

# Measuring the Intangible Military Combat Readiness in the Malaysian Armed Forces

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**Abstract:** Militaries worldwide foresee the military force as coercive arms to be the eventual measure of power because military capabilities enable countries to act against internal and external threats. Malaysia's military forces including other security agencies lack a model or framework and an assessment instrument as a means of combat readiness to measure individual and collective team preparedness before deploying for any operations including international peacekeeping operations and humanitarian disaster relief operations within the country. The current combat preparedness of security agencies is in piecemeal assessment working in silos which often create discrepancies and compatibility issues especially when they are required to work in cohesiveness during a combat operation for both local and international duties. A systematic approach of assessment for all security forces must be developed to address such issues and challenges especially when required to as very often they are required to join forces in working together in concert with other forces for operations. Using a mixed-method approach the research will investigate the factors on the current assessment of combat readiness in morale, environment and psychological factors before combat duties and eventually proposing a systematic model and framework assessment for combat readiness which can be used by all security forces in Malaysia especially when working together in combined and joint operations. The aim of this research is to address the current gap of assessment in security forces and propose a systematic model and developing an assessment instrument to determine the combat readiness for all security forces in Malaysia namely Malaysian Army, Royal Malaysian Air Force, Royal Malaysian Navy, Royal Malaysian Police, Malaysian Maritime Enforcement Agency and other relevant security forces in Malaysia to work in cohesion and provide some distinctive operations procedures as an agency or in teams working together in any operations both local and international duties.

**Keywords:** *Combat Readiness; Military Psychological Factors; Quality Of Life; Morale*

## 1. Introduction

The Malaysian National Defence Policy reflects the continued commitment towards strengthening national defence and Armed Forces modernization (Malaysian National Defence Policy,2014). The conceptions of national

power policy include military preparedness as a component of national power (Creswell,2014). All security forces in the world have operational readiness for their troops to be prepared for any duties both local and overseas. The general trend seen in mathematical models and formulae for measuring operational readiness is mostly concerned with

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measuring either the tangible elements or the intangible elements. Consequently, there is a lack of research for a model that measures combat readiness encompassing both the tangible and intangible elements. The absence of the measure of intangible elements in the model that measure the tangible elements of combat power, and vice versa, could not provide a comprehensive status of combat readiness. Therefore, there is a need to conceptualize an approach to measure combat readiness that incorporates the tangible elements with the intangible elements by focusing on how best to utilize the knowledge and information of the current practice in measuring the combat readiness of military forces. Malaysia is one of the top countries in Asia in terms of contributing the most number of troops to the United Nations (UN) peacekeeping missions worldwide. According to UN Peacekeeping, Malaysia is ranked the eighth highest troop contributor to the UN in Asia, contributing 887 troops to UN missions as of October 2017. Besides such international duties, the Malaysian Armed Forces are required to defend the country sovereignty in security and defence from all external and internal threats. Often, they have to work together with other security agencies to fulfil such national duties. Malaysian Army currently measures combat readiness for combat deployment through the System Force Scoring (SFS) which quantifies the combat logistics and manpower requirements only. Unfortunately, other factors for combat readiness are not identified such as morale, cohesion factors, teamwork, skills, competency, welfare etc. There is a need to look at cognitive and intangible factors to determine whether the individual, unit and organization are ready to be deployed for combat duties and operations. An early model of military readiness from the major military forces in the world suggested that the human components of operational readiness rested on several psychological components, including confidence, proficiency (achieved through training and experience), and understanding of and motivation toward combat missions. There is a need to address the issues of compatibility for other security forces to work together in concert in operations rather than they work in isolation.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **Combat Readiness**

The importance of readiness was aptly pointed out by Sun Tzu when he said it is a doctrine of war not to assume the enemy will not come, but rather to rely on one's readiness to meet him (Griffith, 1971). Likewise, the need for readiness was also emphasised by Clausewitz (1874) when he mentioned that the term 'art of war' or 'science of war' are related to the "pattern and preparation and the mode of using arms, construction of fortifications and entrenchments, organism of an army and the mechanism of its movements, ... the end and aim of them all was the establishment of an armed force fit for use in war". These older definitions of readiness do not differ much from the contemporary definitions. Readiness following the definition of Betts (1995) refers to the state of the operational status of the assets ready for use at its optimal or designed parameters. The usage of assets implies the immediate capacity for the combat of the force that exists and not the capability of the desired size and types of force. Similarly, the United States Department of Defence (2010) defined readiness as "the ability of the United States military forces to fight and meet the demand of national military strategy". Russia places equal emphasis on the maintenance of combat readiness as reported in the Interfax [Russia and CIS Military Daily (Moscow) on 4 February 2011] that the increase in officer's numbers will raise the army's combat readiness. In the context of most armed forces, combat readiness determines the availability of the force elements for the application of combat power and fighting power. Most doctrines refer to readiness as the time frame to mount a given operation (Malaysian Armed Forces, 2011). The armed forces maintain a given level of readiness at all time that is ascertained by the evaluations of the response needed for national defence contingencies and the reaction time needed. Different force elements in an armed force have different readiness requirements. Similar to definitions used by some other armed forces and armies, the Malaysian Army (2011, p.xii) defines combat readiness as "A condition of the Army and its constituent units and formations, weapon systems or other military technology and equipment to perform during combat military operation, or functions consistent with the purpose for which they are organised or designed, or the managing of resources and training in preparation for combat". Based on the

definitions of combat readiness above, clearly, the measuring of combat readiness has to take into account both the tangible and intangible factors. It indicates the need to conceptualise a comprehensive measure of combat readiness for a military force.

### **Measuring Combat Readiness**

Literature has indicated that military forces in the world share the same concern of the need to gauge its combat readiness. However, different defence forces measure combat readiness differently. For example, the United States Department of Army Field Manual (FM) 100-11 (n.d) pointed out that measuring readiness involves many tangible and intangible factors. Some of these factors are quantifiable while others are subjective. The tangible elements for force readiness factors that can be objectively measured are the status of personnel and the status of equipment. While the subjective determination is the factors of morale, cohesion and quality of leadership. The same manual highlighted that force readiness management at all force levels must focus on properly structured, manned, equipped, trained, deployed, sustained and funded organisation. Hence, this Field Manual is in tandem with other literature that depicts measuring readiness as an arduous task that involves both the tangible and intangible elements. Military organisations have well-established procedures for gauging the preparedness of units for deployed operations. Such readiness evaluations typically include assessments of unit-level tactical proficiency, equipment serviceability checks, manning levels, audits of logistic stocks and supply processes, and reviews of each unit member's readiness status (typically medical, dental, and weapons test compliance). Yet, despite recognition by military leaders throughout history that the human dimensions of capability are crucial to operational effectiveness, formal assessments of the psychological aspects of readiness appear to be the exception rather than the norm in today's military forces. This neglect may be explained partly by the uncertainty surrounding which factors impact psychological readiness and how they influence one another. In short, how do we measure psychological readiness and what best predicts it? The importance of assessing readiness at different levels in the

military was demonstrated by Shamir, Brainin, Zakay, and Popper (2000), who found that perceptions of readiness at the soldier level were only modestly correlated with perceptions at the level of instructional staff. The authors concluded that the two groups employed different standards to assess the combat readiness of units. The danger of different perceptions of readiness operating across levels of an organisation has been tragically demonstrated by incidents of indiscipline and atrocious behaviour on the part of deployed military personnel. Donna Winslow's socio-cultural analysis of the behaviour of the Canadian Airborne Regiment in Somalia is compelling reading (Winslow, 1997).

### **Assessment of Morale**

Morale in a military unit is reflected when the soldiers put the mission before his concerns although this may entail his death. There are numerous definitions used in defining morale. Baynes (1987) defines morale as "the enthusiasm and persistence with which a member of a group engages in the prescribed activities of that group". On the other hand, Manning (1987) describes morale as "a function of cohesion and esprit de corps." Likewise Britt, Castrol and Adler (2006) term morale as "a soldier's level of motivation, commitment, and enthusiasm for accomplishing unit mission objective under stressful conditions." Based on the various definitions, for this research, morale is defined as a soldier's level of motivation, commitment, and enthusiasm for accomplishing unit mission objective under stressful conditions. Based on the outcomes of the literature review, the various components of morale that must be measured include the dimensions of leadership, motivation, esprit de corps and spirituality. Confidence in leadership amongst officers and soldiers at all levels is needed to build the morale needed in an organization. The fighting power and combat readiness will deteriorate in the absence of leadership and morale. Leadership plays a pertinent role in ensuring the sustenance of the morale of the soldiers especially those who are exposed to extreme conditions and heavy fire in the battlefield environment (Malaysian Army, 2007; United States Marine Corps, 1997; United States Department of Defence, 2010, Australian Army, 2009; Murphy & Farley, 2002; Gal & Manning, 1987; Goynes,

2004; Shamir et al., 2000; Hooker, 1995; Griffith, 2002; Nkewu, 2014). Motivation is related to the morale of the soldier as he must be motivated to face the enemy despite the risk of being harmed or killed. Unless the soldiers are motivated, they will not be combat-ready to carry out their mission (Murphy & Fogarty, 2009; Britt, Castrol & Adler, 2006; Siebold & Manning, 1999; Goynes, 2004). *Espirit de corps* aims to create synergy towards the performance and is the bonding between soldiers and their secondary groups beyond their primary group bonding that relates the soldiers to the institution of the unit. Therefore, the degree of bonding between members of an organization will also reflect their willingness to fight as a team and the fighting power generated (Malaysian Army, 2011; Cushman, 1947; Gal, 1986; Baynes, 1987; Siebold & Manning, 1999; Krulak, 1996).

The spirituality aspect forms a strong intangible element that acts as a force multiplier in a combat force and can be related to the subjective outcomes in the aspects of perceived quality of life, well-being or life satisfaction. Hence, the level of spirituality possessed by the soldiers could be used as a measure of the command climate in a military unit (Malaysian Army, 2007; Campbell, 1976; Andrews & Withey, 1976).

### **Assessment of Environment**

The Oxford English Dictionary defines environment as the surroundings or conditions in which a person, animal or plant lives or operates (Stevenson, 2013). As such, the domain of the environment in which the soldiers operate has a critical role in establishing the command climate of a military unit. Based on the literature review, the aspects of the environment that affect the command climate are the dimensions of work, neighbourhood and housing, community and family and friends. These dimensions could help in achieving commitment among soldiers that would result directly in the high effectiveness of the unit. Many past research and studies have concluded that work/job is one of the main contributors towards the quality of life that affect the combat readiness of an armed force (Campbell, 1976; Andrews & Withey, 1976; Flanagan, 1978; Bestuzhey-Lada, 1980; Murrell et al., 1983; Glatzer, 1987; Rath & Harter, 2010). The military unit focuses on the

environment through a safe and conducive working environment that would result in high work satisfaction, therefore enhancing its command climate. Neighbourhood and housing provide the social environment that enhances the quality of life (Sirgy & Cornwell, 2002). Healthy neighbourhoods have housing, schools, commercial and retail facilities, employment, parks and recreation, health care and daycare, personal security and neighbourhood safety. Thus, neighbourhood and housing serve as motivation factors for the soldiers that are important for command climate and effectiveness in the unit. (Campbell, 1976; Andrews & Withey, 1976; Bestuzhey-Lada, 1980; Murrell et al., 1983; Verwayen, 1980; Glatzer, 1987; Moller, 1992; Rath & Harter, 2010). Community living in military bases that are of quality and standard could enhance the *esprit de corps* and morale of the soldiers (Malaysian Army, 2011). It involves community integration and participation as well as the availability of social support (National Research Council, 2002). These indicators contribute to their quality of life and the environment of the command climate in the unit. (Flanagan, 1978; Bestuzhey-Lada, 1980; Murrell et al., 1983; Glatzer, 1987; Moller, 1992; Rath & Harter, 2010). Research has shown that work-family conflict increased work turnover, caused more sickness absences (Hacker & Doolen, 2003) and less job is done, as well as poor family, community and life satisfaction (Hassan, Dollard & Winefield, 2009). Thus, the enhancement of the aspects of family and friends for a better environment is done through the improvement of the service and social environment. Therefore, a measure of commitment towards family and friends among the officers and soldiers would indicate the command climate that allows them to carry out their missions. The focus of this research is, however, being on the psychosocial aspects. The non-human indicator of combat readiness, such as the physical serviceability of military equipment, is not part of this study. Therefore, it is important to measure the soldiers' perceptions of the various building blocks. The following definition of combat readiness is proposed: the individual and/or collective state of mind of a soldier or a group of soldiers that will determine their performance during military operations. This state of mind is a function of the social trust and confidence these soldiers have, their worries and concerns, their familiarity with the enemy and the

frontage, morale, and preconceptions of the opposing force. Confidence, social trust and morale are made up of various building blocks. Combat readiness can be conceptualised in terms of consisting of two interdependent dimensions i.e. the tangible and intangible elements.

### **Assessment of Psychological Intangibles**

Psychological evolves more on the mind and mental part of a soldier, especially in tough and unpredictable situations. Intangibles to describe psychological concepts that contribute to soldier mission readiness include adaptability, self-awareness, sense-making, warrior ethos, confidence, resilience, moral-ethical judgment, among others. The followings are six statements which relate to psychological factors. The term hardiness can be defined as "a personality attribute that reflects the courage and motivation to cope effectively with the stressors of daily life" (Vogt, Rizvi, Shipherd, & Resick, 2008, p. 61). Over time and with contemporary perceptions and research in this field, this term of hardiness is redefined as "accustomed to dealing with fatigue or hardships" ("Hardy," n.d., para. 3). This research pressures meticulously on a stronger consistent concept and its significance to other outcomes such as stressors, strains, social support, coping and performance (Bartone, 1999; Bartone, Roland, Picano, & Williams, 2008; Dolan, & Adler, 2006; Eschleman & Bowling, 2010; Maddi, Matthews, Kelly, Resurreccion, & Villarreal, 2010). Contemporary research pronounced that hardiness can be developed by and for different situations (Mosley & Laborde, 2016; Bartone, 2006; Bartone, Barry, & Armstrong, 2009; Maddi, 2007). Hardiness has been looked upon differently as mentioned by Maddi et al., (2010) that defines hardiness as "a specific set of attitudes and skills that provide the courage, motivation, and strategies leading to resilience and growth in stressful circumstances". There were two types of research conducted which supports the inclination that hardiness can be developed (Maddi, Harvey, Khoshaba, Fazel, & Resurreccion, 2009; Zach, Raviv, & Inbar, 2007). A research was conducted among 71 Israeli military officers on their physical performance on the impact of a continuous training program during stressful situations. The research conducted the impacts and measurement of hardiness on different occasions, one at the beginning under normal situations and the other at the end of the training under stressful

conditions. The results link respondents to have improved their hardiness after they have taken the training (Zach et al., 2007). Another research on college students showed that hardiness has improved after the respondents have undergone the training (Maddi et al., 2009). Both types of research acknowledge that hardiness can be improved with appropriate training provided.

### **RESEARCH OBJECTIVE**

The objective of this research is to address the current gap of assessment in security forces and propose a systematic model and developing an assessment instrument to determine the combat readiness of all security forces. Currently, there is no assessment of security forces personnel on their readiness to go for combat or operation duties. This is by developing a validated and reliable instrument to measure command readiness with a designated scoring worksheet to determine the status of command climate for units namely Malaysian Army, Royal Malaysian Air Force, Royal Malaysian Navy, Royal Malaysian Police, Malaysian Maritime Enforcement Agency and other relevant security forces in Malaysia to work in cohesion and provide some distinctive operations procedures as an agency or in teams working together in any operations both local and international duties. This instrument will also take preventive measures and also corrective measures after establishing the score of an individual, unit and an organization. The outcome of this research is to develop a systematic model and framework assessment for combat readiness for all Malaysian Security agencies. This instrument that will be able to measure the combat readiness both tangible and intangible factors of units to be deployed in combat areas, humanitarian assistance such as natural disaster assistance, peacekeeping operations such as the current military deployment in Lebanon and national security operations such as the recent intrusion in Lahad Datu. Key objectives of this research are as follows:

1. To determine the current model and assessment instrument for combat readiness in the Malaysian Armed Forces.
2. To determine the factors that need to be considered for

military units prior to operational duties.

3. To determine the intangible factors that can influence combat readiness of military units before deploying for operational duties.

4. To propose a new model framework assessment for combat readiness for the military units before deployment for operational duties.

### **Research Methodology**

A meta-analysis of research on operational and combat readiness formulation of a systematic framework assessment tool and model for operational readiness for the Malaysian Army will be conducted by mix method both quantitative and qualitative. A meta-analysis of research on current operational and combat readiness of the Malaysian Army based on current doctrines and interviews with current top management of the Malaysian Army. Using past research on other major militaries of the world such as US Army, Australian Army, Canadian Army to understand the current concept of operational and combat readiness assessment framework and model to determine the best approach and practices currently employed by them. Retrospective Interview Protocols with soldiers on combat duties in the field to determine what variables and factors are evident for combat readiness assessment framework and model to be used in the Malaysian army in the future based on current environment, situational awareness and military technologies. Questionnaires designed to determine the various variables and factors to determine the combat readiness assessment framework and model with approaches towards operational readiness for deployment and combat duties for the Malaysian Army. Focus group interviews with selected Senior and Junior Military Officers, Senior Non Commissioned Officers (SNCOs) and Junior Non Commissioned Officers (JNCOs).

### **Significance Of Research**

The importance of formulating this model and assessment framework is in line with the Malaysian National Defence Policy which reflects the continued commitment towards strengthening national defence and Armed Forces modernization (Malaysian National Defence Policy,2014).

The conceptions of national power policy include military preparedness as a component of national power (Creswell,2014). The National Defence Policy reflects the country to defend its strategic interests and maintain national security. It emphasizes the need to maintain the strategic importance of the environment of a stable and secure for the people of the country. The main objective of developing the nation's defence capability is to build a MAF that is integrated and balanced with the combination of assets and other resources for national defence. This principle emphasizes combat readiness and operational preparedness in the Armed Forces structure as it involves not only combat forces but also the logistical support network of military-industrial cooperation in line with national development priorities. In this context, self-reliance should not be limited to military efforts alone but should involve all relevant government agencies and the people. All security agencies besides the military are relevant for the prosperity and stability of the country and to the people of Malaysia. As an independent and sovereign country, Malaysia is aware that the most appropriate measures to safeguard the interests and national security are through the pursuit of self-reliance and combat readiness that is the core of its defence policy. Combat readiness assessment tool will allow security forces and agencies in Malaysia to work in concert to prepare them for any eventualities especially in combat duties. Military spending is one area where there is no private solution to replace the public purse. No single corporation or group of citizens is sufficiently motivated (or trustworthy) enough to take financial responsibility for the cost of having a military. Adam Smith, one of the fathers of free-market economics, identified the defence of society as one of the primary functions of government and justification for reasonable taxation. The government is acting on behalf of the public to ensure that the military is sufficiently well resourced.

### **3. Conclusion**

National security is important not only to the government but to the nation as a whole. National security serves many purposes. First of all, the armed forces are a very important aspect of national security. We live in a dangerous world and the military's goal is to keep our nation secure. That is

why a strong national defence is so important to the security and protection of the nation. The aim of this research is to address the current gap of assessment in security forces and propose a systematic model and developing an assessment instrument to determine the combat readiness for all security forces in Malaysia namely Malaysian Army, Royal Malaysian Air Force, Royal Malaysian Navy, Royal Malaysian Police, Malaysian Maritime Enforcement Agency and other relevant security forces in Malaysia to work in cohesion and provide some distinctive operations procedures as an agency or in teams working together in any operations both local and international duties. With an assessment model for combat readiness our combination of all security forces and agencies can work holistically in cohesion to be prepared for any eventualities and ready for combat duties both local and overseas.

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