

S.P.E.A.R. System™ and the Scope of Use-of-Force Techniques in Policing

For many years, much “squabbling” has occurred in procuring the best model of success for achieving proficiency in armed and unarmed conflicts. With a lack of similar and interchangeable defensive tactics and firearm programs at the academy level, and an ever-increasing field of commercial use-of-force systems, discerning a certain and appropriate use-of-force program for a department has become difficult. More importantly, many programs have failed to recognize the basic principles that define and substantiate the use-of-force: control and self-defense. In the quest for marketability, these principles have become clouded through techniques not applicable to the officer’s environment, a lack of situational training, and through unqualified use-of-force instructors. As a result, not only is the safety and security of the officers and our public in jeopardy, but administrators have a difficult time getting their prosecutors “on board” when it’s time to review use-of-force incidences that result in injuries and litigation.

Because most unarmed defensive tactics techniques are based upon the martial arts, they were not originally designed for controlling and arresting the bad guys. Therefore, tactics must be further *field tested and modified* for dangerous environments encumbered by street cops and tactical operators. Summarily, whether using the weaver or isosceles stance when firing a weapon or using jujitsu in subduing a suspect, two variables must be understood and trained for: judicial control and self-defense. If trainers and administrators can clarify training objectives through this scope, then climbing the ladder of success becomes easier in using justifiable force. Enter Tony Blauer’s S.P.E.A.R. System™.

As mentioned previously, use-of-force is a dynamic situation. We are constantly moving back and forth between control and self-defense. There is a fine line when circumstances warrant both aspects within seconds of each other. *Control* can be defined as a degree of influence that an officer exerts over another in responding to a problem. Officers must not only control the subject but themselves as well. Both self control and control of violators are developed by skills received through training and practice. The goal of subject control is to gain compliance or cooperation in effecting an arrest or other circumstances leading to a lawful detention.

Techniques and technologies in subject control baffle the everyday officer when definitive guidelines and application principles are not understood or trained for. For example, many control techniques lead to pain responses if executed with subject resistance. Continuing or exceeding these responses are often problem areas for many officers in executing *control* techniques. Pepper sprays and non-lethal devices, which are functional and necessary, do not control individuals but subdue them and incapacitate them to the point that physical control *can* be established. When considering control, one must consider *physical* control. While officers are never “out of the woods” in respect to potential attacks, a controlled violator is one who is no longer dominating the situation. Thus, restrained individuals are *physically* placed into restraint devices, *physically* removed from a premise, and so forth. Control should also be utilized with the element of surprise.

Combining this element with affirmative and decisive application of the proper control technique will allow officers to control a violator effectively and efficiently. Physical



confrontations with subjects that rely on strength and stamina can be averted, reducing the chance of physical injury to the officer or subject.

Law enforcement officers are taught early in their careers that they must gain control over any situation they are called to. But what about the situation that is “out of control?” Statistically, we find more and more cops ambushed with the threat right in front of them! Whether their hands are on their hips standing flat-footed or they are simply scratching their chin with one hand while holding a flashlight in the other, cops often find themselves in the middle of fight they didn’t know was coming. Unfortunately, they are not always provided with the tools to survive a close-quarters encounter that both protects them and allows them to finally control a combative subject. To do either require a system based upon biomechanics and psycho-physiology. Big words that are best translated in combat as Spontaneous Protection Enabling Accelerated Response (S.P.E.A.R.).

Self-defense responses are based upon effective mind, body, and spirit applications, however, the dogmatic side of self-defense looks only at equipment and technique-based training: non-lethal devices, pressure points and a slew of martial arts-based responses that simply do not protect you at the moment of truth. The idea is that eliminating or decreasing either not only increases the chances of injury or death but also increases the chances for negligent actions on the part of the law enforcement officer. This may be so but only within the realm of *control*. While pain compliance tools, for example, are effective, they are only so in certain situations and circumstances. Furthermore, they are often argued as only a distraction function or as an application to be used in *conjunction* with a control measure.

However, we must remember that control does not happen unless you’ve weathered the ambush *first*—that fight that you are NOT expecting. What can cops do when they are faced with a threat or stimulus that is introduced suddenly, aggressively, and in close proximity? Think about the big “sucker punch” or haymaker that we see, over and over, in dashboard cams or written use-of-force reports (assuming the report is done correctly)?

Several challenges currently face use-of-force trainers in respect to selling, establishing, and implementing tactics that save lives while satisfying police and judicial administrators. An officer must be able to recognize and interpret a tense, evolving, and uncertain situation and make quick decisions regarding the magnitude and response of such event. Are we controlling or defending? Theoretically, if an officer is not controlling or attempting to control a violator and is instead preparing to defend himself or others, they must decide the level of self protection to employ. Is this merely a case of a deflection technique or must the officer draw his firearm and shoot? These “decisions” are inhibited, scientifically, by Hick’s Law and the events of our primal/survival instincts that play out in a real close-quarters encounter. A tactic must be designed so that a single officer working alone can protect himself before gaining control of a violator. Unlike civilians, cops don’t run away—the subject must be apprehended. As a result, control cannot logically precede survival when a close-quarters encounter is presented.

Secondly, techniques should not be a fine or complex motor skill but a gross motor skill that is easy to learn, easy to use, and easy to remember (psycho-motor skill retention). With the S.P.E.A.R. System™, however, we don’t have a technique to remember but a TACTIC that is based upon the flinch response that is inherent to each and every one of us when we are introduced to a threat that is sudden, aggressive, and in close proximity. Furthermore, we all



flinch the same, differently. That is, every one of us will cover our heads in a primal or protective manner depending on how sudden, aggressive and close that stimulus is. Wouldn't it be great to take something that we will do anyway and turn it into a tactical response?

Third, officers must feel confident in a tactic and their ability to perform under stress. To control (by various means) can compliment other training that an officer has previously received. To survive and defend requires the ability to know that you will fight, that you will survive that fight and that you will be able to justify it after the smoke clears. Tony Blauer has best-offered these avenues in the Fight 1, 2, and 3 paradigm of the S.P.E.A.R. System™.

If departmental training staff and administrators can effectively understand these variables of combat encountered on the street (which not all do), officers will receive quality use-of-force training and learn tactics that save lives, establish control, and reduce vicarious liability. While a plethora of tactics and techniques of self-defense are widely available in our cop-world, it is the ultimate responsibility of the trainer and administrator to seek out and promote the *best* option for their officers based upon the integrity and fidelity of the tactic. Tony Blauer's S.P.E.A.R. System™ is the only system of close-quarters combat that effectively blends psycho-motor skills, fear management principles, and justifiable use-of-force in a manner that is scientific and empirical...not just anecdotal and aesthetically pleasing.

Any use-of-force training program should have the following elements:

- Work in the real world;
- Learning and retention based on psycho-physiology;
- The agency must accept; the courts must acknowledge;
- Tactics are integrated into all patrol scenarios;
- Legal parameters (i.e. *Tennessee v. Garner/Graham v. Connor*) must be understood and taught within the framework of the tactic;
- Testing (with scientifically empirical outcomes).

Of critical importance within any program is defining the *premise* or scenario for which the tactic will be utilized. Many departments are small and many officers are the only ones on duty and may not have the option of immediate backup. These lone officers are faced with the possibility of using lethal force or of having to subdue, control, and handcuff a subject by themselves. Considering this, isn't it worth having training in a tactic which is based upon what your body wants to do, anyway, and with which a tactical response can be learned by converting a primal instinct into something combative? Remember survival *before* control. Train hard and smart!

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