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The Role And Importance Of Combat Training Exercises Simulating Real Combat Situations In Enhancing The Fighting Spirit Of Military Personnel

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Abstract. The present study examines the critical role of combat training exercises simulating real-life battlefield conditions in strengthening the fighting spirit, psychological readiness, and overall combat effectiveness of military servicemen. Drawing on contemporary military pedagogy and empirical research, the article analyzes how realistic training environments replicate the physical, psychological, and tactical demands of actual combat, thereby reducing fear, increasing confidence, and developing cohesive unit performance. The study argues that exercises designed to approximate genuine combat stress - including live-fire drills, night operations, urban warfare simulations, and stress inoculation training - produce measurable improvements in individual soldier resilience and collective military readiness. The article also reviews legislative and doctrinal foundations governing military training in Uzbekistan and highlights international best practices. The findings suggest that investment in high-fidelity training scenarios directly correlates with superior battlefield outcomes, lower casualty rates, and a stronger will to fight among armed forces personnel.

Keywords: combat training, fighting spirit, military readiness, realistic simulation, stress inoculation, battlefield preparation, military psychology, armed forces, Uzbekistan, morale, unit cohesion.

INTRODUCTION



Throughout military history, the quality of training has consistently proven to be one of the most decisive factors in determining the outcome of armed conflict. Nations with well-trained, psychologically prepared, and tactically proficient armed forces have repeatedly demonstrated the capacity to overcome numerical or material disadvantages through superior discipline, adaptability, and resolve. This fundamental truth has become especially relevant in the twenty-first century, where the character of warfare has grown increasingly complex, asymmetric, and unpredictable.

The concept of the 'fighting spirit' - encompassing a soldier's will to engage, endure hardship, and persist in the face of adversity - occupies a central place in military doctrine and psychology. While natural courage and patriotism form part of this spirit, research consistently demonstrates that it is cultivated and reinforced primarily through realistic, demanding, and well-structured training. Soldiers who have rehearsed combat scenarios under conditions closely approximating real danger are significantly better equipped - mentally, physically, and tactically - to perform when actual hostilities arise.

In the Republic of Uzbekistan, the modernization of the Armed Forces has been declared a strategic national priority. President Shavkat Mirziyoyev's military reforms, launched in earnest from 2017 onwards, emphasize the transition from Soviet-era training paradigms toward a modern, professional military culture centered on individual soldier initiative, technical proficiency, and unit-level combat effectiveness. Central to these reforms is the reform of combat training programs - shifting away from rote drills and theoretical instruction toward scenario-based, realistic training that develops genuine warrior skills and psychological fortitude.

This article investigates the theoretical foundations, empirical evidence, and practical methodologies underpinning realistic combat training as a mechanism for building fighting spirit. It draws upon Uzbek military doctrine and regulatory frameworks, international military research, and established principles of military psychology to construct a comprehensive argument for the priority role of high-fidelity training exercises in contemporary military preparedness.



THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS: FIGHTING SPIRIT AND COMBAT READINESS

The concept of 'fighting spirit' (jangovar ruh in Uzbek military terminology) refers to the composite psychological state of a military unit or individual soldier that drives continued effective action under conditions of extreme danger, physical exhaustion, fear, and uncertainty. It encompasses morale, courage, unit cohesion, confidence in equipment and leadership, and a sense of purposeful mission. Classical military theorists, most notably Carl von Clausewitz, recognized the moral forces of warfare as paramount: 'Moral factors are among the most important in war... they constitute the spirit that permeates war as a whole.' (Clausewitz, 1832).

Contemporary military psychology builds on this foundation, identifying several key dimensions of fighting spirit: (1) individual psychological resilience - the capacity to manage fear and stress without performance degradation; (2) collective cohesion - mutual trust and interdependence within the unit; (3) confidence in training - the soldier's belief that preparation has adequately equipped him for the task; and (4) ideological and moral motivation - commitment to the values and objectives for which the fight is conducted. Realistic combat training exercises serve as the primary mechanism for developing and reinforcing each of these dimensions simultaneously.

Stress inoculation theory, as developed by Meichenbaum (1985) and subsequently applied to military training by researchers at the U.S. Army Research Institute, provides a scientific basis for understanding how repeated exposure to controlled stressors builds psychological resilience. The theory holds that graduated, realistic exposure to threatening stimuli - such as loud explosions, simulated casualties, confusion, and fatigue - progressively desensitizes the threat-response system and develops cognitive coping strategies, enabling soldiers to maintain decision-making capacity and coordinated action under actual combat conditions. This theoretical model has been operationalized in training doctrines worldwide, including the advanced training methodologies now being adopted by the Uzbek Armed Forces.

REGULATORY AND DOCTRINAL FRAMEWORK IN UZBEKISTAN



The legislative and doctrinal basis for military training in Uzbekistan is grounded in a robust framework of national security legislation and military doctrine. The Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan 'On Defense' (1992, amended 2018) establishes the fundamental principles of national defense and assigns the state the responsibility of ensuring a high level of combat readiness within the armed forces. The Military Doctrine of the Republic of Uzbekistan, updated in 2018, explicitly emphasizes the importance of professional training, psychological preparation, and the development of high moral and combat qualities in military personnel.

Presidential Decree No. UP-5416 (2018) on the 'Further Development of the Armed Forces of Uzbekistan' directed the comprehensive reform of the combat training system, including the introduction of scenario-based exercises, joint training with foreign armies, and the development of modern training infrastructure. Subsequently, the Combat Training Regulations of the Armed Forces of Uzbekistan (2020) formalized requirements for the regular conduct of exercises approximating real combat conditions, including mandatory live-fire exercises, tactical field exercises, and psychological preparation programs.

Shokirboev (2022) notes that the regulatory requirements for realistic combat training in Uzbekistan have been substantially upgraded over the past decade, reflecting the state's recognition that the quality of training - not merely its quantity - is the decisive factor in military effectiveness. The transition from a predominantly conscript-based force with brief training cycles to a longer-service professional model has created the institutional conditions necessary for deep, sustained, and realistic combat preparation.

TYPES OF REALISTIC COMBAT TRAINING EXERCISES AND THEIR PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT

Live-Fire Exercises

Live-fire exercises, in which soldiers operate under conditions of actual gunfire from supporting elements, represent the most direct method of psychological conditioning available within peacetime training. Research by Grossman and Christensen (2008) demonstrates that soldiers who have undergone live-fire training exhibit significantly reduced startle responses, improved marksmanship under pressure, and greater confidence in engaging



enemy positions. In the Uzbek Armed Forces, live-fire exercises have been systematically integrated into the annual training cycle, with particular emphasis on combined-arms coordination - infantry working alongside armored and artillery elements under realistic conditions.

Tactical field exercises and force-on-force training

Tactical field exercises, particularly those conducted as force-on-force scenarios using simulation munitions or electronic systems, provide the most comprehensive replication of actual combat dynamics. Soldiers must execute plans, adapt to unexpected enemy actions, manage casualties, and maintain unit cohesion - all under physical exhaustion and information scarcity. Tojiboyev (2021) documents evidence from exercises conducted at the 'Termez' combined-arms training center demonstrating that units completing multi-day force-on-force exercises show a 34% improvement in tactical decision-making speed and a significant reduction in self-reported anxiety about combat deployment.

Urban warfare simulation

Given the predominance of urban environments in contemporary conflict, training facilities replicating city environments have become essential to modern military preparation. Urban combat (MOUT - Military Operations in Urban Terrain) presents unique psychological challenges, including extreme physical proximity to adversaries, the difficulty of distinguishing combatants from civilians, and the disorienting nature of enclosed spaces under fire. Dedicated MOUT training facilities, which Uzbekistan has been developing as part of its infrastructure modernization program, allow soldiers to rehearse these scenarios repeatedly until procedural responses become automatic, thereby freeing cognitive resources for adaptive decision-making.

Night and adverse condition exercises

A significant proportion of modern military operations are conducted under conditions of reduced visibility, extreme temperature, or adverse weather. Training that replicates these conditions - night navigation, cold-weather operations, desert survival exercises - builds specific technical skills while simultaneously developing the psychological adaptability necessary to function effectively when environmental conditions compound the stress of combat. Yusupov and Mirzayev (2020) emphasize that regular night-training exercises,



when conducted progressively and with appropriate safety measures, produce measurable improvements in unit performance under nocturnal conditions and are associated with increased self-reported confidence among participating personnel.

Physical conditioning as a foundation

Physical fitness constitutes the biological substrate upon which combat effectiveness is built. Research by Karimov (2019) establishes a direct correlation between physical conditioning levels and psychological resilience under stress in Uzbek military personnel, consistent with international findings. Soldiers with higher aerobic capacity and muscular endurance demonstrate superior performance on complex cognitive tasks under fatigue - precisely the conditions prevailing in sustained combat. Progressive physical training integrated with tactical exercises ensures that the psychological benefits of conditioning are realized in operationally realistic contexts.

PSYCHOLOGICAL PREPARATION AS AN INTEGRAL COMPONENT

The explicit incorporation of psychological preparation into training programs represents a significant evolution in modern military pedagogy. Whereas traditional approaches treated psychological fortitude as a quality either possessed innately or forged incidentally through physical hardship, contemporary doctrine recognizes psychological readiness as a trainable skill set amenable to systematic development.

Rashidova (2021) identifies three primary methodological approaches employed in the psychological preparation of Uzbek military personnel: (1) cognitive restructuring - training soldiers to interpret threatening stimuli as challenges rather than threats, thereby activating performance-facilitating rather than performance-inhibiting arousal; (2) visualization and mental rehearsal - systematic use of imagery to mentally rehearse complex tactical sequences, building procedural memory and reducing the novelty of combat scenarios; and (3) group cohesion exercises - structured activities designed to build inter-personal trust, mutual responsibility, and collective identity within the unit.

These approaches are most effective when embedded within realistic training scenarios rather than conducted in isolation as classroom activities. The integration of psychological preparation techniques into live exercises enables



soldiers to practice cognitive regulation skills in conditions that approximate the emotional and physiological state of actual combat, ensuring that the skills transfer to operational deployment.

Umarov (2023) highlights the role of after-action reviews (AARs) as a critical psychological tool in realistic training. AARs conducted immediately following demanding exercises, in which both successes and failures are analyzed without blame in a structured group format, serve dual functions: they build accurate tactical self-assessment and they normalize the experience of difficulty and error, reducing shame and increasing adaptability. This process directly contributes to the development of the 'growth mindset' identified by psychological research as a key predictor of resilience under adversity.

UNIT COHESION AND COLLECTIVE FIGHTING SPIRIT

Extensive research, beginning with the pioneering work of Stouffer et al. (1949) on the American soldier and confirmed by subsequent studies across multiple national militaries, consistently identifies unit cohesion - the bonds of trust, mutual obligation, and shared identity within a combat team - as the single most powerful predictor of fighting spirit and performance under fire. Soldiers fight not primarily for abstract national ideals, but for their immediate comrades.

Realistic combat training exercises are uniquely effective as cohesion-building mechanisms because they create genuine shared hardship and mutual dependence. When soldiers navigate live-fire courses together, rescue simulated casualties under fire, or solve tactical problems in darkness with degraded communications, they experience authentic interdependence of a quality impossible to replicate through classroom instruction or administrative activities. The shared memory of having overcome demanding training creates a reservoir of trust that sustains unit performance when the stresses of actual operations emerge.

Nazarov (2022) documents evidence from Uzbek battalion-level exercises demonstrating that units whose annual training programs included a minimum of 30 days of integrated realistic field exercises - as opposed to individual skill drills - exhibited significantly stronger cohesion scores on validated measures and superior performance on subsequent operational evaluations. This finding has direct practical implications for the design and resourcing of training programs.



INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE AND BEST PRACTICES

The importance of realistic training in building fighting spirit has been demonstrated empirically across numerous national military establishments. The Israel Defense Forces, whose combat training philosophy was shaped by the experience of existential conflict, place maximum emphasis on progressive, realistic training that closely replicates actual battlefield conditions. The Israeli approach - characterized by the principle that 'we fight the way we train' - has been credited as a central factor in operational effectiveness.

The United States Army's National Training Center (NTC) at Fort Irwin, California, provides perhaps the most comprehensively documented example of the impact of realistic training on military performance. Units rotating through the NTC engage in multi-week force-on-force exercises against a highly proficient opposing force (OPFOR) under conditions designed to maximize tactical realism and stress. Research conducted over four decades of NTC operations demonstrates consistent improvements in unit readiness, leadership development, and - critically - the confidence and fighting spirit of participating soldiers.

These international models offer valuable lessons for the continued development of Uzbekistan's combat training system, several of which are already being incorporated through bilateral training exchanges and international military education programs. The commitment of the Uzbek state to learning from and adapting best international practices, as articulated in the country's military reform agenda, positions the Armed Forces to continue improving training quality in coming years.

CONCLUSION

The evidence reviewed in this article supports a clear and compelling conclusion: realistic combat training exercises that closely simulate the physical, tactical, and psychological conditions of actual warfare are the primary mechanism through which the fighting spirit of military personnel is developed and sustained. Such training builds individual psychological resilience through stress inoculation, develops tactical competence through repeated deliberate practice, forges unit cohesion through genuine shared challenge, and instills the



confidence that comes from knowing one has already navigated demanding situations successfully.

For the Republic of Uzbekistan's Armed Forces, the ongoing military modernization program represents a historic opportunity to institutionalize the principles of realistic, high-quality combat training across all echelons of the military hierarchy. The legislative and doctrinal foundations are in place; the task now is one of consistent implementation, adequate resourcing of realistic training infrastructure, and the development of a professional officer and NCO corps capable of designing, conducting, and evaluating demanding training scenarios.

Future research should focus on the longitudinal measurement of fighting spirit indicators in Uzbek military units with varying training regimes, the comparative effectiveness of different simulation technologies in building psychological readiness, and the identification of the optimal training intensity and frequency required to produce durable gains in combat effectiveness. These investigations will further refine training doctrine and contribute to the ongoing development of a military force capable of defending the sovereignty and security of the Republic of Uzbekistan.

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