

Analyzing Asymmetric Opponents through Deconstruction of Asymmetric Engagements

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This presentation reviews the results of an investigation into a process for developing asymmetric tactics in support for small unit training. Some have argued that asymmetric tactics are something outside of our normal understanding. This work disagrees with that assertion. We postulated that any force would prefer to achieve their strategic objectives through quick, decisive operations. Forces resort to asymmetric warfare when they realize that they cannot successfully conduct decisive operations, usually because of a capability discrepancy with a more capable force such as the US. The presentation supports this supposition by historical examples of when Americans resorted to asymmetric tactics.

The investigation hypothesized that if asymmetric tacticians do not vary greatly from conventional tacticians, then the asymmetric tactician would use roughly the same process as his conventional peer to build an asymmetric tactic—namely that the asymmetric tactician would string together a set of tasks through a set of cause-effect interactions in order to achieve a tactical purpose. Should this be true, it could inform an asymmetric scenario generation system, where the system could select from a menu of tasks and then string those tasks into a tactic.

The presentation will show how this hypothesis was tested in two phases. In the first phase, the investigation reviewed the asymmetric approaches of four recognized asymmetric tactic practitioners: T.E. Lawrence, Mao Tse-Tung, Marighella, and Che Guevara. The presentation will show the primary findings of this review, the predominant importance of survival to the asymmetric tactician—not necessarily individual survival, but the survival of the organization or movement. This drives the overall objective of the tactic, which are conducted to sustain the asymmetric organization as much as to diminish the asymmetric organization's opponent.

The second phase deconstructed seven historical asymmetric engagements. The presentation will show how these engagements were deconstructed, using two concepts: the Military Mission to Means Framework and nesting concepts used by military planners. The presentation will use a small number of the seven historical asymmetric engagements to demonstrate how these concepts were used.

The presentation will conclude by showing the findings of the investigation, specifically to what extent they validated the original hypotheses and what insight they provided into asymmetric operations and opponents.