

Asymmetrical Combatives Training:

Recently I had the opportunity to read a 2003 paper written by Col. Thomas J Williams (Director of the US Army Physical Fitness Research Institute, US Army War College) entitled, "Strategic Leader Readiness and Competencies for Asymmetric Warfare." IMO, although the target audience for this paper was those in leadership roles in military and para-military professions, for those who study combatives and their real world applications, this paper is a must read.

I have always said that personal combat is a war in microcosm. As such, those of us who teach personal combatives can glean knowledge from those who make war a profession. Modern and past military strategic leaders have learned the "art of war" through actual application, and as such, we should extrapolate their experience to the realm of personal combat, and pass the lessons learned from these warriors to our students where reasonable and appropriate to do so.

In the US military, the need to think differently has been a recurring theme in defence transformation efforts. The current terrorists threats posed by a variety of extremist groups around the world have really spawned a change from dealing with these threats "symmetrically" to "asymmetrically." To quote a definition of asymmetrical strategies from Col. Williams' paper:

" Asymmetric approaches generally seek a major psychological impact, such as shock or confusion that affects an opponent's initiative, freedom of action, or will. Asymmetrical methods require an appreciation of an opponent's vulnerabilities. Asymmetric approaches often employ innovative, non-traditional tactics, weapons, or technologies, and can be applied at all levels of warfare- strategic, operational, and tactical- across the spectrum of military operations."

Another analogy to explain the differences between symmetrical and asymmetrical warfare can be found in the movie "The Patriot" In this movie the Patriots who fought in the War of Independence, understood that they could not fight a symmetrical war with the British Red Coats. Instead, they chose to fight an asymmetrical war utilizing so called "guerilla" tactics (stun and run) thus giving them a tactical advantage that the Red Coats could not, and would not, adapt to as it was not seen to be very gentlemanly.

IMO, asymmetric approaches to war attempt to disrupt and undermine an enemies ability to direct and control rational and deliberate actions, both psychologically and physically, thus creating maximum uncertainty and ambiguity. IMO, this should be our goal in personal combatives as well !!!!!!!

To correlate the above noted information to personal street combatives, I see much of what is taught in "traditional" martial arts as being symmetrical in orientation. It is because of this fact, IMO, that traditionalists are finding both their relevance and adaptability (specific to real world self protection) being challenged by both myself and other asymmetrical modern realists who teach street combatives. In the street, you will be facing "adaptive adversaries", much like what the US military is facing in Afghanistan with the AlKida. The US military has recognized that to defeat such an opponent, symmetrical strategies would not work. Symmetrical strategies are just too predictable, and thus, easily defeated and exploited by the enemy. Instead, military leaders are now using asymmetrical tactics with the intent to keep the enemy on the defensive. Street combatives need to follow this same principal.

Although I do consider myself to be a "Modern Realist" there are those whose writings and philosophies from the past truly influence my beliefs and teachings today. Some of these historical warriors such as Sun Tzu and Carl Von Clausewitz (to name two), IMO, were not symmetrical warriors but asymmetrical, and as such, can and do offer much to those of us who are teaching combatives today, if we are willing to open our minds and allow our beliefs and traditions to be challenged. As Sun Tzu stated:

"All warfare is based on deception. When capable, feign incapacity; when active, inactivity. Offer the enemy bait to lure him; feign disorder and strike him. Pretend inferiority and encourage his arrogance. I make the enemy see my strengths as weaknesses and weaknesses as strengths."

The above noted Sun Tzu quote is asymmetrical thinking at its highest level. IMO, Sun Tzu, Clausewitz and other Modern Asymmetrical Warriors offer a framework to help guide the needed adaptation that we as teachers, coaches, and instructors of modern street combatives need to pass onto our students, when it comes to teaching strategic asymmetrical approaches to personal combat in the real world. Asymmetrical training allows one to adapt, overcome, and improvise. Asymmetrical training understands that combative principals stay the same, but can be applied in diverse combative applications. Asymmetrical training also promotes the understanding that functionality of technique is far more important than perfect technique in the street.

The challenge posed by asymmetrical applications to street combatives requires a realignment of the way we as combative teachers, coaches, and instructors approach, think, and plan. It challenges tradition and forces us to think outside of the box, something that is seen to be a "threat" rather than a "challenge" by some who teach in this field. In combat there are NO constant conditions, and this is why asymmetrical combatives training is a must for those who seek real world application.

Strength and Honor

Darren Laur

