

# Professional Reader

## *Americans and Asymmetric Conflict*

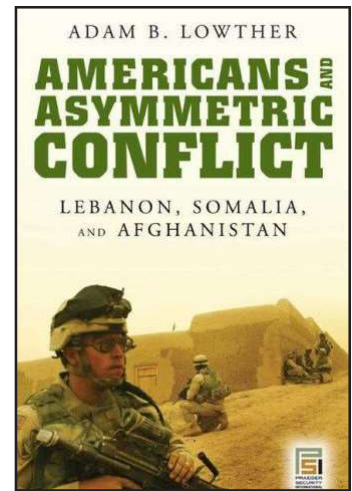
by Adam B. Lowther

(Praeger Security International, Westport, CT, 2007),  
233 Pages, \$75.00 ISBN-13: 978-0-275-99635-2

Asymmetric approaches to conflict are the focus of an increasingly large body of publications. This has been a positive development as U.S. Army doctrine seeks to improve the adaptability and flexibility of its intelligence gathering, dissemination, and tactical and strategic planning. The current Counterinsurgency (COIN) Field Manual (FM 3-24) has successfully addressed previous deficiencies in COIN doctrine and notable other works fill what was a dearth of 'big picture' views on current asymmetric warfare, COIN, and guerrilla warfare. One of these is Adam Lowther's *Americans and Asymmetric Conflict*.

Lowther focuses on gathering lessons learned from cases in which the American Military confronted asymmetric tactics in order to further develop a better understanding of how to flexibly counter such tactics in future conflict. The cases considered consist of chapters on U.S. involvement in Lebanon (1982-83), Somalia (1992-93), and Afghanistan (2001-present). These case studies provide the reader with short, but solid, historical overviews of each conflict; however, the analyses of the cases are relatively shallow. There is a preponderance of thought given to the strategic aspects of each scenario rather than a detailed analysis of the tactics utilized by U.S. Forces' adversaries.

It is notable that the development and the use of asymmetric tactics are entwined with strategic considerations. Importantly, distinctions in asymmetric warfare are complex but critical to clarify. For example, the author carefully distinguishes between guerrilla warfare and asymmetric warfare by pointing out that, "The grand strategy of the guerrilla seeks the overthrow of the current government and/or political system. The asymmetric fighter, however, generally seeks to force a change in his adversary's foreign policy." (Page 57)



The specifics of asymmetric warfare usually entail strategic considerations which end up being a noticeable focus of the author's work, even though it is claimed that the book focuses on "drawing lessons at the tactical level and often saying little about higher levels of strategic analysis." (Preface, xi) A fundamental challenge of COIN is that the tactical and strategic are closely related. The intelligence a battalion S2 provides company commanders has potentially profound consequences at the international level.

The most worthwhile sections of *Americans and Asymmetric Conflict* are the first two chapters of the book. These two chapters articulate the historical development of warfare doctrine and lead to the types of asymmetric warfare exemplified in the follow on chapters that involved the U.S. in Lebanon, Somalia, and Afghanistan. The author successfully traces the growth of asymmetrical warfare in both eastern and western doctrine and the advantages and disadvantages of each. There is much in this historical account that may be of use to Soldiers who are already familiar with the 'greats' (Herodotus, Thucydides, Livy, Sun Tzu) and Napoleonic-era theoreticians Clausewitz and Jomini. For example, the 4 A.D. Roman Flavius Renuus Vegetius' work *Epitoma Rei Militaris* (A Summary of Military Matters) is given a solid look. Vegetius' work was a guide on how to use asymmetric warfare against the Roman Empire's more powerful enemies since, at that time the Roman Empire was in decline. In conclusion, since there is truly an endless amount to learn about asymmetric warfare, Adam Lowther's work is worthwhile, especially as a primer on this approach to conflict. ✨

**Reviewed by First Lieutenant Nathaniel L. Moir**