



You don't know Linda Malvern. She's the British author of a book called *Conspiracy to Murder: The Rwandan Genocide*. The paperback version of this book, which asserts that 800,000 people were killed in Rwanda over 100 days, is scheduled for release in April of 2006. According to Malvern, the preplanning of the Rwandan genocide included the importation of large quantities of machetes – the tools used to affect this grotesque exercise in human atrocity by ethnic Hutu extremists filled with hatred for another ethnic group, the Tutsi.

Malvern writes that Rwanda's government imported \$750,000 USD worth of Chinese machetes prior to the killings. That was supposed to be enough for "every third male" in the country. The BBC reported in March of 2004 that Malvern was questioned by the Rwandan war crimes tribunal as it sought answers about these horrific crimes, now a matter of record and still the topic of finger pointing over the West's complicity in allowing the murders to occur.

That is the first thing I think about when I hear the term *machete*. Perhaps it is coincidence, but only five months after that BBC report, the city of Boston was

contemplating a ban on machetes. The Associated Press reported in August of 2004 that Boston police were seeing an upsurge in gang attacks involving machetes, "the huge knives that are a ubiquitous tool in rural Latin America." Both urban and suburban communities were said to have enacted new bans on the tool, with gang sweeps in Boston, Lynn, Revere, Chelsea, Everett, and Somerville netting seizures of machetes, "Chinese throwing stars," and at least one "Japanese metal chain whip." The AP, with typical breathless and wide-eyed incredulity, lamented the ease with which machetes can be obtained at garden stores "or over the Internet," making them "by far the most popular of the alternative weapons."

The arguably left-leaning *Boston Globe* editorialized more heavily than did the Associated Press. "...[M]achetes have a darker history, too," it intoned. "They have been used in numerous civil conflicts around the world, from the Mexican Revolution in 1905 to the current ethnic strife between Christians and Muslims in Nigeria. Authorities in North American cities have registered dozens of gang-related machete attacks this year alone." The Massachusetts Senate is now

considering a bill prohibiting the carrying, sale, and manufacture of machetes, making machetes the latest in a long series of alleged "assault weapons" that are nothing but ordinary tools.

In March of 2006, the Scripps Howard News Service ran a remarkably overwrought story by Lisa Hoffman, which bore the screaming headline, "Machetes cutting a wider swath of fear in U.S. communities." The article speaks of the machete as "cheap and easily bought" (language clearly evocative of the vilification of inexpensive "Saturday Night Special" handguns, as those who would ban the tools of self-defense target yet another product for anthropomorphism) and claims that, in a "spreading trend" that has yet to be run as a "crisis" in our hysterical national media, "criminals are using machetes as weapons, striking fear in cities and towns across the country." The editorializing in the article would be hilarious if it was not so single-minded in its attempt to demonize a simple cutting tool. Hoffman says machetes have "the intimidation power to make the hair stand up on the back of your neck" and runs through a laundry list of machete attacks in Indiana, Texas, New Jersey, and elsewhere across the US.

"Abetting the spread" of machete-related violence is, Hoffman asserts, "the wide availability and low cost of the tool." Hoffman goes on to describe Fairfax County, VA, as "wrestling with the machete problem," claiming the county has "tallied more than 110 machete cases in recent years" (most of them gang-related).

Virginia House of Delegates member Vivian Watts is, in predictable leftist political fashion, pushing for "machete control." She is, according to Hoffman, "sponsoring a bill to make it unlawful to

brandish a machete with intent to intimidate."

All this media attention and hysterical political posturing boils down to a simple fact: The machete is a remarkably effective and expedient weapon. Common everywhere, extremely inexpensive (I have seen Tramontina machetes from Brazil selling for only a few US dollars), and relatively intuitive, this agricultural tool is a dependable implement of personal defense if wielded with sufficient intent.

THE MACHETE AS WEAPON

The machete can be had in lengths ranging from barely a foot to over two, sometimes blurring the line between "really big knife" and "not so big sword." If it is packaged with a sheath (and there are no guarantees that it will be), this is often little more than a rudimentary canvas blade cover. Aftermarket sheaths of leather and synthetic materials are fairly common. Some machetes have hand guards (which make them look like cutlasses) and some do not. Materials and workmanship vary, but the steel used in their blades is usually nothing remarkable and might be low-end alloy like 420. (Import machetes might be almost anything, really, with questionable heat treats to boot.)

The fact is simply that the machete is manufactured as (and generally treated in keeping with) an agricultural tool to be abused and eventually discarded. Few if any are manufactured to some high standard of quality as would be a production or custom sword or knife of similar dimensions. When you purchase a machete, do so knowing that you're not going to spend much – and you're not going to get a lot in return. The machete is an *expedient* weapon, meaning it will

work when you need it to work (and it will do so with great efficacy), but it is probably not something you'll own and use heavily for the rest of your life.



Photo by Phil Elmore

The machete is weighted for chopping, making it an intuitive slashing, hacking tool. To employ it as a weapon of expedient self-defense is, therefore, relatively easy. A simple system of cutting angles based loosely around any of countless pattern systems in the Filipino Martial Arts (FMAs) facilitates both practice and execution. Even if you have never worked with a long blade, the techniques presented here will get you through the basics.

CUTTING AS ATTACK AND DEFENSE

All defensive and offensive techniques with the machete can be accomplished using the same, nominally offensive mechanics. When an attack comes in, you match that attack's angle with a preemptive or intercepting chop or cut of

your own at the same angle – meeting and destroying the attack. While the machete could also be used for more traditional blocking, meeting the incoming weapon to deflect it with the spine or flat of the machete, most machetes are made of relatively soft metal with broad profiles. This makes them more prone to breaking if they are attacked with sufficient force. It also means they are less easily maneuvered than lighter, better-balanced weapons, making them more awkward to use for traditional blocking.

None of this means you cannot block with the machete, of course; some people will not notice any awkwardness in maneuvering the tool, especially if they've got a good machete and a reasonable amount of skill. It means simply that I advocate the cut-for-cut method of defensive offense over the more traditional methods because this leverages the machete's intuitive chopping ability, channeling it into slashing angles.

THE ANGLES

If you've spent any time around FMA or working with blades, I guarantee you've seen these angles before. We'll include them for completeness and reference. The basic ready position from which we'll start – which assumes you've got the machete already in your hand, because you're not likely to be quick-drawing it from concealment – keeps the off hand at the chest, out of the way in a nominal guard. The machete is held in the weapon hand slightly cocked (but not so high as to leave that side of the body open to a strike.

Angle 1 is a forehand diagonal or lateral slash. This hacks directly from the ready position across the opponent's body from

right to left. (“Right” and “left” here are from the machete-wielder’s viewpoint.)

Angle 2 can be performed either forehand or backhand. A forehand Angle 2 strike starts at the opposite side of the body and cuts downward from left to right.

A backhand Angle 2 starts from the completion of Angle 1 and travels back up the path of the Angle 1 strike, from low to high, from left to right.



Photo by Phil Elmore

There are no more angles to learn because this is all that is required for expedient use of the machete. (I am assuming right-hand use here, but southpaws can simply mirror the angles.) Using these angles (all other strikes are variations on these – a completely lateral strike from left to right is still an Angle 1, even though it is horizontal rather than diagonal as it moves across the opponent’s body) you can intercept or preempt slashing attacks that come from those angles. Picture an Angle 1 strike

moving toward you. By launching your own Angle 1 strike, you can attack the weapon-bearing limb or the weapon, effectively intercepting it and destroying the attack. The same is true for an Angle 2 strike (which can be intercepted by an Angle 1 or an Angle 2, depending on the opponent’s position relative to you. (You can also perform overhand strikes that start behind the body and travel down over the head in a power arc; this is a distorted, exaggerated Angle 1, really.)



Photo by Phil Elmore

The machete can be used defensively to deflect a straight strike, either with the flat or with the edge of the blade. By rotating the machete using the wrist (pivoting at the elbow), you can whip a deflecting slap up or down to parry a straight thrust to the outside of your body.

MACHETE FIGHTING – AND FIGHTING POLITICS

The offensive utility of the simple cutting, hacking angles described here is obvious. Generally speaking, you should lead with the weapon, keeping your knees slightly bent and your feet staggered, as you step

in and slice or chop at your target. With practice you can learn to flow with your strikes, performing repeated chops and starting each new attack at the completion of the last. An Angle 1 flows nicely into a backhand Angle 2, for example, and the Angle 2 can loop down into another Angle 1. There is always the repeated raise-and-hack-and-raise-to-hack again method, too, though is more adrenaline than technique.



Photo by Phil Elmore

Regardless of its provenance as an agricultural tool, an “alternative weapon,” or even an implement of genocide, the machete is an effective and expedient weapon that is, as of this writing, widely and cheaply available. It is worth learning to use even if you never intend to wield one yourself. If the news is to be believed, the chances that you could *face* a machete are not bad at all.

If you hope to own a machete of your own in the future – for that matter, if you hope to own *any* cutting tool – it is in your best interests to become politically active. It is a sad fact of history that when the Powers that Are ban the most effective weapons of self-defense (such as firearms), they don’t stop there. They continue on, prohibiting other weapons (such as “alternative” weapons as referenced by the slanted news stories I’ve shared with you), eventually even restricting the teaching of the martial arts. Given today’s politically correct world, the blade arts will be the first maligned and the first banned.

The language used to vilify the machete in recent news stories is exactly the type of language used to redefine inexpensive handguns as “Saturday Night Specials.” When the scions of politically correct propaganda succeed in redefining a perfectly mundane tool as a weapon that is “cutting a...swath of fear” in our society, they win the hearts and minds of a culture that is increasingly ignorant of knives and cutting tools. We cannot afford to lose this ideological battle – for if we do, we will lose the right to possess all manner of necessary tools. Along the way, the right to keep and bear arms – the right to self-defense – will be infringed grossly.

Buy your machetes now, while you still can. ♠

No sane person sharpens his machete to chop down a banana tree.

- Nigerian Proverb