

# History of asymmetric warfare

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## When was asymmetric warfare invented?

“They are very quick in their operations of exceeding speed and fond of surprising their enemies. They suddenly disperse and then reunite and again after having inflicted vast loss upon the enemy, scatter themselves over the whole plane in irregular formations, always avoiding a fort or an entrenchment.”





“These calls announce the start of a raid into land controlled by their neighbors. As they leave their core zone, the patrol goes silent, occasionally stopping to listen. Signs of the enemy are detected and examined closely. The militia is now at the very edge of their territory. All need to be on maximum alert. Then it's waiting and listens. An unfamiliar call raises the tension. It's an uncertain time. The size of the rival group is as yet unknown.

Not far away the neighbors are eating, oblivious to the approaching dangers. The patrol moves off with a sense of purpose. They must remain silent until they close in on their rivals. The attack is on. To intimidate their opponents, the aggressors scream and drum. It's a ferocious attack ...”

# Long term perspective

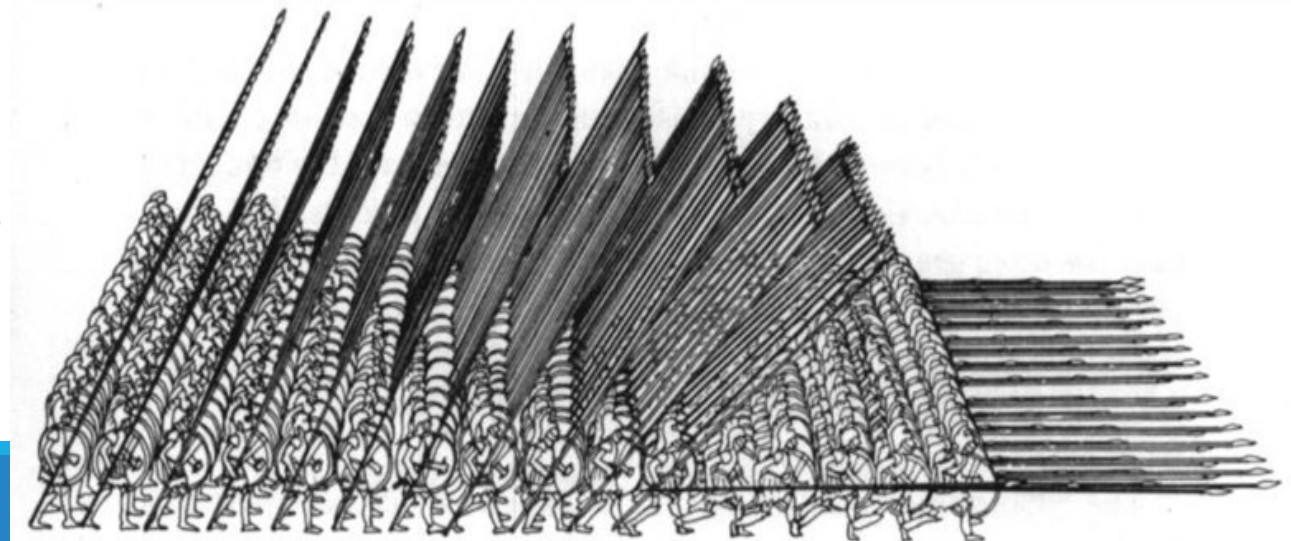
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- asymmetric/irregular warfare is actually the original, “normal” warfare
- characteristic for tribal conflicts and so is “counterinsurgency”
- it is referenced in the oldest records

conventional/regular warfare is comparatively recent invention

- it requires “civilization”

historically more visible and attractive



# Oldest period

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## Sun Tzu (6<sup>th</sup> century B.C.)

- “An army may be likened to water, for just as flowing water avoids the heights and hastens to the lowlands, so an army avoids strength and strikes weakness.”
- “The supreme art of war is to subdue the enemy without fighting.”

## Quintus Fabius Maximus Verrucosus (3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C.)

- adopted “Fabian strategy” after initial Hannibal’s victories
- avoiding direct battle, attacking supply routes, war of attrition
- time must be on the side of defender
- military success, political disaster

## Zealots and Sicarii in Judea (1<sup>st</sup> century A.D.)

- guerrilla warfare against Roman Empire
- Sicarii were actually a bit more terroristy





# Middle ages

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- some bits of asymmetric warfare can be seen during the Hundred Years' (1337-1453) and Thirty Years' (1618-1648) wars
  - for example Bertrand du Guesclin
- anti-Ottoman resistance in the Balkans
  - for example Skandenberg of Albania (15th cent.)
- colonial wars
- Robin Hood as guerrilla fighter?
  - social rebellion and local resistance
- Irish resistance 1594-1603

# American War of Independence (1775–1783)

almost perfect conditions for asymmetric warfare

attacks on supply routes, officers, etc.

war was eventually decided back in London due to lack of support





## Napoleon's Spanish "ulcer", that he wanted to "liberate" and it might had cost him the war (1807-1814)

*"It is manifest that, though a great army may easily defeat or disperse another army, less or greater, yet it is not in a like degree formidable to a determined people, nor efficient in a like degree to subdue them, or to keep them in subjugation—much less if this people, like those of Spain in the present instance, be numerous, and, like them, inhabit a territory extensive and strong by nature. For a great army, and even several great armies, cannot accomplish this by marching about the country, unbroken, but each must split itself into many portions, and the several detachments become weak accordingly, not merely as they are small in size, but because the soldiery, acting thus, necessarily relinquish much of that part of their superiority, which lies in what may be called the engineer of war; and far more, because they lose, in proportion as they are broken, the power of profiting by the military skill of the Commanders, or by their own military habits. The experienced soldier is thus brought down nearer to the plain ground of the inexperienced, man to the level of man: and it is then, that the truly brave man rises, the man of good hopes and purposes; and superiority in moral brings with it superiority in physical power."*

*- William Wordsworth*



# Modern Era

- American Civil War (1861-1865)
  - both sides legitimized local guerillas
  - option to prolong the war
- Franco-Prussian War (1870-1871)
  - “francs-tireurs” – French anti-Prussian guerrillas in captured territory
- Boer Wars (1880-1881, 1899-1902)
  - both wars highly asymmetrical
  - Boers very effective “mobile snipers”
  - British army adapted well (camouflage, fortifications, protected supply routes, razing enemy supplies, concentration camps, pursuit units, armoured trains)
  - decent conditions of surrender



THE WAR IN THE TRANSVAAL: THE BOERS' METHOD OF FIGHTING.—SEE PAGE 15.



# The Great War

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- T.E. Lawrence (and Gertrude Bell)
  - tried to create anti-Ottoman Arab revolt
  - “successful”, consequences still felt today (Sykes-Picot line)
  - Germany tried the same thing against India (Niedermayer expedition)
- Paul von Letow-Vorbeck
  - undefeated German colonel in Tanzania
  - waged asymmetric war against much larger British army in Africa
  - goal was to force Entente to keep forces in Africa
  - no supplies, lived off the land

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4iKHwHPpIKQ&t=2256s>

# Further conflicts

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partisans and occupation resistance movements during WW2

- France, Poland, Yugoslavia, and many others

Chinese revolution and Mao's Long March

de-colonization wars

- Africa and Asia

Vietnam War

Afghan War

# Videos

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Algiers - [/p00txp61/](#)

Paris - [/p00txp44/](#) (4:00)

Bin Hao - [/p00txnyc/](#)

Vietnam 1 - [/p00txp2s/](#)

Vietnam 2 - [/p00txnwv/](#)

Iraq - [/p00txqjt/](#) (2:00)