**Asymmetric Warfare**

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**Asymmetric warfare** is [war](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/War) between [belligerents](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Belligerent) whose relative military power differs significantly, or whose strategy or tactics differ significantly.

"Asymmetric warfare" can describe a conflict in which the resources of two belligerents differ in essence and in the struggle, interact and attempt to exploit each other's characteristic weaknesses. Such struggles often involve strategies and tactics of [unconventional warfare](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unconventional_warfare), the "weaker" combatants attempting to use strategy to offset deficiencies in quantity or quality. Such strategies may not necessarily be militarized. This is in contrast to *symmetric warfare*, where two powers have similar military power and resources and rely on tactics that are similar overall, differing only in details and execution.

The term is frequently used to describe what is also called "guerrilla warfare", "insurgency", "terrorism", "counterinsurgency", and "counterterrorism", essentially violent conflict between a formal military and an informal, poorly-equipped, but elusive opponent.

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| [**Warfare**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/War)[**Military history**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Military_history) |
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**Definition and differences**

The popularity of the term dates from [Andrew J.R. Mack](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Andrew_J.R._Mack&action=edit&redlink=1)'s 1975 article "Why Big Nations Lose Small Wars" in [*World Politics*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_Politics), in which "asymmetric" referred simply to a significant disparity in power between opposing actors in a conflict. "Power," in this sense, is broadly understood to mean material power, such as a large army, sophisticated weapons, an advanced economy, and so on. Mack's analysis was largely ignored in its day, but the end of the [Cold War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cold_War) sparked renewed interest among academics. By the late 1990s new research building on Mack's insights was beginning to mature, and after 2004, the [U.S. military](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/U.S._military) began once again to seriously consider the problems associated with asymmetric warfare.

Discussion since 2004 has been complicated by the tendency of academic and military communities to use the term in different ways, and by its close association with [guerrilla warfare](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guerrilla_warfare), [insurgency](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Insurgency), [terrorism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Terrorism), [counterinsurgency](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Counterinsurgency), and [counterterrorism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Counterterrorism). Military authors tend to use the term "asymmetric" to refer to the indirect nature of the strategies many weak actors adopt, or even to the nature of the adversary itself (e.g. "asymmetric adversaries can be expected to...") rather than to the correlation of forces.

Academic authors tend to focus more on explaining the puzzle of weak actor victory in war: if "power," conventionally understood, conduces to victory in war, then how is the victory of the "weak" over the "strong" explained? Key explanations include:

(1) strategic interaction;

(2) willingness of the weak to suffer more or bear higher costs;

(3) external support of weak actors;

(4) reluctance to escalate violence on the part of strong actors;

(5) internal group dynamics and

(6) inflated strong actor war aims.

Asymmetric conflicts include both interstate and [civil wars](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Civil_war), and over the past two hundred years have generally been won by strong actors. Since 1950, however, weak actors have won a majority of all asymmetric conflicts.

Advancements in this type of warfare have been dramatically amplified with the evolution of advanced weaponry. The perpetual evolutionary arms race has made industrialized countries incredibly advanced in comparison to primitive nations. This has given those advanced countries huge advantages in asymmetric warfare.

**Strategic basis**

In most [conventional warfare](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conventional_warfare), the belligerents deploy forces of a similar type and the outcome can be predicted by the quantity of the opposing forces or by their quality, for example better command and control of their forces(c3). There are times where this is not true because the composition or strategy of the forces makes it impossible for either side to close in battle with the other. An example of this is the standoff between the continental land forces of the [French army](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/French_army) and the maritime forces of the [United Kingdom](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom)'s [Royal Navy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Royal_Navy) during the [French Revolutionary](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/French_Revolutionary_Wars) and [Napoleonic Wars](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Napoleonic_Wars). In the words of Admiral [Jervis](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Jervis,_1st_Earl_of_St_Vincent) during the [campaigns of 1801](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Campaigns_of_1801_in_the_French_Revolutionary_Wars), "I do not say, my Lords, that the French will not come. I say only they will not come by sea", and a confrontation that Napoleon Bonaparte described as that between the elephant and the whale.

**Tactical basis**

The tactical success of asymmetric warfare is dependent on at least some of the following assumptions:

* One side can have a technological advantage which outweighs the numerical advantage of the enemy; the decisive [English Longbow](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/English_Longbow) at the [Battle of Crécy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Cr%C3%A9cy) is an example.
* Technological inferiority usually is cancelled by more vulnerable infrastructure which can be targeted with devastating results. Destruction of multiple electric lines, roads or water supply systems in highly populated areas could have devastating effects on economy and morale, while the weaker side may not have these structures at all.
* Training and tactics as well as technology can prove decisive and allow a smaller force to overcome a much larger one. For example, for several centuries the Greek [hoplite](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hoplite)'s (heavy infantry) use of [phalanx](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phalanx_formation) made them far superior to their enemies. The [Battle of Thermopylae](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Thermopylae), which also involved good [use of terrain](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Asymmetric_warfare#The_use_of_terrain_in_asymmetric_warfare#The_use_of_terrain_in_asymmetric_warfare), is a well-known example.
* If the inferior power is in a position of self-defense; i.e., under attack or occupation, it *may* be possible to use unconventional tactics, such as hit-and-run and selective battles in which the superior power is weaker, as an effective means of harassment without violating the [laws of war](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Laws_of_war). Perhaps the classical historical examples of this doctrine may be found in the [American Revolutionary War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_Revolutionary_War), movements in [World War II](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_War_II), such as the [French Resistance](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/French_Resistance) and [Soviet](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/USSR) and [Yugoslav](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yugoslavia) [partisans](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Partisan_(military)). Against democratic aggressor nations, this strategy can be used to play on the electorate's patience with the conflict (as in the [Vietnam War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vietnam_War), and others since) provoking [protests](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Protest), and consequent disputes among elected legislators.
* If the inferior power is in an aggressive position, however, and/or turns to tactics prohibited by the laws of war ([*jus in bello*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jus_in_bello)), its success depends on the superior power's refraining from like tactics. For example, the [law of land warfare](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Law_of_land_warfare) prohibits the use of a [flag of truce](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_truce) or clearly marked medical vehicles as cover for an attack or [ambush](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ambush), but an asymmetric combatant using this prohibited tactic to its advantage depends on the superior power's obedience to the corresponding law. Similarly, laws of warfare prohibit combatants from using civilian [settlements](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human_settlement), populations or facilities as [military bases](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Military_base), but when an inferior power uses this tactic, it depends on the premise that the superior power will respect the law that the other is violating, and will not attack that civilian target, or if they do the propaganda advantage will outweigh the material loss. As seen in most conflicts of the 20th and 21st centuries, this is highly unlikely as the propaganda advantage has always outweighed adherence to international law, especially by dominating sides of any conflict.
* As noted below, the Israel-Palestinian conflict is one recent example of asymmetric warfare. Mansdorf and Kedaroutline how Islamist warfare uses asymmetric status to gain a tactical advantage against Israel. They refer to the "psychological" mechanisms used by forces such as Hezbollah and Hamas in being willing to exploit their own civilians as well as enemy civilians towards obtaining tactical gains, in part by using the media to influence the course of war.

**Use of terrain**

Terrain can be used as a [force multiplier](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Force_multiplier) by the smaller force and as a force inhibitor against the larger force. Such terrain is called **difficult terrain**.

The contour of the land is an aid to the army; sizing up opponents to determine victory, assessing dangers and distance. "Those who do battle without knowing these will lose." ― [Sun Tzu](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sun_Tzu), [*The Art of War*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Art_of_War)

The guerrillas must move amongst the people as a fish swims in the sea. ― [Mao Zedong](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mao_Zedong).

A good example of this type of strategy is the [Battle of Marathon](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Marathon), where the narrow terrain of a defile was used to funnel the Persian forces, who were numerically superior, to a point where they could not use their size as an advantage.

For a detailed description of the advantages for the weaker force in the use of built-up areas when engaging in asymmetric warfare, see the article on [urban warfare](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Urban_warfare).

**War by proxy**

Where asymmetric warfare is carried out (generally covertly) by allegedly non-governmental actors who are connected to or sympathetic to a particular nation's (the "state actor's") interest, it may be deemed [*war by proxy*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/War_by_proxy)*.* This is typically done to give [*deniability*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deniability) to the state actor. The deniability can be important to keep the state actor from being tainted by the actions, to allow the state actor to negotiate in apparent good faith by claiming they are not responsible for the actions of parties who are merely sympathizers, or to avoid being accused of [belligerent actions](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Belligerent) or [war crimes](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/War_crime). If proof emerges of the true extent of the state actor's involvement, this strategy can backfire; for example see [Iran-contra](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iran-contra) and [Philip Agee](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philip_Agee).

**Asymmetric warfare and terrorism**

There are two different viewpoints on the relationship between asymmetric warfare and [terrorism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Terrorism). In the modern context, asymmetric warfare is increasingly considered a component of [fourth generation warfare](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fourth_generation_warfare). When practiced outside the [laws of war](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Laws_of_war), it is often defined as [terrorism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Terrorism), though rarely by its practitioners or their supporters.

The other view is that asymmetric warfare does not coincide with terrorism. For example, in an asymmetric conflict, the dominant side, normally as part of a [propaganda](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Propaganda) campaign, can accuse the weaker side of being [bandits](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bandit), [pillagers](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Looter) or [terrorists](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Terrorists). Others argue that asymmetric warfare is called "terrorism" by those wishing to exploit the negative connotations of the word and bring the political aims of the weaker opponents into question. An example of this is over [Kashmir](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kashmir): the [Pakistanis](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pakistan) claim that a war of freedom for the Kashmiris is being fought with the [Indians](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/India), who in turn, label them as terrorists. The [Iraqi insurgency](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iraqi_insurgency) is similarly labeled as terrorism by its opponents and [resistance](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Resistance_movement) by its supporters. Similarly the use of terror by the much lesser [Mongol](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mongol) forces in the creation and control of the [Mongol empire](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mongol_empire) could be viewed as asymmetric warfare. The other is the use of [state terrorism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/State_terrorism) by the superior [Nazi](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nazi) forces in the [Balkans](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Balkans), in an attempt to suppress the resistance movement.

**Representative list of asymmetric wars**

Below is a representative list of interstate asymmetric wars fought between 1816 and 2011:

[Franco-Spanish War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Franco-Spanish_War), [First Anglo-Burmese War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_Anglo-Burmese_War), [Second Russo-Persian War](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Second_Russo-Persian_War&action=edit&redlink=1), [War of the Cakes](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/War_of_the_Cakes), [First Anglo-Afghan War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_Anglo-Afghan_War), [Uruguayan Dispute](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Uruguayan_Dispute&action=edit&redlink=1), [Austro-Sardinian War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Austro-Sardinian_War), [First Schleswig-Holstein War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_Schleswig-Holstein_War), [Second Anglo-Burmese War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Second_Anglo-Burmese_War), [Anglo-Persian War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anglo-Persian_War), [Italo-Roman War](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Italo-Roman_War&action=edit&redlink=1), [Two Sicilies](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Two_Sicilies), [Franco-Mexican War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Franco-Mexican_War), [Second Schleswig-Holstein War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Second_Schleswig-Holstein_War), [Anglo-Abyssinian War](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Anglo-Abyssinian_War&action=edit&redlink=1), [Anglo-Egyptian War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anglo-Egyptian_War), [Tonkin War](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Tonkin_War&action=edit&redlink=1), [Franco-Siamese War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Franco-Siamese_War), [Second Italo-Ethiopian War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Second_Italo-Ethiopian_War), [Second Boer War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Second_Boer_War), [Sino-Russian War](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Sino-Russian_War&action=edit&redlink=1), [Tripolitanian War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tripolitanian_War), [Franco-Turkish War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Franco-Turkish_War), [Polish Revolution](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Polish_Revolution&action=edit&redlink=1), [Italo-Ethiopian War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Italo-Ethiopian_War), some Israeli-Arab conflicts: the [First](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_Intifada) and [Second Intifada](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Second_Intifada), and various conflicts with the [Hezbollah](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hezbollah), [Sino-Japanese War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sino-Japanese_War), German-Polish Confrontation of [World War II](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_War_II), German-Danish Confrontation of [World War II](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_War_II), German-Norwegian Confrontation of [World War II](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_War_II), German-Belgian Confrontation of [World War II](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_War_II), German-Dutch Confrontation of [World War II](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_War_II), Italo-Greek Confrontation of [World War II](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_War_II), German-Yugoslav Confrontation of [World War II](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_War_II), [Korean War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Korean_War), [Himalayan War](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Himalayan_War&action=edit&redlink=1), [Vietnam War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vietnam_War), [Second Sino-Vietnamese War](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Second_Sino-Vietnamese_War&action=edit&redlink=1), [Nagorno-Karabakh War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nagorno-Karabakh_War), [Soviet War in Afghanistan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soviet_War_in_Afghanistan), [Gulf War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gulf_War), [War in Afghanistan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/War_in_Afghanistan_(2001%E2%80%93present)), [Iraq War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iraq_War), [2006 Lebanon War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2006_Lebanon_War), 2011 [Libya Civil War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Libya_Civil_War). [The War of AMIGA and SoT](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=The_War_of_AMIGA_and_SoT&action=edit&redlink=1)

**Examples of asymmetric warfare**

**The American Revolutionary War**

From its initiation, the [American Revolutionary War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_Revolutionary_War) was, necessarily, a showcase for asymmetric techniques. In the 1920s, [Harold Murdock](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Harold_Murdock&action=edit&redlink=1) of [Boston](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boston) attempted to solve the puzzle of the first shots fired on [Lexington Green](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battles_of_Lexington_and_Concord), and came to the suspicion that the few score militia men who gathered before sunrise to await the arrival of hundreds of well-prepared British soldiers were sent specifically to provoke an incident which could be used for propaganda purposes. The return of the British force to Boston following the search operations at [Concord](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battles_of_Lexington_and_Concord) was subject to constant [skirmishing](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Skirmisher), using [partisan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Partisan_(military)) forces gathered from communities all along the route, making maximum use of the terrain (particularly trees and stone field walls) to overcome the limitations of their weapons- [muskets](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Musket) with an effective range of only about 50–70 meters. Throughout the war, skirmishing tactics against British troops on the move continued to be a key factor in [Patriot](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Patriot_(American_Revolution)) success; however, they may also have encouraged the occasional incidents, particularly in the later stages, where British troops used alleged surrender violations as a justification for killing large numbers of captives (e.g. [Waxhaw](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Waxhaw_Massacre) and [Groton Heights](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Groton_Heights)).

Another feature of the long march from Concord was the urban warfare technique of using buildings along the route as additional cover for [snipers](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sniper), which provoked the logical response from the British force — destruction of the buildings. When revolutionary forces forced their way into [Norfolk, Virginia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Norfolk,_Virginia), and used waterfront buildings as cover for shots at British vessels out in the river, the response of destruction of those buildings was ingeniously used to the advantage of the rebels, who encouraged the spread of fire throughout the largely [Loyalist](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Loyalist_(American_Revolution)) town, and spread propaganda blaming it on the British. Shortly afterwards they destroyed the remaining houses, on the grounds that they might provide cover for British soldiers. On the subject of propaganda, it should be borne in mind that, contrary to the impression given in the popular American film [*The Patriot*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Patriot_(2000_film)), British forces never adopted a popular response to partisan-style asymmetric warfare — retribution massacres of groups selected on a semi-random basis from the population at large.

The rebels also adopted a form of asymmetric [sea warfare](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sea_warfare), by using small, fast vessels to avoid the [Royal Navy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Royal_Navy), and capturing or sinking large numbers of merchant ships; however the British responded by issuing [letters of marque](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Letter_of_marque) permitting private armed vessels to undertake reciprocal attacks on enemy shipping. [John Paul Jones](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Paul_Jones) became notorious in [Britain](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kingdom_of_Great_Britain) for his expedition from France in the little sloop of war [*Ranger*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/USS_Ranger_(1777)) in April 1778, during which, in addition to his attacks on merchant shipping, he made two landings on British soil. The effect of these raids, particularly when coupled with his capture of the Royal Navy's [*HMS Drake*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/HMS_Drake_(1777)) — the first such success in British waters, but not Jones's last — was to force the British government to increase resources for coastal defense, and to create a climate of fear among the British public which was subsequently fed by press reports of his preparations for the 1779 [*Bonhomme Richard*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/USS_Bonhomme_Richard_(1765)) mission.

From 1776, the conflict turned increasingly into a proxy war on behalf of [France](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/France_in_the_American_Revolutionary_War), following a strategy proposed in the 1760s but initially resisted by the idealistic young [King Louis XVI](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/King_Louis_XVI), who came to the throne at the age of 19 a few months before Lexington. France also encouraged proxy wars against the British in [India](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/India), but ultimately drove itself to the brink of [state bankruptcy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_bankruptcy) by entering the war(s) directly, on several fronts throughout the world.

**20th century asymmetric warfare**

**Second Boer War**



[Boer Commandos](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boer_Commando)

Asymmetric warfare featured prominently during the [Second Boer War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Second_Boer_War). After an initial phase, which was fought by both sides as a conventional war, the British captured [Johannesburg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Johannesburg), the Boers' largest city, and captured the capitals of the two [Boer Republics](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boer_Republics). The British then expected the Boers to accept peace as dictated by the victors in the traditional European way. However instead of capitulating, the Boers fought a protracted [guerrilla war](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guerrilla_war). Between twenty and thirty thousand Boer [commandos](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Commando) were only defeated after the British brought to bear four hundred and fifty thousand troops, about ten times as many as were used in the [conventional](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conventional_warfare) phase of the war. During this phase the British introduced [internment](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Internment) in [concentration camps](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Concentration_camp) for the Boer civilian population and also implemented a [scorched earth](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scorched_earth) policy. Later, the British began using [blockhouses](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blockhouses) built within [machine gun](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Machine_gun) range of one another and flanked by [barbed wire](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Barbed_wire) to slow the Boers' movement across the countryside and block paths to valuable targets. Such tactics eventually evolved into today's [counter insurgency](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Counter_insurgency) tactics.

The Boer commando raids deep into the [Cape Colony](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cape_Colony), which were organized and commanded by [Jan Smuts](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jan_Smuts), resonated throughout the century as the British and others adopted and adapted the tactics used by the Boer commandos in later conflicts.

**World War I**

* [Lawrence of Arabia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lawrence_of_Arabia) and British support for the [Arab uprising](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arab_Revolt) against the Ottoman Empire. The Ottomans were the stronger power, the Arabs the weaker.
* Austria-Hungary vs. Serbia, August 1914. Austria-Hungary was the stronger power, Serbia the weaker.
* Germany vs. Belgium, August 1914. Germany was the stronger power, Belgium the weaker.

**Between the World Wars**

* [Abd el-Krim](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muhammad_Ibn_%27Abd_al-Karim_al-Khattabi) led resistance in [Morocco](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Morocco) from 1920 to 1924 against French and Spanish colonial armies ten times as strong as the guerilla force, led by General [Philippe Pétain](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philippe_P%C3%A9tain).
* [TIGR](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/TIGR), the first [anti-fascist](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anti-fascist) national-defensive organization in [Europe](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Europe), fought against [Benito Mussolini](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Benito_Mussolini)'s regime in [northeast Italy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Northeast_Italy).
* Anglo-Irish War (War of Irish Independence) fought between the Irish Republican Army and the Black and Tans/Auxiliaries. Lloyd George (British Prime Minister at the time) attempted to persuade other nations that it was not a war by refusing to use the army and using the Black and Tans instead but the conflict was conducted as an asymmetric guerilla war and was registered as a war with the League of Nations by the Irish Free State.

**World War II**

* [Winter War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Winter_War) - [Finland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Finland) opposed an invasion by the [Soviet Union](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soviet_Union)
* [Warsaw Uprising](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Warsaw_Uprising) - [Poland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poland) (Home Army, [Armia Krajowa](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Armia_Krajowa)) rose up against the [German occupation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/German_occupation_of_Poland).
* Germany in Yugoslavia, 1941–45 (Germany vs. Tito's Partisans and Mihailovic's Chetniks).

**Britain**

* [British Commandos](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_Commando) and European coastal raids. German countermeasures and the notorious [Commando Order](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Commando_Order)
* [Long Range Desert Group](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Long_Range_Desert_Group) and the [Special Air Service](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Special_Air_Service) in [Africa](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Africa) and later in Europe.
* [South East Asian Theatre](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/South-East_Asian_Theatre_of_World_War_II): [Wingate](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Orde_Charles_Wingate), [Chindits](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chindits), [Force 136](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Force_136), [V Force](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/V_Force)
* [Special Operations Executive](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Special_Operations_Executive) (SOE)

**United States**

* [Office of Strategic Services](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Office_of_Strategic_Services) (OSS)
* [China Burma India Theatre](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/China_Burma_India_Theater_of_World_War_II): [Merrill's Marauders](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Merrill%27s_Marauders) and [OSS Detachment 101](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/OSS_Detachment_101)

**After World War II**

* [United States Military Assistance Command Studies and Observations Group (US MAC-V SOG)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Studies_and_Observations_Group) in [Vietnam](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vietnam)
* United States support of the [Nicaraguan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nicaragua) [Contras](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Contras)

**Cold War**

The end of [World War II](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_War_II) established the two most powerful victors, the [United States of America](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States) and the [Union of Soviet Socialist Republics](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soviet_Union) (USSR, or just the Soviet Union) as the two dominant world [superpowers](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Superpower).

**Cold War examples of proxy wars**

See also [proxy war](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Proxy_war)

The war between the [mujahideen](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mujahideen) and the [Red Army](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Red_Army) during the [Soviet invasion of Afghanistan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soviet_invasion_of_Afghanistan) has been claimed as the source of the term "asymmetric warfare", although this war occurred years after Mack wrote of "asymmetric conflict," it is notable that the term became well-known in the West only in the 1990s. The aid given by the [U.S.](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Cyclone) to the mujahadeen during the war was only covert at the tactical level, the [Reagan Administration](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reagan_Administration) told the world that it was helping the "freedom-loving people of Afghanistan". This proxy war was aided by many countries including the USA against the USSR during the [Cold War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cold_War). It was considered cost effective and politically successful, as it gave the USSR a military defeat which was a contributing factor to its collapse.

**21st century**

**Israel/Palestinians**

The battle between the [Israelis](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Israelis) and some [Palestinian](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Palestinians) organizations (such as [Hamas](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hamas) and [Islamic Jihad](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islamic_Jihad_Movement_in_Palestine)) is a classic case of asymmetric warfare. Israel has a powerful army, air force and navy, while the Palestinian organizations have no access to large-scale military equipment with which to conduct operations; instead, they utilize asymmetric tactics, such as: small gunfights, cross-border sniping, rocket attacks, and [suicide bombing](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Suicide_bombing).

**Sri Lanka**

The [Sri Lankan Civil War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sri_Lankan_Civil_War) which raged on and off from 1983 to 2009, between the Sri Lankan government and the [Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liberation_Tigers_of_Tamil_Eelam) (LTTE) saw large scale asymmetric warfare. The war started as an insurgency and progressed to a large scale conflict with the mixture of guerrilla and conventional warfare. The LTTE pioneered the use of [suicide bombing](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Suicide_bombing) and perfected it with the use of male/female and even child suicide bombers both on and off battlefield targeting civilians; use of expansive filled boats for suicide attacks or shipping both civilian and military; use of light aircraft for suicide attacks.

**Iraq**

The victory by the US-led coalition forces in the 1991 [Persian Gulf War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gulf_War) and the [2003 invasion of Iraq](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2003_invasion_of_Iraq), demonstrated that training, tactics and technology can provide overwhelming victories in the field of battle during modern conventional warfare. After Saddam Hussein's regime was removed from power, the Iraq campaign moved into a different type of asymmetric warfare where the coalition's use of superior conventional warfare training, tactics and technology were of much less use against continued opposition from the various partisan groups operating inside Iraq.

**See also**

* [Civilian casualty ratio](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Civilian_casualty_ratio)
* [Counter-terrorism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Counter-terrorism)
* [Fourth generation warfare](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fourth_generation_warfare)
* [Guerrilla warfare](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guerrilla_warfare)
* [Irregular military](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Irregular_military)
* [List of guerrillas](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_guerrillas)
* [Lawfare](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lawfare)
* [War on Terror](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/War_on_Terror)
* [Low intensity conflict](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Low_intensity_conflict)
* [Military use of children](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Military_use_of_children)
* [Partisan (military)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Partisan_(military))
* [Political Warfare](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Political_Warfare)
* [Reagan Doctrine](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reagan_Doctrine)
* [Resistance movement](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Resistance_movement)
* [Space](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Space)
* [Unconventional warfare](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unconventional_warfare)
* [Unrestricted Warfare](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unrestricted_Warfare)

**US Organizations:**

* [Center for Asymmetric Warfare (CAW)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Center_for_Asymmetric_Warfare_(CAW))
* [Asymmetric Warfare Group](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Asymmetric_Warfare_Group)
* [Special Activities Division](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Special_Activities_Division)

**Documents:**

* [*Management of Savagery*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Management_of_Savagery)

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