

Home of the National Tactical Invitational
American Tactical Shooting Association

To view us online, visit <http://www.teddytactical.com/>

Monthly Lecture: 05-2007

RESPONSE TO PREDATION

ATSA STUDY GROUP

APRIL 21, 2007

By: Skip Gochenour

Predator and Prey Strategies

All animals, including man, are faced with the problem of predation. When a predator enters an environment occupied by prey an interaction begins in which the predator and the prey are faced with decisions on how to proceed. Each participant has a narrow range of strategies and behaviors in which to accomplish their respective goals.

For the predator the strategy generally is to construct a condition where he can approach the prey to within a critical distance where he can successfully execute his strike.

For the prey the strategy is to fight, flee or freeze.

The narrow range of these strategies sets conditions where the behaviors of the respective parties are recognizable to the other as they are being executed.

VCA Predation Strategies

Critical distance, the distance at which a predator can successfully launch an attack, may vary according to their chosen implement of attack, but most frequently is measured in feet.

There are exceptions such as those seen in the Beltway Snipers who practiced their craft in the DC area in the fall of 2002 and Charles Whitman who used the tower of a Texas university in 1966, but most commonly VCA choose to work at nearly touching distance.

To reach critical distance the VCA commonly looks for physical environments where he can take advantage of conditions that will restrict the successful flight of his prey.

Constricted areas such as rooms, areas between parked vehicles, the interiors of vehicles and such allow the VCA to acquire critical distance. VCA also use the

behavior of their prey to enhance their ability to reach critical distance by observing which, in the number of possible targets, are distracted by attention to common personal duties and activities that make up the daily life. On occasion, VCA use artifice and device, and sometimes distraction, (Ted Bundy) to aid in reaching critical distance. Most commonly the VCA uses a direct, purposeful and quickened pace to close the final span of space to critical distance.

While less common, it is certainly not uncommon for the VCA to loiter about in a location that will bring the prey into critical distance, even if that location is an open area such as a street. When the prey places themselves into critical distance, the VCA executes his strike.

VCA working in teams will most often operate in concert to maneuver and restrict the flight options of their prey.

The common feature of VCA activity is to create circumstances where critical distance necessary for their strike is reached. The recognition of this feature should serve as an alarm that activates in the Practitioner a pre-loaded response designed to first confirm the actual nature of the threat and to implement the solution available.

Response Strategies

Across the animal world, including man, response strategies to predation is the same. Fight, flight or freeze is seen universally.

Fight

Predation is distinguishable from fighting. Fights have certain rules that are morality based. Whether common bar room brawls, the Rules of War, or the Code Duello, there are features that define a fight. Among those features is a public announcement of grievance, postured challenge, an opportunity to resolve the challenge short of actual engagement, an understanding of what manner of blows are and are not acceptable within the context of the actual engagement, a cessation of blows upon the injured when they are no longer capable of effective response, the obligation to provide for or not interfere with assistance to the injured party and the recognition of and the avoidance of injury to non-combatants to the engagement. Violation of these features is considered "unfair" and immoral.

Predation is, therefore, an immoral act. The immoral nature of the act serves as a root for the criminalization of violent predation. Even in the face of VCA predation the Practitioner who violates these moral rules places himself in jeopardy of criminal sanctions. Hence the trained "verbal challenge" offered to a VCA, "Drop the gun!", serves a public notice, the opportunity for the VCA to cease his actions and even escape, the requirement to avoid the delivery of no more than reasonably necessary blows and the provision of assistance to the injured VCA when the threat is reduced to an acceptable level are all moral requirements of the fight response to the offerings of VCA predation. The fight response of a Practitioner will be examined by authorities to determine compliance with these "rules". Specific circumstance may obviate the ability to comply with some of

them, but an acceptable explanation will still be necessary to avoid assignment to a reciprocal act of immorality.

A fight can be defined as an engagement with a hostile in which every decision you make is worth your life, or in some cases, the life of another. Fight response has various forms. The one most commonly considered is a counter-attack designed to over-power the attacker. There are circumstances where that may not be possible or is less effective than other forms of assertive response. At VT some responded by tarrying Cho by obstructing his access to critical distance on others. The response of the Professor who blocked Cho's access to a classroom by using his own body is no less a form of fighting, given the option circumstance, than directly engaging him with force designed to over-power him. The fight response does not guarantee survival and in some instances that chosen response can include the decision to die purposefully.

Flight

Flight to avoid an act of VCA predation is the preferred response strategy. Flight response is most effective when it is exercised before the VCA is able to reach critical distance. The concept of "awareness" seeks to address this issue. Flight response is complicated by circumstance such as physical obstructions, duty sworn obligations and non-duty sworn obligations to others for whom the Practitioner has a legal or moral obligation and who may not, because of personal condition or circumstance, be able to apply that response. Flight response, if possible, is the legal obligation imposed by most jurisdictions.

Circumstance may limit the available response to VCA predation to the flight option even if the VCA has reached critical distance.

Freeze

Freeze response, often derided as "grass-eater" response, is a response that is implemented when the predator has reached critical distance and initiates his attack with overwhelming force of violence. There is evidence that it is well known throughout the animal world. There is reason, therefore, to view it as a universal strategy, though certainly the least attractive one, to predatory attacks. The freeze response would suggest a strategy of hoping the predator is distracted from his actions sufficiently to overlook the user of this strategy. Cho, the VT killer, seems to have missed some of his prey in this fashion. He was apparently further distracted from his actions by the response of the police which lead to his self termination. The end result was that some of those who opted for the freeze strategy survived.

Predation Strategies and Response

Predation strategies used by VCA and the response strategies used by their targets seem to be universal in the animal world. It is possible these strategies are the product of other than learned behavior, though personality may impel individuals more towards one form of response than another.

Predation is an immoral act that is devoid of rules. Fighting is a moral act that is rule driven. Particularly as it applies to fight response, techniques designed to make that response more effective can be learned and practiced. Of greater importance is the learning and practice of moral decision making. The inculcation of moral behavior allows the Practitioner to instantly make decisions in the midst of real-time evolving circumstance.

The Practitioner will never know the nature and circumstance of the test imposed upon him by a VCA. None of the techniques provided to him in training may fit the test he will face. Only his moral make-up will allow him to respond with the circumstance specific improvised technique.

Practitioners must learn to recognize behaviors designed by VCA to place them inside critical distance. The recognition of those behaviors must activate an alarm that causes the Practitioner to focus on the source or sources of that behavior until the suspicion is confirmed. At the same time the self-generated alarm is activated a set of pre-loaded actions must begin to run. As with the alarm system in a house, it's primary function is to provide adequate time to initiate a response.

Practitioners must also recognize the narrow range of specific response strategies to VCA predation. Selection among these responses will be tied to the level of penetration the VCA has established into critical distance and the imposition of circumstance peculiar to the specific test posed.