforts to understand the ebb and flow of war center on materiel. When the U.S. military assesses Iraqi or Afghan *combat power*—the relative ability of a military force to succeed against a given adversary—it generally ignores or includes only the most fleeting mentions of will to fight.

Therefore, when partner forces collapse, as they did in Vietnam, and Iraq, and just now in Afghanistan, the collapse comes as a genuine surprise. Some American leaders then blame partners for their lack of will to fight. Because the United States did not assess or specifically try to build partner will to fight in a thoughtful, structured manner—see below—the United States cannot be blamed for a partner force's lack of will to fight. This thinking might be summed up as: They were given enough stuff and training, so it is their fault that they lost.

Certainly, partner military forces share blame for their own respective defeats. But the result is still failure, and the United States still winds up losing. In the cases of Vietnam and Afghanistan, the results have been strategic defeats for the United States. After-the-fact blame casting does not recover the money, lives, or national power expended to deploy the stuff that did not win the war. If there is Schadenfreude to be had in the wake of these disasters, it is not worth the investment.

Failure to assess and center our partner development efforts on will to fight is an intellectually lazy and strategically unsound way to run a partner-centric military campaign. We now have sufficient case evidence to suggest that failure to focus on human will correlates with American defeat. Afghanistan offers a raw, immediate case for examination.

## Will to Fight and Combat Power

This section describes will to fight and related terms, describes relative Afghan security force and Taliban combat power, and provides an example of a will-to-fight assessment of the Afghan security forces in early August 2021. It is this kind of assessment that might have helped to steer a better policy. The following section provides a summary analysis of Afghan security force will to fight.

### What is Will to Fight?

Most of us use terms like morale or cohesion to describe the motivations and sentiments that keep military forces in the fight. Military experts often use the term *will to fight* to describe these nontangible aspects of warfare. Why do soldiers like those in the Afghan Army and police fight? Why do they choose to attack aggressively, or hold back, or run, or surrender? These are questions of will. Most Western military forces base their theories of warfare on *will to fight*.

For example, the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff define war as “a violent struggle between two (or more) hostile and independent wills, each trying to impose itself on the other.” Winning war requires breaking the adversary’s will to fight. A stalemate occurs when neither side is willing to back down and both sides have the means to fight. This is what we experienced in Afghanistan from 2002 through 2021.

Because the U.S. military has not defined will to fight, my research team at RAND [defined](#) it as the *disposition and decision to fight, act, or persevere in combat*. Nobody can accurately predict human behavior—to know for sure if and when someone will

fight or flee—but it is possible to examine [disposition](#) to improve understanding of behavior.

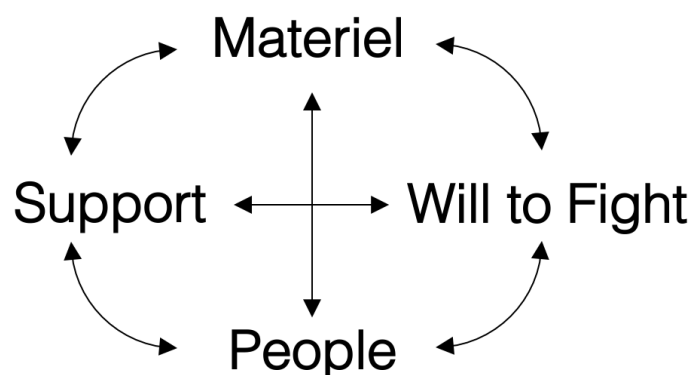
Kirby stated that Afghan will to fight could not have been predicted. That is accurate: It is impossible to predict human behavior with any degree of certainty. But expecting clear prediction sets up a false dichotomy. It would, indeed, have been possible to *forecast* Afghan disposition to fight—to build a robust but imperfect understanding and expectation for behavior—even if it was impossible to predict will to fight.

## What is Combat Power?

Like will to fight, the term *combat power* is not defined by the U.S. military. In general, combat power is the cumulative value of materiel, human capital (numbers and quality of troops), support, and will to fight. Material and nonmaterial factors are interconnected. Combat power is relative to the enemy. For example, a force with weak combat power can defeat a force with even weaker combat power.

Figure 1, below, shows the integral, reciprocal relationship between these four broad elements of combat power. Physical numbers of people—troops—receive support in the form of intelligence, airpower, medical aid, etc. Their materiel, including rifles, clothing, vehicles, and radios, gives them the tools to fight. Troops receiving good support and supplied with good equipment can have good will to fight. All these things help. But will to fight is also informed by ideology, belief in the mission, confidence in leaders, fear of the adversary, and many other factors (see below).

**Figure 1: Reciprocal Elements of Combat Power**



## Relative Afghan Security Force and Taliban Combat Power

Figures 2 and 3, below, show exemplary depictions of Afghan security force and Taliban combat power. In both figures, combat power is depicted as a combination of materiel, people, and support (M-P-S) on one side, and will to fight on the other. Everything is relative and reciprocal. Government equipment and coalition support improved Afghan security force will to fight and suppressed Taliban will to fight. When the coalition left, the balance of combat power was suddenly reversed.

In Figure 2 (pre-NATO coalition withdrawal), below, the Afghan security forces have significant advantages. In addition to their coalition-supplied equipment and training, they have NATO air support, medical support, intelligence, logistics, and thousands of contractors helping them to keep their systems working. While many Afghan units had insufficient material or troops, they generally could count on the coalition pulling them out of a big fight.

**Figure 2: Relative Combat Power With NATO Presence**

Afghan Security Force Combat Power <u>With Coalition</u>		Taliban Combat Power <u>Opposing Coalition</u>	
Materiel—People—Support	Will to Fight	M—P—S	Will to Fight
Trucks, helicopters, troops, ammunition, fuel, air support, weapons, intelligence, medical support, logistics, communications, contractors, advisors	Will to fight reinforced by NATO support	Rifles, machineguns, light rockets, improvised mines, motorcycles	Will to fight reduced by NATO support
Relatively <i>more</i> combat power than the Taliban		Relatively <i>less</i> combat power than the government	

On the other side of Figure 1, above, the very lightly armed Taliban have a sustained will to fight that is suppressed by the coalition's support to the government. It is somewhat demoralizing to know that you are fighting the United States military, which can drop bombs on you from anywhere and without warning. Under these relative conditions, the Taliban might never have quit, but also probably would never have had the relative combat power to seize all of Afghanistan.

Figure 3, below, shows the impact of the coalition's departure. Through the first half of 2021, the U.S. military guaranteed the security of about 10,000 advisors from various allied countries, and also the security of thousands of contractors who kept the Afghan Air Force flying, equipment running, radios functioning, etc. When the United States announced its departure, it forced the rest of the NATO allies, other country partners, and all of the contractors to leave as well. This quickly and effectively kicked the strongest leg of the stool out from under the Afghan security forces. They could no longer count on American air support, they could not keep their equipment running, and they were suddenly abandoned by their powerful ally.

**Figure 3: Relative Combat Power Without U.S.-Led Coalition Presence**

Afghan Security Force Combat Power <u>Without Coalition</u>		Taliban Combat Power <u>Without Coalition</u>	
M-P-S	Will to Fight	M-P-S	Will to Fight
Trucks, helicopters, troops, <b>ammunition, fuel, air support, weapons, intelligence, medical support, logistics, communications, contractors, advisors</b>	Will to fight reduced by NATO departure	Rifles, machineguns, light rockets, improvised mines, motorcycles	Will to fight increased by NATO departure and Afghan loss of will to fight
Relatively <i>less</i> combat power than the Taliban		Relatively <i>more</i> combat power than the government	

On the other side of Figure 3, above, Taliban materiel and support were unchanged. But they were immediately emboldened by the coalition withdrawal. They knew exactly what would happen to the Afghan military once it was abandoned. They also knew that without American planes flying overhead, they would have the [freedom to move](#) anywhere, in the open, and concentrate the full power of their effective light infantry against the overstretched Afghan security forces. Coalition withdrawal collapsed Afghan security force combat power—material, people, support, and will to fight, together—and ballooned relative Taliban power, contributing to Taliban victory.

This side-by-side comparison suggests that Afghan collapse was not solely due to a lack of leadership, or lack of underlying will to fight. Their generally poor but sufficient will to fight or to keep fighting, with NATO advisors, combat airpower, and contractors was significantly affected by their sudden deprivation of materiel and support. Arguments that the Afghan security forces had all the necessary tools to defend against the Taliban offensive in July and August 2021 are specious.

## Assessment of Afghan Security Force Will to Fight, August 2021

Between 2015 and 2021 I co-led a series of government-funded research projects on will to fight. In 2018 our team published two reports, one describing military will to fight and the other describing national will to fight. I encourage anyone who is interested in the details of this subject to read these free Adobe PDF reports, or to read the short, graphics-heavy summary of both reports [here](#).

In these reports we present two models of will to fight. Really, they are analytic guides to help people develop a holistic understanding of will to fight. We start with the premise that single factors can be important, but no single factor is *always* most important. In other words, will to fight isn't all about leadership, or all about training, or all about cohesion. It is about varying degrees of these factors, and many others.

Will to fight is a *disposition* (and then a series of decisions) that is influenced by many factors. Examining factors is arguably the most constructive and practical way to build a knowingly imperfect, but demonstrably better picture of will to fight. The common present alternative is to guess.

Table 1 in the Appendix of this report lists and defines 37 major factors from our military will-to-fight analytic [model](#). They are broken down by level of focus, from the individual to the military unit (a platoon, or a division), to the military organization (a service, like the Afghan Army), the state (like the former Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan), and society. The last factors are relative to the environment and adversary. Factors from every level influence dispositions and decisions to fight of Afghan military leaders and soldiers.

## Applying Factor-by-Factor Analysis to the Afghan Security Forces

I applied those 37 factors on a ratio scale of 1-9 to demonstrate how factors can be used to better understand will to fight. Each factor reduces, has little effect on, or

improves will to fight. On this scale, a 1 is very bad influence on will to fight, while a 9 is great influence (positively affects) will to fight. Definitions for each factor are in the Appendix, and I included a brief explanation of my scores in each row here. Note that I am not a full-time subject-matter expert on the Afghan security forces, so these scores should not be taken at face value.

A thorough analysis would require focused effort by an intelligence organization or one of many open-source analysis organizations. But there is sufficient public information available to make some cursory judgments with readily available public data.

Figure 1 is my factor-by-factor reading of Afghan security force will to fight in early August 2021. While I am familiar with the Afghan military and police, I am not a subject-matter expert. These results should not be taken at face value. I'm offering them here to show the reader how to apply a factor-by-factor assessment.

**Table 1: Factor Assessment of Afghan Security Force Will to Fight August 2021**

FACTOR	Very bad—bad			Mediocre			Good—great		
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Desperation		2	Fear of total defeat and danger to families						
Revenge				4	Uneven desire for revenge				
Ideology		2	Soldier, police ideology diffuse, not unifying						
Economics			3	Pay often delivered late, not at all					
Individual Identity				4	National identity uncertain				
Quality	NOT ASSESSED								
Individual Competence	NOT ASSESSED								
Unit Cohesion	Flee..		3	...together or fight together					
Expectation	1	Expected NATO support but were abandoned							
Unit Control	NOT ASSESSED								
Unit Esprit de Corps			3	Regular units treated as secondary					
Unit Competence				4	Basic combat competence				
Unit Support			3	Inadequate food, water, fuel, ammo					
Unit Leadership				4	Uneven leadership				
Organizational Control	NOT ASSESSED								
Organizational Esprit				4	Some pride in serving				
Organizational Integrity		2	Corruption often undermined operations						
Organizational Training	Decent training				5				
Organizational Support		2	Almost no air support, medical, fuel, etc.						
Doctrine		2	Checkpoint doctrine passive & vulnerable						
Organizational Leadership				4	Mixed leadership at all levels				
Civil-Military Relations			3	Disconnect between Ghani, generals					
State Integrity		2	State was corrupt by Afghan standards						
State Support		2	State did a poor job supporting the military						
State Strategy		2	Spread thin & depend on NATO, not good						



State Leadership		2	Ghani generally not respected by military
Societal Identity		3	Many identities undermine cohesion
Societal Integrity		3	Broad corruption slows improvement
Societal Support		3	Inadequate support for the military
Weather, Climate, Terrain	NOT ASSESSED		
Fatigue		3	Tired of fighting without relief
Mission	1		Defend everywhere without coordination
Adversary Reputation	1		Taliban are effective, brutal light infantry fighters
Adversary Performance	1		Taliban sweep through frontline units, win after win
Adversary Equipment	Taliban equipment is not impressive		7
Messaging		2	State messaging is weak, Taliban's strong
Allies	1		NATO abandoned the Afghan security services

Once all the factors have been assessed, they can be compared side-by-side. This makes the most important factors and the assessment gaps jump out. See the Appendix for a bar-chart representation of these factor-by-factor assessments.

## Conclusions from the Factor Assessment

This assessment suggests that while Afghan security forces will to fight was low, it was also sustainable with NATO support. While advisors created dependencies by helping to fill in these gaps over two decades by providing air support, shoring up weak leaders, attacking corrupt practices, etc., they also helped the Afghans to compensate to the point that they never had to face the full brunt of the Taliban.

With NATO at their backs, fear of the Taliban fighters could be minimized with air support and advising. Poor organizational doctrine and strategy could be addressed with guidance provided by Western military officers advising at all levels of the Afghan Army and police. Advisors helped to arrange for troop rotations to reduce fatigue, significantly improved training, and set expectations for security: If the Afghans could count on NATO, then they could expect to survive an uneven fight in a remote outpost.

When NATO left—as reflected in this assessment—Afghan expectations were crushed. Fear of the Taliban grew rapidly as they won battle after battle unopposed by NATO airpower. As supplies, airpower, medical support, fuel, vehicles, etc. dried up, and as Afghan strategy was thrown into chaos, fighting seemed less and less a viable option.

What does this assessment tell us about Afghan security force will to fight? Anyone predisposed to agree with the Forever War narrative might see this as justification to withdraw. The Afghans look hopeless without direct Western support. Others might see a mediocre force that will need very-long-term support. It would be reasonable to take this assessment (or better, one conducted by full-time analysts with the best available data) and argue for an unequivocal binary policy choice: Withdraw and expect collapse or stay and expect a wavering but perhaps sufficient status quo.

I do not know if the U.S. military or Intelligence Community provided President Biden with a structured assessment of Afghan security force will to fight. I cannot confirm

reports that Biden was told the Afghan government would last for six to eighteen months. But if those reports are accurate, the will-to-fight analyses were inaccurate and inadequate.

## Conclusion

Statements by various U.S. officials, including President Biden and Assistant Secretary Kirby, suggest that the United States had little to no structured understanding of Afghan will to fight as of this week. This gap is a result of cumulative failures, not just the immediate failures of the present administration.

While NATO did tremendous work to try to improve all aspects of the Afghan government and its military, in my reviews of military assessments from 2002 through 2021, it never expended sufficient effort to understand Afghan will to fight.

In the early 2010s I conducted research for the U.S. Government and for NATO on assessment methods in Afghanistan. I [found](#) almost no mention of will to fight in assessment [forms](#) used by advisors and analysts. When NATO officers were asked to assess will to fight, they were not provided with definitions or methods to make their analyses stick.

Clearly, addressing this gap and focusing partner will to fight would help improve our military effectiveness and stave off the kinds of surprise defeats we experienced in August 2021. Other examples of models and factors and analytic approaches exist and are worth examining (e.g., see [this report](#) on Afghan will to fight).

## Looking Back to Vietnam and Iraq

For those who believe that Afghan security force will to fight was hopeless, it is worth considering the two other cases I mentioned above: Vietnam and Iraq. During the Vietnam War, the Army of the Republic of Vietnam became a running joke in the United States. Generals often denigrated ARVN performance in intelligence briefings (now declassified) and even in public.

One of these poorly regarded units, the ARVN 18<sup>th</sup> Division, performed poorly throughout the Vietnam War. American officers found it to be mediocre, at best, and they had little confidence that it would fight when hard pressed. But even as South Vietnam was collapsing, the 18<sup>th</sup> Division, along with reinforcements, fiercely defended the vital crossroads at Xuan Loc against overwhelming military odds. Human will can disappoint, but it can also be surprisingly resilient.

And while the Iraqi Army collapsed in 2014—four whole divisions of advanced mechanized infantry melted away in the face of the Islamic State fighters armed almost exactly like the Taliban—now one of the most critical holes in Iraqi will to fight is being filled. A sense of Iraqi nationalism, once dismissed as an impossibility, is evident even in the protests against the government. Military forces now have a nation to fight for, even if it is too often corrupt, bankrupt, and chaotic.

## Looking Forward in Afghanistan

There are no more Afghan security forces to speak of, perhaps with the exception of a few security units at the Kabul airport. Our government partner is gone. The United States had twenty years to effectively forecast Afghan disposition to fight. It failed to do so. It makes sense to shift our focus to the Taliban and think about a point in time when we might have to return, perhaps in counterterrorist raids, as insurgent advisors against the Taliban, or as an invading army.

Everyone should question absolutist conclusions about Taliban will to fight. While it may be true that the current generation of Taliban leaders might never quit, they might have been forced into a genuine negotiated settlement if they truly believed NATO would stay the course. Perhaps the next generation of Taliban might lack the same fervor. Either way, it might be worth applying structured analyses towards Taliban will to fight. It might still be necessary to try to break them in years to come.

There is no adversary who has perfect, indomitable, unperturbable will to fight. Perhaps the most fanatical adversary the United States ever faced—the Japanese Empire in World War II—surrendered, as did at least 50,000 Japanese soldiers during the war. Approximately 5.7 million Soviet soldiers were captured during World War II. Tens of thousands of Viet Cong surrendered and even fought for their former enemy during the Vietnam War. Thousands of fanatical Islamic State fighters broke, ran, and surrendered during the Iraqi Army counteroffensive from 2016 through 2018.

Keep in mind that thousands of Taliban fighters have surrendered throughout the war in Afghanistan. Remember that the United States helped to release thousands of these prisoners as part of the ersatz peace deal in 2020, fueling Taliban combat power before their big push. As a whole, Taliban will to fight is formidable. But human will is always subject to violent or nonviolent influence, and to change brought about by time.

## Looking Forward Around the World

Presently the United States is engaged in advisory military operations with partner forces in, at least, Syria, Iraq, the Philippines, Jordan, Kuwait, Kenya, Honduras, Djibouti, Burundi, Ukraine, Colombia, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Mozambique, the United Arab Emirates, and Kosovo. The will to fight of each of these partner forces may currently be as much of a mystery as Afghan will to fight.

The United States is also engaged against many adversaries around the world. We conduct operations in Iraq and Syria, and in many parts of Africa against a range of insurgents and terrorists. All of these groups have a will to fight and combat power that can be more effectively understood and forecasted. The United States is also engaged in great power competition with China, Russia, Iran, and North Korea. Each of these states, and all of their military forces also have will to fight and relative combat power.

Understanding human will is difficult and time consuming. It is always an imperfect process. But the too-often failure-prone alternative to assessing will to fight—guessing, losing, and blaming—suggests the effort is worthwhile.

For more information on will to fight see:

<https://www.benconnable.com/research>

<https://www.benconnable.com/commentary>

[www.rand.org//ard/projects/will-to-fight/publications.html](http://www.rand.org//ard/projects/will-to-fight/publications.html)



## Appendix: Will-to-Fight Factors Quick Reference

This Appendix offers a quick reference for the will-to-fight factors drawn from the 2018 RAND study, *Will to Fight: Analyzing, Modeling, and Simulating the Will to Fight of Military Units*. It is available at [www.rand.org](http://www.rand.org), and at my website, <https://benconnable.com>.

Anyone who wants to use these factors to understand will to fight can turn them into a series of questions. For example, how desperate were Afghan security forces, and how did that desperation affect their will to fight? Did it cause fear that contributed to their surrender or flight? Or did desperation cause some of them to fight harder? How much did corruption in the Afghan government undermine their confidence and desire to fight? To what extent did the loss of NATO air support influence their decisions?

Table 2 provides a summary of will-to-fight factors. Figure 4, below the table, provides a bar chart view of the Afghan security force will-to-fight assessment from Table 1 in the main body of the report.

**Table 2: Will-to-Fight Factors and Quick Definitions**

Desperation	Pressing fear of losing that motivates or weakens individuals
Revenge	Desire to punish the enemy for their behavior or presence
Ideology	Commitment to a cause or belief and the influence of belief on will
Economics	Financial incentives to fight, or incentive to preserve opportunities
Individual Identity	Strength of association with an ethnicity, group, nation, etc.
Quality	Capacity to learn military skills, read, adapt, physical fitness
Individual Competence	Trained ability to perform military tasks like shooting, driving
Unit Cohesion	Strength of connections within units, can influence fighting or flight
Expectation	Belief that something will or will not happen, can generate surprise
Unit Control	Method of discipline: Too harsh? Too lenient? Just right?
Unit Esprit de Corps	Pride in belonging to the unit, belief that the unit will succeed
Unit Competence	Collective, trained military capabilities to perform in combat
Unit Support	Unit receives food, clothing ammunition, fuel, medical care, etc.
Unit Leadership	Unit leaders are more or less effective and more or less trusted
Organizational Control	Method of collective discipline: Is it culturally aligned?
Organizational Esprit	Pride in belonging to the military service (e.g. Afghan Army)
Organizational Integrity	Level of corruption: Is it culturally appropriate? Too much?
Organizational Training	Organizations provide more or less effective, appropriate training
Organizational Support	The service, or joint force provides air support, materiel, pay, etc.
Doctrine	Method of combat is more or less appropriate to the adversary
Organizational Leadership	Leaders are more or less effective and more or less trusted
Civil-Military Relations	Civil and military leaders work closely together or are more divided
State Integrity	Corruption at the state level is more or less culturally appropriate
State Support	Government provides the military, and the soldiers, combat needs
State Strategy	Government's approach to the war is logical, effective, or less so

State Leadership	Leaders are more or less effective and more or less trusted
Societal Identity	Citizens are more or less unified around a pro-government identity
Societal Integrity	Civilian corruption has limited or negative impact on the military
Societal Support	People support or do not support the military to varying degrees
Weather, Climate, Terrain	Environmental conditions can improve or sap will to fight
Fatigue	Time in combat & away from families, time under harsh conditions
Mission	Immediate purpose of the military unit
Adversary Reputation	Adversaries instill more or less fear in the unit
Adversary Performance	Adversary success or failure on the battlefield affects perceptions
Adversary Equipment	Adversaries have overmatch, equivalence, or are poorly equipped
Messaging	Influence by the government, allies, and adversaries
Allies	Degree to which friends support and stick by the military force

Figure 4 shows the results of my for-discussion-purposes-only assessment. It becomes clear that, at least from my perspective, Afghan security forces will to fight was generally low. There were endemic issues like corruption, lack of national unity, poor support, and a mixed bag of leadership at all levels up to President Ghani. Given this information, the U.S.-led coalition could have left knowing the Afghans would quickly collapse (not last up to 18 months) or stay, knowing that dependencies would last for many years or decades. Without this kind of analysis, the United States left Afghanistan with the mistaken expectation that Afghan security force will to fight would endure for up to, or perhaps over a year.

**Figure 4: Factor Assessment of Afghan Security Force Will to Fight August 2021**

