

“Making Use of the OODA Loop”

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One of the goals of Kenpo is to have control during any confrontation. That control includes of oneself and obviously of the opponent. Establishing and maintaining control during the encounter will enable a participant to dictate the outcome.

Control may be accomplished in any number of ways. One concept for consideration is the OODA loop. OODA stands for Observation – Orientation – Decision – Action. This concept was formulated by the late Colonel John Boyd, a United States Air Force Korean combat veteran and military tactics scholar. He observed that when Side A presented Side B an unexpected and threatening situation it allowed Side A time and opportunity to gain an advantage. If Side B could not adapt, its decisions and actions would be delayed and rendered ineffective due to the constantly changing circumstances of the fight.

A conflict can be seen as seen a series of Observation – Orientation – Decision – Action (OODA) cycles. The occurrence of any action elicits its observation, something happened. Orientation is recognition or taking a mental snapshot of the situation. Orientation is necessary because the chaotic nature of conflicts make it impossible to process information as fast as we can observe it. Once orientation occurs a decision needs to be made on how to respond. The decision takes into account all the factors present at the time of orientation. Lastly comes the implementation of the decision. This requires action.¹ If before an adversary gets to the action phase and begins to react, something different occurs, that will elicit a new observation and force the restart of the OODA loop. By restarting the OODA loop, the adversary must process new information and will be unable or at least ineffective in taking an action.

Kenpo techniques make use of any number of major or minor movements. These could be active checks, blocks, brushes, bumps, flexes, flicks, grabs, grazes, hooks, kicks, pokes, pulls, punches, pushes, rakes, slaps, strikes, sweeps, traps, and etcetera. Some of these moves may not necessarily be extremely forceful or damaging but are useful to physically check the opponent and more importantly to influence and control (restart) the opponent’s OODA loop. The goal is to keep the opponent stuck in the early stages of the OODA loop, unable to successfully take an action and recover during the execution of a technique. Thus the opponent is “controlled” until put in position for a confrontation ending impact or submission.

¹ Loren W. Christensen and Wim Demeere, *Timing in the Fighting Arts*, (Hartford, Turtle Press, 2004)