A Guide for Measuring Resiliency

Description

A portion of this article was previously published in Small Wars and Insurgencies journal.

The question of state resiliency remains essential to the three biggest U.S. foreign policy questions of today. Why did Afghanistan fall so rapidly to the Taliban in 2021? Why, in contrast, has Ukraine stood firm against Russian aggression since 2014? And what will the Republic of China (Taiwan) do in the face of the Chinese Communist Partyâ??s coercion and, perhaps, military force tomorrow? In military doctrine, accurately framing the operational environment is crucial. While existing analytical tools like PMESII-PT and ASCOPE offer valuable insights, the primary focus of the military planning process tends to be on assessing the physical characteristics of air, land, maritime, space, and cyberspace. These are vital for planning conventional campaigns, yet they often provide an incomplete picture by not fully encompassing the equally decisive social, economic, and political dimensions of human environments. In reality, tools like PMESII-PT comprise operational assessments supporting conventional campaign design, while one that focuses on resilience and resistance offers a methodology better suited for assessing the enduring requirements faced in competition, deterrence, and irregular warfare. In analogous terms, reading resistance graffiti can provide a better awareness for stabilizing partners or inspiring change in adversaries than counting tanks (photo by NoonIcarus from wikicommons).

image

Illustration 1: Graffiti in Venezuela (2017) â??Bread for our town. Elections now!â?•

Quite frankly, the militaryâ??s current design process lacks sufficient interdisciplinary considerations beyond military science for measuring the governing authorityâ??s resilience or resistance to the same. In contrast, we (myself and my partner in developing these methods â?? John Collison) suggest a more innovative human-centric model specifically for assessing resilience and resistance within nation-states. In this short article, I present a straightforward guide to measure resiliency in terms of will, potential, and sustainability of authority in opposition to subversion, coercion and aggression.

Conceptual Framework

A dynamic and polarizing relationship exists between governmental and/or societal resilience and to resistance movements potentially opposed to that very same authority. In fact, every human society contains forms of resistance to current governance or foreign occupation. Resistance can span a spectrum of activities from nonviolent and legal forms of protest to illegal or violent means. In contrast, each regime attempts to brace the resolve of the population against political, economic, or social change â?? and even revolution. To visualize this relationship of *Resilience and Resistance,* we leverage a reconceptualization of Gordon McCormickâ??s model, originally published in 1987 to explain the Shining Path Insurgency.

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Illustration 2: The Resilience and Resistance Model

In this model (as shown in illustration 2), there are four primary nodes: (a) the population, (b) the resilience node, (c) the resistance node, and (d) the external support node. The resistance and resilience nodes perform five basic actions in opposition to each other: (1) attempt to gain support from the population; (2) disrupt the otherâ??s efforts to garner support from the population; (3) perform violent and/or nonviolent actions directly against one another; (4) attempt to interrupt their opponentâ??s attempts to garner international support; and (5) attempt to garner international support. Both the population and the external support nodes have agency and can initiate actions to influence the resilience and/or the resistance nodes as well. The power of the *Resilience and Resistance Model* is that it applies in nearly every intrastate conflict, no matter the scale or level of violence.

Resiliency Measurement

The methodology for measuring state resiliency is partly inspired by David Hastingsâ?? research compiling an international human security index over the past decade. In short, Hastings used publicly available datasets to quantify the United Nationsâ??s seven factors of human security in nation-states. Similarly, the resiliency of a state or population can be assessed by its ability to resist subversion, coercion, and aggression from internal or external threats. Some key factors to consider when measuring resiliency include: (a) the physical aspects of the nation or region in question, (b) the fragility of current governance, (c) cultural resilience to change, (d) the will of the population to fight, and (e) the perceived effectiveness of current governance.

Screen Shot at PM

General characteristics to consider include the size and makeup of the population in terms of ethnicity, linguistics, religion, type of governance, and socioeconomic classes. One place to get a general idea of this type of data is from the Central Intelligence Agencyâ??s *World Factbook.* This database covers

relevant metrics regarding geography, population, natural environment, type of government, economy, energy, communications, transportation, military capabilities, and even food security.

Subsequently, when finding real data, another key criterion involves analyzing the fragility of current governmental systems. Obviously, by utilizing information from economic, academic, non-governmental organizations, and other government agencies sources, this portion of the data-driven product approach to measuring resilience remains much more of a whole-of-government product than the ones offered in military planning. The _Fund for Peace_ has established one such a database which considers multiple metrics binned into four categories: (a) cohesion, (b) economic, (c) political, and (d) social. Finally, analyzing resiliency requires a comprehensive study of governance. Some of the factors include the regimeâ??s accountability to the people, stability of the regime, how effective the regimeâ??s activities and efforts are, the types of regulations in place and how they are enforced, rule of law, and government corruption. Fortunately, the World Bank maintains such a database for nations and investors to consider but works equally well for resiliency metrics.

Two additional sources are worthy of consideration. One reference with insights into cultural resilience includes _Swiss Re Instituteâ??s_ resilience index. This index ranks thirty-one nations in their ability to absorb a range of challenges, including natural disasters. It measures nations against nine benchmarks. While this index provides a good example of investigation, it contains only a fraction of states worthy of analysis. Another source from Journal of Advanced Military Studies provides a methodology to estimate national morale during violent conflict. This scholarship provides methods for evaluating both the stateâ??s and the militaryâ??s confidence and ability to maintain combat operations. Another study from RAND defines national will to fight as â??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.â?• So, both military morale and national will to fight prove useful metrics for analysis. Illustration 3 shows these previously described methodologies for measuring resilience in a consolidated table.

Case Study

In this section, I use Venezuela as a case study to measure resiliency in a succinct, one-paragraph overview. This analysis relies on internationally recognized and publicly available statistics. The essence of Venezuelaâ??s value as a case study stems from evaluating the resilience of the Nicolas Maduro regime, especially in light of the support it has received from competitor states like Cuba, Russia, China, and Iran over the past decade.

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Illustration 4: Map and Location of Venezuela

General Context

Venezuela, one of three countries born from the collapse of Gran Colombia in 1830 alongside Columbia and Ecuador, experienced a pivotal change after the discovery of oil in 1914. Since then, the state has been ruled by *caudillos* (strong men). Initially, these leaders maintained strong ties with the United States, but this shifted when Hugo Chavez took power in 2002. Chavez attempted to enforce a form of popular socialism and state-managed economy similar to that employed by Fidel Castro. Venezuela shares borders with Colombia, Brazil, and Guyana, and its porous border is home to nonstate groups such as the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (commonly referred to as the Spanish acronym, FARC) and the National Liberation Army (or ELN, also the Spanish acronym). In terms of size, the country is large, about twice the size of California, with a population of 28 million, roughly half that of Colombia. Since 2015, an estimated 7 million people have left Venezuela, creating a large diaspora in neighboring countries, as well as the United States. The Venezuelan population resembles that of many Latin American countries and reflects centuries of colonial rule with a mix of European and indigenous people, including immigrants from Italy, Portugal, Germany, Africa, and the Middle East. The majority language is Spanish and Catholicism is the predominant religion, practiced by 96% of the population.

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Illustration 5: Data-Centric Analysis of Resilience

Data-Driven Analysis

As depicted in Illustration 5, these numbers rank Venezuela on a percentage bases with all other countries in the world, with 0% being the worst and 100% being the best. Venezuela ranks 29th out of 179 countries (or 16.2% in comparison with others) in terms of state fragility. The national will to fight is subjectively evaluated as low (or 33.3%), due to corruption, government incompetence, and lack of public trust. I also evaluate social resilience as low (33.3%), with diffused political loyalties, substantial social class competition, and ethnic disparities. According to the World Bank, and in comparison with other nations, Venezuela ranks 6.8% in government accountability, 12.3% in political stability, 5.2% in government effectiveness, 2.4% in regulation efficiency, .5% in rule of law, and 1.9% in control of corruption. Tallying all the factors equally, as shown in Illustration 5, Venezuelaâ??s overall resiliency to coercion, subversion, or revolution remains one of the lowest at 12.4% compared to other nations. In contrast, neighboring Costa Rica scores 76.43%.

Providing a Comprehensive Examination

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Phase One. If simply providing a percentage-based estimate of state resiliency seems a bit dissatisfying, that might be because this is only step one in a 12-step process designed to fully analyze a state in terms of both resiliency and resistance. Phase One, or steps one through five, provides a comprehensive and data-driven analysis to measure state resiliency and resistance, as well as the potential success or failure of external support to either. It leverages publicly available data produced by U.S. government agencies, global organizations, and academia.

Phase Two. In Phase Two, our methodology leverages globally produced research from non-governmental organizations and international universities (including Carnegie Endowment of Peace, Harvard, and Uppsala University) to identify prevalent or influential resistance organizations within the state and then categorize these organizations along the resistance continuum to classify their general nature as either nonviolent legal, nonviolent illegal, rebellion, insurgency, or belligerency.

Phase Three. In Phase Three, the methodology conducts a detailed analysis of one or more resistance movements identified in the previous phase, examining their leadership, motivation, operating environment, organization, and activities. This approach incorporates methods recognized by John Hopkins University â?? Applied Physics Laboratory and U.S. Army Special Operations Command.

Phase Four. Finally, in Phase 4, we subjectively assess the information gathered to make recommendations concerning potential external support in another stateâ??s intrastate conflict consisting of three primary options: to (a) support the resiliency of current governance, (b) support resistance to the same, or (c) do nothing. At a minimum, the comprehensive analysis consists of all twelve steps.

Conclusion

Three major publications in 2023 and 2024 showcase these research methods. The first is an essay titled â??A Guide for Measuring Resiliency and Resistance,â?• published in *Small Wars and Insurgencies Journal* on 14 December 2023 and features Moldova as a case study. This journal essay outlines Phase One (or the first five steps). The second essay is titled â??Assessing Resistance for the Purpose of Informing International Policy,â?• published in *Expeditions of Marine Corps University Press* on 9 January 2024 and features the Communist Chinese Party and Taiwan as a case study. This essay covers Phases Two, Three and Four (or steps 6-12). The third publication is a book titled

Resilience and Resistance: Interdisciplinary Lessons in Irregular Warfare, Competition and Deterrence, scheduled for publication by Joint Special Operations University Press in mid-2024. The book will illustrate all 12 steps of the process (and features so much more). It also demonstrates how these specific methodologies can be applied to the case of China and Taiwan with all four phases.

In summation, the 12-step analysis process outlined above enables planners, statesmen, or practitioners to frame a country or region in terms of resilience and resistance using data-centric tools that emphasize human conditions normally unaccounted for in military science. In the current landscape of competition, deterrence, and irregular warfare, a thorough analysis of a state's resilience and resistance potential remains vital. The prescribed resilience and resistance assessment serves as an initial step in developing a more comprehensive understanding of intrastate conflict, providing insights applicable for policy formulation and guiding effective military strategy.

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The views expressed are those of the author and do not reflect the official position of the United States Military Academy, Department of the Army, or Department of Defense, or that of any organization the author is affiliated with, including Joint Special Operations University and US Special Operations Command.

Main image: Staff Sgt. Chad Hume and Capt. Wes Cooler, 2nd Security Force Assistance Brigade, pitch their proposal to fellow SFAB members taking part in simulated scenario during training conducted by the West Point Negotiation Project July 2. The SFAB Soldiers went through training with the negotiation project to help them better prepare for future deployments. (Brandon O'Connor via United States Military Academy at West Point)

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