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First Strike: Mastering the Preemptive Strike for Street Combat

A Book Review by Phil Elmore



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[Sammy Franco](#)'s *First Strike* is a detailed look at a concept often discussed in combatives circles: the preemptive strike, a strike launched before an attacker can complete his attack. This is obviously a legally thorny issue, for many judges and juries will look at the person who struck another person first and see the "bad guy" in an encounter.

The premise of Franco's book, however, and of the preemptive strike concept in general, is that the person who first successfully completes a blow has a distinct advantage in a violent encounter. Franco's 189-page softcover book examines the concept and its accompanying issues in depth.

The book begins with a brief overview of Franco's Contemporary Fighting Arts – its philosophy, components, and principles, which are discussed at much greater length in Franco's other texts (including *Street Lethal*, *Killer Instinct*, *When Seconds Count*, and *1,001 Street Fighting Secrets*). It continues with a lengthy description of the first-strike principle.

"Whenever you are squared off with a dangerous adversary and there is no way to escape safely, you must strike first, strike fast, strike with authority, and keep the pressure on. This offensive strategy is known as the first-strike principle, and it's essential to the process of neutralizing a formidable adversary in a street fight.

"...The element of surprise is invaluable. Launching the first strike gives you the upper hand because it allows you to attack the adversary suddenly and unexpectedly. As a result, you demolish his defenses and ultimately take him out of the fight."

- Sammy Franco, in *First Strike*

Interestingly, Franco sees many individuals' reluctance to employ preemptive strikes as the result of a "mixed-up moral conscience," the product of a misunderstanding of traditional Judeo-Christian ethics as they apply to self-defense. He urges the reader to "resolve moral issues" and explains the difference between "Thou shalt not kill" and "Thou shalt not murder." Considerable space is devoted to determining when, legally and in terms of "justifiable self-defense," an individual may employ a preemptive strike while still considering that action the *defense* of their person or their loved ones.

In Chapter 2, "First-Strike Prerequisites," Franco discusses the ranges of combat (kicking, punching, grappling, and the "neutral zone" in which neither person can strike), the "first strike stance" and fighting stance, mobility, and footwork. The "first strike stance" will look familiar to many, for what works is what works.

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In this case, "what works" is blading the body at a 45-degree angle while getting the hands up, palms open and facing the opponent. (The fighting stance taken from CFA is basically the same, though the fists are closed and it looks more like a boxing or JKD stance.)

Chapter 2 continues with a discussion of the body's weaponry, targeting, and certain psychological factors that must be taken into consideration, such as avoiding looking into the attacker's eyes and "ghosting" his features to dehumanize him and make your vicious preemptive strikes mentally easier to deliver. Combat attributes and mechanics are also covered in detail.

I wasn't overly thrilled with the "Fifth Column Tactic" described in this chapter, in which Franco advocates confusing the enemy by appearing to take his side when that enemy is confronting a friend of yours. While this might have certain strategic advantages in getting your opponent into a vulnerable position while lulling him into a false sense of security, it would seem to me to be potentially troublesome from a legal standpoint where witnesses to the altercation are involved.

Chapter 2 concludes with paragraphs devoted to fear and fear management, fight-or-flight responses, and the "killer instinct."

Chapter 3 is devoted to defensive tactics for "when things go bad" – techniques such as blocks and slipping that can be used in making the transition to offensive strikes in regaining the initiative. Chapter 4 lists, in detail, what Franco sees as "first-strike tools – such

as open-hand blows, hammerfists, elbows, and kicks of various kinds.

Franco considers closed-fist blows to be necessary secondary and follow-up strike tools. While he doesn't say so quite as explicitly in *First Strike*, he is adamant that closed-fist blows cannot be discarded from one's arsenal. In at least one other book, he went so far as to say that anyone advocating only open-hand blows for street fights has obviously never been *in* one.

Chapter 5, "Secondary Strike Tools," details the kicks and punches Franco advocates for follow-up blows. He stresses the need for constant practice and includes sample training routines at end of the chapter.

"Knowing' a technique is definitely not the same as being able to perform it – and performing a technique in a safe and secure training environment is not the same as being able to use it during a volatile street fight."

- Sammy Franco, in *First Strike*

To demonstrate the concepts discussed to that point, Franco explains 15 different first-strike scenarios in Chapter 6. These include numerous relatively clear (though small) black and white photographs, frame-by-frame descriptions, and fighting tips. There are also two "advanced" scenarios and a "makeshift weapon" scenario.

There is no formal conclusion to the book, though there are appendices. The first is a brief list on how to deal politely with police in a nonconfrontational manner. The second

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covers "disingenuous vocalization exercises."

First Strike concludes with a suggested reading list of Franco's numerous books and magazine articles. There is also a glossary of terms defined "in the context of Contemporary Fighting Arts."

First Strike can be purchased through Mr. Franco's website and through other sources, such as Amazon.com.
