

Israeli Special Forces Counter Terror

Overview



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General Organization



An operator arresting a Palestinian terrorist during a mission in the Occupied Territories, late 1990's.

The Israeli CT units are divided into three kinds of units: Takeover units, Engagement units and Assisting units.

Takeover Units

Takeover units are the units who have CT capability as a primary specialty. They are the units who spent most of their time training on this particular expertise. They are also the units, which in most cases will perform the actual rescue attempt.

- Unit YAMAM - In charge on domestic (within Israel) CT missions.
- Sayeret MATKAL - In charge on foreign (outside Israeli borders) CT missions.
- S'13 - In charge on foreign (outside Israel borders) maritime CT missions.
- LOTAR Eilat - In charge on domestic (within Israel) CT missions in the Eilat city area.

In several specific Areas Of Operation (AO) such as the Israeli harbors, airports and borders, all four units have the authority and jurisdiction to act, depending on the decision being made by the Ministry of Defense with the IDF Chief of General Staff.

Engagement Units

Engagement units are the units who has CT capability as a secondary specialty. Their role is to close and secure the raid zone, gather intelligence and wait for the designated Takeover unit to arrive. Engagement units are only allowed to perform a rescue attempt if the terrorists are starting to kill the hostages, other then that, they must wait for the designated Takeover unit to arrive.

Each Engagement belong to an IDF Command, based on their geographic whereabouts The Commands are (as previously mentioned): North Command, Center Command and South Command.

North Command:

- Sayeret Golany

Center Command:

- Sayeret T'zanhanim.
- Sayeret NAHAL.
- Sayeret Duvdevan.

South Command:

- Sayeret Givaty.

Because of their different roles and assignments Engagement units are also known as the "Outer Circle" units, while the Takeover units are known as the "Inner Circle" units.

Although not officially stated in the T'ZAVACH plan, the civilian SF units have a very advanced CT capability. In a regular textbook CT scenario the IDF own engagements units will respond, but in a rare circumstances such as wartime or when multiple terror acts happen simultaneously those units will act as standard engagement units and will respond to the call.

Assisting Units

Assisting units are the units that help the Engagement and Takeover units in their CT missions.

- Attack Palga - this company is part of Unit Oket'z (Unit 7142), the IDF SF canine warfare unit. Attack Palga deploy specially trained assault dogs against terrorist and kidnappers.
- One team in Unit 869 - the IDF long range observations and intelligence gathering unit - is permanently attached to Sayeret MATKAL and will assist it as well as other units in surveillance and intelligence gathering in the terrorists' held zone, before and during the rescue raid.
- The TIBAM (computer planning) team. This team is made out of computer specialties that help CT units with making a model of the target.
- Unit YACHSAP - in charge on Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) missions.
- Unit 5114 (Psagot Battalion) - one of the IDF Electronic Warfare units. This unit is in charge on radio surveillance in the terrorists held zone and if needed to block the

terrorists' outgoing and incoming radio transmission.

Although not considered formally as Engagement, Takeover or Assisting units, most IDF SF units, like Sayeret Shaldag, Sayeret Maglan and Sayeret Egoz, pass a CT course or do within themselves extensive CT training. This is being done for two reasons: it increases the soldiers' moral and more importantly, it improves the weapons skills dramatically especially in CQB combat.

Inner Team Organization

Each IDF assault team is divided into three main elements:

- Main Entry Section.
- Rappelling and Climbing Section (Terror Monkeys) - in charge on breaking in using the roofs, chimneys and windows.
- Snipers Section - consists snipers (known as "Snipers 1") and spotters (known as "Snipers 2") - one for each sniper.

Part from the assault team from a designated Takeover unit or Engagement units, a dog and handler from Unit Oket'z Attack Palga and operators from Unit YACHSAP are also an integral part of the CT team.

Deployment

In a domestic CT scenario, the unit in which zone and command the scenario happened, will respond.

In a foreign CT scenario, the best-fitted units will be selected regardless of their home commands.

For example, in the Thunderbolt Operation - the Entebbe airborne hostage rescue raid in 1976 - Sayeret MATKAL was the designated Takeover unit with Sayeret Golany (belongs To the North Command) and Sayeret T'zanhanim (belongs to the Center Command) as the designated Engagement units. The two Engagement units worked in the Outer Circle, preventing from Ugandan soldiers to get close to the airport terminal in which the rescue attempt (Inner Circle) was being held by Sayeret MATKAL.

Alert

During Peace-Time

- Takeover units must have at least two teams on alert at all times.
- Engagement units must have at least one team on alert at all times.
- Assisting units must have at least one team on alert at all times.

When a CT team is on alert, all members are fully dressed with combat gear and are able to deploy in under 15 minutes.

Each CT team on alert has specially modified GMC Vandora trucks known as LOTAR Vehicles. Each such vehicle carries weapons, equipment and seven warriors. The trucks are being used when helicopter insertion is impossible.

During Wartime

In wartime, the teams on alert are much fewer, because most Takeover and Engagement units will be deep in enemy territories, performing complicated SF operations rather than stay in Israel on CT alert status. Few teams will still be on a domestic CT alert, in order to avoid domestic terrorism acts, as well as to prevent sabotage in key military or industry installations.

The teams in wartime alert will not be used in the actual war and are really the Israeli state last line of defense. If enemy forces will break into Israel and these teams' limited strength won't be enough to stop the invasion, the next solution is a nuclear one.

Counter Terror Warfare School



The Israeli Defense Force (IDF) Counter Terror (CT) Warfare School (Unit 707) was founded in 1985 as an integral part of the then newly formed Mitkan Adam - the IDF Special Training Facility (MAHAM 7208).

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Overview

As a country subjected to numerous terror attacks, the Israeli Special Forces (SF) have always placed a considerable training focus on CT. In this aspect, the establishment of CT School was the climax of a massive reorganization process that took place in the Israeli SF CT.

The Israeli CT reorganization began as result of the Mahalot High School incident in 1974. In that fiasco more then 20 civilians hostages were killed in a failed rescue attempt carried out by Sayeret MATKAL.

Following the Mahalot High School incident, the Israeli SF had began intense CT training and were soon fully operational ready. However, prior to the creation of school, each unit trained according to its own CT techniques, without official guidance.

The formation of the school ensured that all units will get the same unified training, which in turn will allow them to cooperate in a large scale crisis that requires the involvement of more then one unit. Moreover, the existence of the school prevents operational lessons from being kept within the units. Instead such lessons can be passed to all units via the school staff.

While being an integral part of the Mitkan Adam, as a restricted area the school is practically a base within a base. It's surrounded by a fence and has its own gate, the school is located near Mitkan Adam main gate, right across from the IDF Sniping and Sharpshooting School.

The school compound is rather small and composes of few classes, a main building where hand-to-hand combat is being taught, the students tents and the staff' barracks.

All the fire ranges used by the school are located outside of the school compound near the main road that crosses Mitkan Adam from side to side. Out of almost 20 fire ranges found in Mitkan Adam, two are under the direct control of the school - the Video Simulation range, where small arm usage can be practiced on various previously videotaped scenarios, and another ranges found just outside of Mitkan Adam borders. This remote hidden from sight location contains real size models of buses, train trailers and a Boeing 707 airplane. All three models are used for hostage rescue training.

The school also has a large scale CQB facility known as Adam Village ("Kfar Adam" in Hebrew). As it's name suggests, the model represents a small village and is used for CT training.

The school was always considered as one of the IDF crown jewels, and is a corner stone for foreign high ranking officers visits. As one of the few countries that had dealt with terror on a daily basis, most of the hostage rescue tactics globally used today, have originally derived from Israeli developed tactics.

Since it was formed, numerous foreign units had come to the school to share the knowledge and experience gathered by the Israeli SF. Note that unlike in the past direct Israeli-foreign joint units training is rare, and in most cases the training is done with the school staff.

Training



The units which attend the school CT courses Takeover, Engagements, Assisting or other units who need a CT capability.

Takeover units

- Sayeret MATKAL
- Shayetet 13

Engagement units

- Sayeret Golany
- Sayeret T'zanhanim
- Sayeret NAHAL
- Sayeret Givaty
- Sayeret Duvdevan

Assisting units

There are several CT assisting units. However, there are two only assisting units whose

personnel undergo the school CT training:

- Attack Palga - the special CT team within Unit Oket'z (Unit 7142) - the IDF SF canine unit. The Attack Palga deploys specially trained assault dogs against terrorists and kidnappers.
- Unit YACHSAP - the IDF SF Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) unit.

Both units are an integral part of any IDF entry team and as such are working closely with the Takeover and Engagement units and might be subjected to enemy fire. This is why Attack Palga and Unit YACHSAP are the only assisting units whose personnel undergo the CT school course.

Other units

- Sayeret Egoz
- Sayeret Shaldag
- Sayeret Maglan
- Force 100



Members of Force 100 taking a break during a CT training session to pose next to the gate (on the left) and logo of the IDF renown CT school.

The Israeli civilian SF units don't attend the school CT courses, but instead have their own CT school, located at the Israeli Border Guard (MAGAV) Beit Horon base. However, most civilian units come to the school to train on the school's real size models, as well as in Mitkan Adam Close Quarters Battle (CQB) training facility. The reason is that only the IDF school has the train and the airplane models, as well as Mitkan Adam big CQB training area.

Like in all other IDF combat schools, the CT school staff isn't made of experienced fighters doing a second tour as instructors, but is rather made of dropouts from various units. In the CT school case, most of the staff is made of dropouts from Shayetet 13. Since S'13 has an extremely hard training regime, the unit has a large dropout rate, and many of the S'13 dropouts are later reassigned to school.

The rest of the staff is made of dropouts from other SF units, plus a handful of instructors,

which have arrived from regular infantry battalions, primarily from the T'zanhanim infantry brigade. This situation is quite ironic, since often a dropout, who is now one of the school's CT instructors, can end up teaching his former teammates.

The school runs four courses:

- Counter Terror Instructors Course
- Counter Terror Snipers Course
- Counter Terror Engagement Units Course
- Counter Terror Takeover Units Course

Part from the above four courses, the school also runs a one week long refreshment training series, which usually takes place in Mitkan Adam, although in some cases instructors from the school may arrive to the specific unit base and conduct the training there.

Part from the CT qualifications, only soldiers which had undergone the CT school courses are issued handguns and are allowed to carry them. This is a uniqueness, since unlike other armies, sidearms are very rare in the IDF and are carried only by CT units.

Like most other combat courses in the IDF, the CT courses are short and teach only the fundamentals needed to conduct CT operations. After the course, each unit spends a few more months of advanced CT training by the unit's own CT instructors. Moreover, CT oriented units like Force 100 and Sayeret Duvdevan spend almost their entire service training on CT.

Part from their teaching mission, the school instructors (mainly the officers) also act as the IDF Chief of General Staff's own personal protection detail. This protecting element is known as the "White House Team" and guards both the Chief of General Staff himself as well as his house.



Two members of the CT school White House Team (right) standing next to the former (1995-1998) IDF Chief of General Staff - Amnon Lypkin Shahak (left) - during a visit to an IDF post in South Lebanon. Each of the operator is armed with a handgun. Right operator is armed with swan off CAR15. Left operator is armed with standard CAR15. The RAMATKAL himself his armed with IMI Micro Uzi in a belt holster.

Counter Terror Instructors Course

This course runs several times per year according to the school internal needs (usually twice a year). The course is four months long, and is one of the most physically hardest courses in the IDF. As its name suggests, the course qualify CT instructors.

The course personnel is made of two types: the vast majority of the students are future instructors in the CT School. The rest are personnel from various SF units that after the course will return to their home units and will be in charge on daily CT training. This instructors will also maintain contacts with the school so they can pass on new information to the rest of their unit.

Counter Terror Snipers Course

This course is three weeks long and is passed by all snipers in IDF CT units. The course is an advanced sniping course, and its students are all graduates of the IDF Snipers School's three weeks snipers course, also held in Mitkan Adam.

There are two main differences between the IDF Snipers School course which all the IDF snipers undergo, whether they are SF or regular infantry, and the CT school sniping course:

- The IDF Snipers School course focus on long range infantry style shooting, while the CT school snipers course focus on CT applications, hence short range shooting in hostage rescue scenarios.
- The standard Sniper Weapons System (SWS) taught in the IDF Snipers School is the M24 SWS, while the CT school primary rifle is the Mauser 86SR SWS - the IDF CT units standard short range rifle. However, students often bring other SWS to the course.

The course covers there main issues:

- Urban camouflage techniques.
- Surgical acquiring and removal of targets.

- Real time intelligence gathering, which will assist the entry elements to plan and later conduct their rescue raid.



707 officer. Note the school's logo on the right side under the officer's parachuting wings.

Counter Terror Engagement Units Course

This is the main course run by the school, with large number of courses done each year. The units attending the course are all the Engagements units, Sayeret Egoz, Sayeret Shaldag, Sayeret Maglan and Force 100.

The standard Engagement units course is three weeks long and is divided into three main phases, each one lasting one week:

- Primary Weapon Phase - assault rifles and Sub Machine Guns (SMG).
- Secondary Weapon Phase - handguns.
- CQB phase

Primary And Secondary Weapons Phases

During the first two phases the soldiers are taught the correct and the most effective CQB usage of assault rifles, SMG and handguns. Various advanced weapons techniques are learned, from a correct firing position and the actual firing, to jamming solving and the correct switching from a primary to a secondary weapon.

Through out these two phases, the soldiers spend all day long in the fire ranges, with short breaks done only to count the hits and mark the targets.

The weapons taught are the CAR15 the Israeli Military Industries (IMI) Micro and Mini Uzi SMG, and FN High Power and Sig Sauer P226 9 mm handguns.

CQB Phase

As its name suggests the CQB phase covers CT Clearing room techniques. The week starts with one man individual clearing room techniques using both primary and secondary weapons, followed by a pair, two pairs, etc, until the entire team trains together in clearing a multiple rooms building as one well coordinated outfit.

To summarize the course and the CQB week in particular, there's a final simulation exercise. In this exercise the team is provided with a complex hostage rescue scenario, and has to use all their know how to plan and later conduct an assault.

During the final exercise several raids are being done. In each such raid several team members are assigned to the entry team while the rest of the team plays the kidnappers and the hostages.

After raid the soldiers switch parts, so basically every soldier has the chance to act as an assault team member or a terrorist, or as a more passive hostage. This roll playing is vital since not only it boosts up the soldiers confidence in each other, but it also provide them with a wider perspective on the CT mission at hand, so they can get a sense and insight of the terrorists' tactical point of view of the situation.

In order to make the final exercise more realistic, paint guns and simunitions (special paint rounds that can be fired using the soldiers standard issues weapons) are used.

Note that While paint guns are currently widely used in the IDF, especially in the IDF Counter Guerrilla School, the CT school was the first IDF unit to start using the paint guns for training in the mid 1990's. Quite amusing, the school's first paint guns derived from a civilian private paint gun playground that went out of business and sold all its equipment including the paint guns and the protective gear to the CT school.

Exceptions

While the basic course is as mentioned above, hence lasting three weeks with three one week stages, each course is custom made to fit the special operational requirements of the students attending it. Therefore, in most cases the personal in each course are totally homogeny, hence from the same unit and even from the same team. Few examples:

- As the IDF MP SERT, Force 100 needs to learn how to perform CT duties under tear and smoke gas. So the gas element is strongly implemented into the curriculum.
- The IDF four infantry Sayerets - Sayeret Golany, Sayeret T'zanhanim, Sayeret

NAHAL and Sayeret Givaty - are naturally more likely to fight at open spaces rather than urban ones, so the primary weapons phase focus more on the CAR15 assault rifle than on the IMI Micro/Mini Uzi SMG.

- While most of the IDF SF units undergoing the CT course are hard-core Long Range Reconnaissance Patrol (LRRP) units, with the CT responsibility being only a secondary mission, Sayeret Duvdevan is a totally oriented CT unit, with undercover CT in the Occupied Territories being its primary missions. As such, the unit requires a more intense course than the usual three weeks Engagement units course. Instead, Sayeret Duvdevan has a special five weeks course, which covers all the basics in the standard three weeks course plus an even greater emphasis on Contact Combat, and an additional one week dedicated to undercover tactics and to the deployment of concealed weapons.

The enhanced emphasis on Contact Combat makes Sayeret Duvdevan course the hardest of all the school oriented CT courses, and in fact most of the severe Contact Combat training injuries that occurred in the school took place during that course.

Counter Terror Takeover Unit Course

This course is five weeks long and is passed by Sayeret MATKAL, Unit Oket'z Attack Palga and Unit YACHSAP.

While S'13 is considered as a Takeover unit in maritime hostage rescue scenarios ("Minister Scenario"), in land scenarios it's only an Engagement unit and thus do the Engagement units CT course.

The Takeover unit course is held three times a year, and covers all the issues learned in the Engagement units course and is made of five weeks:

- Primary Weapon Phase - assault rifles and Sub Machine Guns (SMG).
- Secondary Weapon Phase - handguns.
- CQB phase - basic CQB techniques.
- Surprise week - advanced CQB techniques.
- Takeover week - advanced hostage rescue techniques - trains, buses and airplanes.

Also taught in this course is a CQB room clearing technique known as the "1-2-3-Boom method". Sometimes referred to in Israel as the "American System" this system is a standard tactic by CT units world wide and basically means that in each room clearing there are three operators clearing the room from all three sides of the entry door - left, right

and straight a head. This system increases the risk to the rescuers but minimizes the risk to the hostages.

Contact Combat

While the CT School shooting training and the CQB training are the fun part of the CT course. The hard part and the part that gave the CT course its infamous reputation is the Contact Combat training.

Contact Combat (Krav Maga) in Hebrew, is the Israeli SF marital art technique. It was developed and refined throughout the 1970's for and by Israeli SF. Unlike other commonly used martial arts, Contact Combat isn't built around an oriental harmony philosophy of some sort. Instead it's a brutal non-nonsense highly effective technique that combines all the nasty elements found in other martial arts. The Contact Combat state is reflects aggressiveness and decisiveness, and with but one goal in mind - to quickly disarm and incapacitate the enemy by all means necessary.

In the CT school, the Contact Combat training is integrated in the CT course and are on a daily bases. The CT school Contact Combat training are made of two types:

- Lessons which teach basic teachings.
- Aggressiveness Training which has dual roles - to boost up the soldiers aggressive nature, and to train the soldiers in absorbing and sustaining heavy beating (Absorption Training).

Various drills are used in the Contact Combat lessons to encounter the student with violent situations, in which he must demonstrate brutal aggressiveness in order to prevail. For example, one such drill known as the "Death Row" involves one soldier which is standing at one end of the room, and he have to get to the other side of the room with a line of other soldiers standing in the way, so he must literally go through them. The other soldiers' role is of course to prevent that individual soldier from achieving his goal.



Student in a desperate attempt to pass the "Death Row".

Another such drill is the "Ring", which is made of a group of soldiers standing in circle facing each other. Then at the instructor's order each soldier must go in straight line

directly to the soldier in front of him. Since all the soldiers in the circle are doing the same thing simultaneously, this drill involves massive beating from all sides.

In the absorption training the drills are much more simplified and basically involved a soldier in a certain position, with several instructors beating the crap out of him. For example a basic such drill involve one student standing a firing position with several instructors beating him with kicks and punches from all sides. Through out the drill the student must maintain a stable firing position as possible.



Typical absorption training - a student standing wearing minimal protection (middle) with three CT instructors beating him up from all sides. Note the CT school cat logo on the instructors sweatshirts.

Another even more notorious example involves a soldier laying on the ground, face up, with his hands behind his neck so his entire body is exposed. Then an instructor comes to the student and strongly kicks him in the stomach. The student must then say his personal details as clearly and quickly as possible. If the soldier doesn't say his personal details fast or clear enough he is punished by another kick to his stomach, until he does it right.

Note: *due the numerous injuries that occurred over the years during absorption training, currently it's done only in the CT Instructors course and not in the Takeover or Engagement units CT courses. However, the SF units are still practicing this kind of training in their own bases before attending the course.*

All this training mentioned above takes place during the week, while in the end of the week there are one on one combats, done between personal from various courses. Since each unit usually participate in a course of its own, the instructors deliberately chose the two combat participants from two different courses so the soldiers won't be clouded by non relevant emotions effecting their aggressiveness, since they have to fight against fellow team mates. Moreover, since the two combat's participants are from two different courses hence from two different units, each soldier wants to prove his unit is the toughest one. so often the combats are much more brutal then they should be under normal conditions. The fact that the combats are held in a tournament style with both courses personal standing on either the sides of the fight cheering up the combatants, doesn't help to reduce the level of violence either.



With two combatants each from a different unit, the combats which are held at the end of the weeks, are very brutal.

This Contact Combat training are what make the CT course the hard course that it is, to a point that the CT course is considered in many SF units to be the hardest part of their training regime, both mentally and physically wise. Therefore most units usually spend few weeks before the course in preparing for it, mainly to enhance Contact Combat training.

Over the years a lot of criticism, most of it justified, has been made against the CT school Contact Combat training. The fact that the instructors are not professional martial arts experts and are young hot blooded soldiers, as well as the lack of proper and sufficient protective body gear, lead to numerous training injuries over the years. These injuries include everything from broken noses and ribs, to ruptured muscles and even head concussions. In most cases the injuries are fairly light and the wounded soldier can return back to training after few days rest, but in other more severe cases, the wounded soldier may need months of recovery down time, and some soldiers even permanently lost their combat capable status, due to the severity of the injury.

As a result, units with influence in the IDF have largely moderated the Contact Combat training in their CT course, and usually make the Contact Combat training a later stage with the unit's own and more careful instructors. For example, after losing several soldiers due to Contact Combat injuries in the CT course, Sayeret MATKAL has prohibited massive Contact Combat training in its CT course, part from general lessons. This is by the way one of the reasons why Sayeret MATKAL's reputation has rather spoiled in the IDF. Same goes for Sayeret Shaldag, which on more than one occasion, its soldiers refused to continue the course unless the Contact Combat's brutal level will be lowered. Other units, with less power and influence in the IDF, continue to take the abuse in the CT course.

Counter Terror Demonstration

The following photos were all taken during the finishing ceremony of the Counter Terror Instructors Course, held in the Israeli Defense Force (IDF) Counter Terror Warfare School in Mitkan Adam, August 2000.

The ceremony included a Counter Terror (CT) display demonstrating a common Israeli CT technique involving sniping element, entry element and undercover operators.



Sniping entering into position.



Sniper in position. The target building is seen in the background,



In yellow shirt a terrorist. In white shirt undercover operator. A jeep with additional undercover operators is seen on the right.



Another undercover operator (red shirt) get out of the vehicle and approach the terrorist.



The two undercover operators (red and white shirts) grab the terrorist (yellow shirt) and snatch him to the jeep.



An entry team assault the building. The vehicle from which the entry team was deployed is seen on the left.



The entry team enters the house. Note dead terrorist killed by the sniper on the roof of the building.



Additionally operators secure the house. Note smoke from stun grenades and breaching devices.



Same as above.