

People are in fact animals with only a thin layer of humanity. We have evolved through hunting and intraspecies aggression. When we loose our self control, we attack and fight as primitively as we used to millions of year ago. We go straight at the opponent ignoring left and right, intent on destroying him. The humanity on other hand is the rest which was left behind. Let's look at how we can use the animal as well as the human part in us to our advantage

Stress and stress level. Animals – but from now on humans – react to threat or danger basically in three ways: freeze, flight and fight. In all cases the brain prepares the body for maximum performance and damage mitigation, blood is pumped to the core organs from the peripheries and the heightened adrenalin levels create tunnel vision. The stress level which starts to effect performance is individual and based on ones naturel, training and conditioning. The higher the stress, the more natural reactions. In extreme cases and fear we become animal like and cannot perform our objectives, let alone use the self defense techniques properly.

Tunnel vision. In normal conditions we can see approximately 180° in front of us, but the peripheral vision occupies the largest part most of it. Extreme stress, fear or physical fight blocks the peripheral vision, usually leaving us with an effective field of vision of only approximately 50° (definition of peripheral vision can vary).

Selective perception simply put prevents us from seeing something we do not want to see or expect. Assuming for example that there is only one enemy I have to deal with and the rest the onlookers are friendlies, could prevent me from seeing an unexpected attack from a friendly who suddenly turned into an enemy.

Timeline. Every conflict has its beginning and an end both physically and psychologically. The best way is to deescalate the conflict, stop it without using the actual violence. That is not always possible and is also affected by the range between us and the opponent. The distance between us and the opponent dictates the tools we can use effectively.

Very long range – distance of 15 m and more. (In reality the distance varies with the size of the opponents, terrain, their skills, preparedness and other factors.) Both opponents can see each other. This is the safest distance from the self defense point of view. Allows safe de-escalation of the conflict. Even if the opponent starts charging with a knife, it is possible to draw a pistol, charge it and take aim effectively.

Long range – distance between 15 m and 5 m. The usual meeting distance in the urban environment. Allows for verbal de-escalation and gives some reaction time. Drawing a pistol effectively might not be possible at this distance (Gun can be first used as melee weapon to create enough space to firing).

Short range – distance between 5 m and roughly two outstretched hands or a kick distance. Still socially acceptable and generally not viewed as threatening. Allows for only a little reaction time on both sides – for defense as well as for arrests. Unexpected knife attacks become a serious threat at this distance.

Kick range. Almost no reaction time unless prepared. Probably ignored the conflict prevention and allowed the opponent to get too close. Can however effectively defend yourself with kicks (stun with head kicks – doesnt work on ice, damage the knee with low kick, push away with push kicks or front kick into the groin, solar plexus, chin) and create space for drawing a weapon.

Straight punch range or a knife range. Something went definitely wrong. Use straight punches, front hammer strikes, baton pommel, pistol barrel, tactical flashlight, knife, improvised weapons. If present, the knife is the main threat and should be dealt with as a priority.

Hook range, elbow range, clinch, biting range – self explanatory.

On the ground – release yourself and get up immediately – you can be kicked at and cannot retaliate properly.

One on one – a duel. In formalized aggression – combat sports and martial arts – usually one opponent faces the other from only one relative direction. Our combat sports training prepares us for only one opponent and lets us ignore our surroundings, does not train our situational awareness.

One on many – a match or a battle. In real life situations we never know how many opponents we face. Their number can change anytime, new opponents can appear from the side, from the back, from anywhere we are not looking at. Previous non-combatants may suddenly join the fight, harm us non-directly or become threats to us in some other way. Group sports such as hockey or football prepare us for such situations as they train our situational awareness and help us to read the situation and the opponents.

Open space. Place such as empty street, a park, where all the targets are visible and hiding places are easily identifiable. Targets do not appear out of nowhere, we can use tools appropriate for each distance, de-escalate, intimidate, have time to prepare and use weapons. In short we have all the reaction time we need.

CQB. Close quarter battle – places with limited space, such as a passage, inside of a building. Limits movement and contains many hiding places. Techniques are limited by range and visibility.

General self defense tactics: Best defense is not to be there or to run away. That is not always possible, the situation can be forced on us or we have to use force against somebody else. Always anticipate the situation can get worse – use prevention exactly like during driving. Maintain your situational awareness – again just like when driving. It is the same exercise, only with people on sidewalks instead of cars on roads. If it comes to conflict, you have probably neglected the prevention. Violent conflicts should be deescalated to avoid injury whenever possible. Use your weapons or arm yourself with an improvised object, a stone, a broom, your mobile phone as fast as possible preferably before the violence starts. Use rucksacks, notebook bags as improvised shields. Use doors, furniture to create more distance. When surprised use kicks and punches to create space for arming yourself – draw or find a weapon.

Always face your enemies, never ever turn your back to them. Never be among your enemies, always try to face as little of them as possible. When surrounded, quickly break the circle and cover yourself behind or with an opponent, it will be harder for the others to hit you. When facing a line of opponents the best position is from its flanks, where you are in contact with only one of them. The worst position is right in front of the middle of their line, where you face basically all of them while they can envelop and surround you. Always position yourself between the attackers and an escape route. Use objects, benches, cars, walls, corners to your advantage. Never stay on the ground. Always fight to the end until you manage to escape or beat them. Call for help, it rarely comes but, you should be identified as defender by onlookers.

Tunnel vision severely impedes what you can see. Shortly look around you all the time, scan especially when you have a brief moment in combat. Always circle around your enemies so that you gradually see to all angles. Always expect more enemies, who can appear any time and are hard to see with tunnel vision and are probably using the tunnel vision against you!

Now we can analyze all these factors combined.

One on one in open space. The simplest combination of factors. All the mentioned options with regards to tactics and training methods are available because you should see your opponent long time before he can get to you.

One on many in open space. Or few against many. Maneuvering and scanning for new opponents is crucial. Never get surrounded, if you do, break their circle. Avoid most of the opponents, fight only a few of them at once by positioning yourself at the narrow side of their formation – go to their flank first a start retreating in broad spirals, you will be able to scan the whole 360° arc from time to time and to discover new attackers approaching. Avoid their weapons, take cover behind unarmed attackers if possible. If weapons are at play, use brutality and explosive violence to even out the odds, there is not much space for mistakes or mercy. **One on one in CQB**

The visibility of the opponent is the key tactical factor. Use it to your advantage and minimize the advantage your enemy has. If you are defending and overpowered, use objects – corners, railings, doors to slow down your enemy – and head for safety, a backup within the building or a nearest exit. When attacking, scan what is in each room and behind each corner briefly before entering and pull back, enter only then as there might be a trap. Expect non-combatants, but always assume they can become hostile. Tunnel vision is a serious problem because enemies can suddenly appear at short distance.

Train often, learn to use the wall to your advantage. Weapons can be disarmed by bashing the hand against the wall. Walls and posts break bones if you hit them. Open palm strike and hammer punches can be a safer option than fists especially when the opponent has a helmet.

One on many in CQB. The visibility and surprise element is even more crucial – new opponents can appear any time from behind an obstacle. The intense stress of fighting multiple opponents makes tunnel vision even worse and proper scanning harder. Positional fight is the key. Use narrow spaces to turn the odds in your favor. Always keep your back safe scan and position yourself in such a way. Never let your opponent push you against the wall, if they try that, make a sortie along the wall – it will protect your flank – and you use all your brutality in this life threatening situation. There is not much space for mistakes in this scenario, do not take risks like you would in a duel.

Building stress resistance and situational awareness

Any techniques should be trained with little stress at first. There will always be a gap between the pure technique demonstrated with no stress level and under stress. If the stress level is sufficiently high, even the masters will revert to basic human reactions, the objective in those cases is to perform the technique as properly as possible.

The stress level should be gradually raised for all students and they should train outside their comfort zone at all time. They will learn to react instinctively with little reaction time and to work with their fatigue. On the other hand they need to survive the training and remember what they have learned. It is crucial to train one against many scenarios frequently as a part of

nearly each training to build high stress resistance and get the students used to fighting against multiple opponents.

Exercises: S – Stress, SA – situational awareness, SV – selective vision, TV – Tunnel Vision

Defender should use the proper defense technique and begins with closed eyes to imitate little reaction time. Attacker announces his attack to allow for a reaction. S

Defender stands surrounded by a circle of attackers, only two at first, gradually more, defender may optionally start with closed eyes. S, SA

Two attackers, one on each side on the gym, defender runs to one side, stops and the attacker immediately attacks him, defender then runs to the other attacker. Repeat. Attacker may be optionally do some exhausting exercise. S

One defender against multiple opponents using various attacks. The goal is to defend properly, stay out of the attackers formation and never to pass between two of them. After attacking wait for a few moments and only then attempt to attack again. Gradually raise the difficulty, increase number of attackers, their speed, add cold weapons, etc. S, SA, TV

Introduce surprise and orientation elements to the usual training. Attack unexpectedly with a hidden training weapon or let some of the students do it. S, SA, SV

Introduce non-combatants to training. Their role is only to bother the training pairs by talking to them, stepping between them, touching and by generally distracting. The distractors cannot be attacked, but only dealt with in a civil way. S, SA, SV.

Give students signals to do certain tasks. Agree on the signals beforehand. No. 1 – everyone to the escape exit, No. 2 – find an improvised weapon or a shield, No. 3 – touch something red, etc. SA, SV

Obstacle course. Divide the class into a good and a bad team. Position the bad team along the course. Each station presents a different scenario and should also contain a surprise element, e.i. short reaction time. Use empty building, densely build up area with many obstacles, etc. Give them fast scenarios, this exercise can become time consuming. One room may contain just one attacker, the may other more attackers and a trap – one opponent distracts, the attacks from the back. Introduce non-combatants. S, SA, SV, TV

Paranoia game. You should always know how many people are around you on the street. While on the street quickly mentally recapitulate position of everyone on the street around you from time to time without looking. Then look around and check how correct your estimate was. SA, SV

Other games can be designed according to the described principles.

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