

Tang Soo Do Karate Center

Founder / Head Master Instructor: Arthur Cohen - 9th Dan

Defending Against Multiple Attackers



The suggestions in this article are based on opinion, my opinion. However, this opinion is based on research and careful reflection, not “gut feeling.” “Gut feeling” is left for the fight when split decisions have to be made. Now is the time for careful thought, creating workable strategies and developing tactics that might work under these conditions. The purpose of this article is to reveal information about conditions or situations that are often unknown or ignored. Lastly, I am not an “expert” on this topic. Anyone who proposes to be an “expert” is either far better than he knows or a fool and fools don’t live long in battle.

The perception of fighting multiple opponents will undoubtedly bring up images of Jackie Chan, Chuck Norris or Steven Segal. What some fail to realize is that the distance and timing are coordinated between the attackers and the defender. It is the cooperation of the attacker(s) that make the defense effective. If it doesn’t come out right, then they just re-shoot the scene, again and again, until it does come out right. In real life, there are no retakes. Let me tell a real story. Bikers were extorting money from dancers in some strip clubs on Long Island. The manager of one club decided that “enough was enough.” On one occasion, he fought it out with 7 bikers and won. He survived 5 stab wounds in the process. In addition to being a tough S.O.B., a warrior, he was a lucky one at that. Seven against one, even when all are empty handed, doesn’t make for good odds.

Multiple assailants should be considered a “high risk” encounter. It is a complex situation with almost an infinite number of variables. First we must consider the nature of the group. How many? What are the size, speed and physical condition of the attackers? Are drugs or alcohol a factor? Are they experienced at working together? Are they armed? Are these warriors or punks? Both are dangerous. We could intimidate punks but warriors on the other hand are another story. What is motivating this group to attack you? Is robbery, fun or revenge their motive? This will make a big difference. What are the environmental factors? Is help available? Are environmental weapons at hand? Where are the escape routes? Are we indoors or outdoors and what is the terrain like? Is there someone with me who I

have to protect e.g. girlfriend, wife, or children? This factor can completely change the strategy of battle. While you become more ferocious in protecting a loved one, your strategic ability is severely compromised. As you can see there are an almost infinite number of variables making pre-practice difficult to simulate.

If you are somewhat aware of your surroundings, a surprise attack by multiple attackers might be avoided. In a surprise attack, the body hasn't prepared itself for "fight or flight" and the impact of the attack might take you out immediately. It takes 3-7 seconds for adrenaline to prepare the body for combat. If you are aware of a possible assault before hand, the body prepares itself to fight. In this state, the body is better prepared to sustain an attack. Also, a plan of escape might be formulated and the situation avoided altogether.

A "wildcard" factor that is seldom considered is the "stress factor." Great risk of injury or death causes a high stress reaction. In addition, one's experience, training, physical condition and confidence will be key factors here. It has been discovered that very high heart rates can cause a catastrophic effect on performance. The exact heart rate would vary from individual to individual. It is now known that fine and complex motor skills deteriorate at very high heart rates. These are skills that require finger sensitivity or complex motor movement. Many of the same skills and techniques we practice in the dojo at low stress levels will not work under high stress. The frightening thing is we are counting on them. We have to identify and practice gross motor skills i.e. elbows and knees and work them into our inventory of weapons. These are the most reliable weapons even under high levels of stress. It doesn't have to look pretty to be effective. We are back to the KIS principal. Keep it simple. The ability to think and plan is non-existent when we are very stressed. You will function on sub-conscious factors either genetic programming in "fight or flight" or pre-trained drills that you practiced in class. Hopefully, you did your homework and trained well. In addition, the eye which normally provides about 80% of our incoming information begins to change. Peripheral vision, critical to keeping track on multiple attackers, begins to diminish. This perceptual narrowing, known as "tunnelvision" or restricted viewing, is a tremendous liability when we try to keep track of many attackers. The chance of a surprise attack goes up. Shooting skills deteriorate tremendously under high levels of stress because of changes in the eye and trembling of the extremities due to a shift in blood flow. In addition to diminished vision, we experience "auditory exclusion" or hearing impairment. Additionally, reaction time also slows at this high heart level.

In conclusion, information about defending against multiple attackers provided by many "experts" is more fantasy than reality. Lots of training to develop an explosive rush that can devastate an opponent is needed. Training with people who have carefully researched and analyzed multiple attack scenarios would be useful.

Most important, by being alert and avoiding situations that might put you at risk is highly recommended. Stay well and Stay Safe!