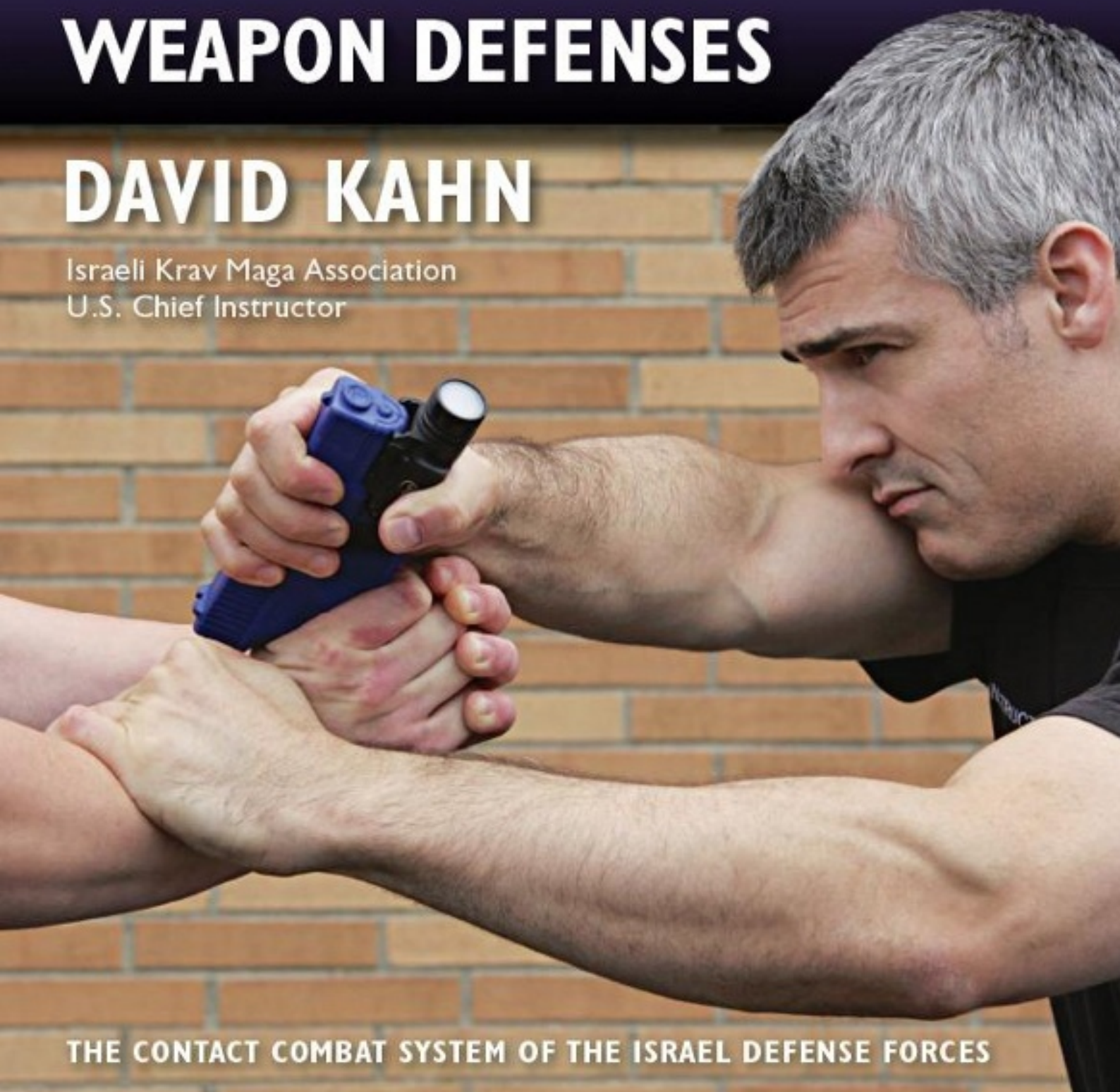


# KRAV MAGA

## WEAPON DEFENSES

**DAVID KAHN**

Israeli Krav Maga Association  
U.S. Chief Instructor



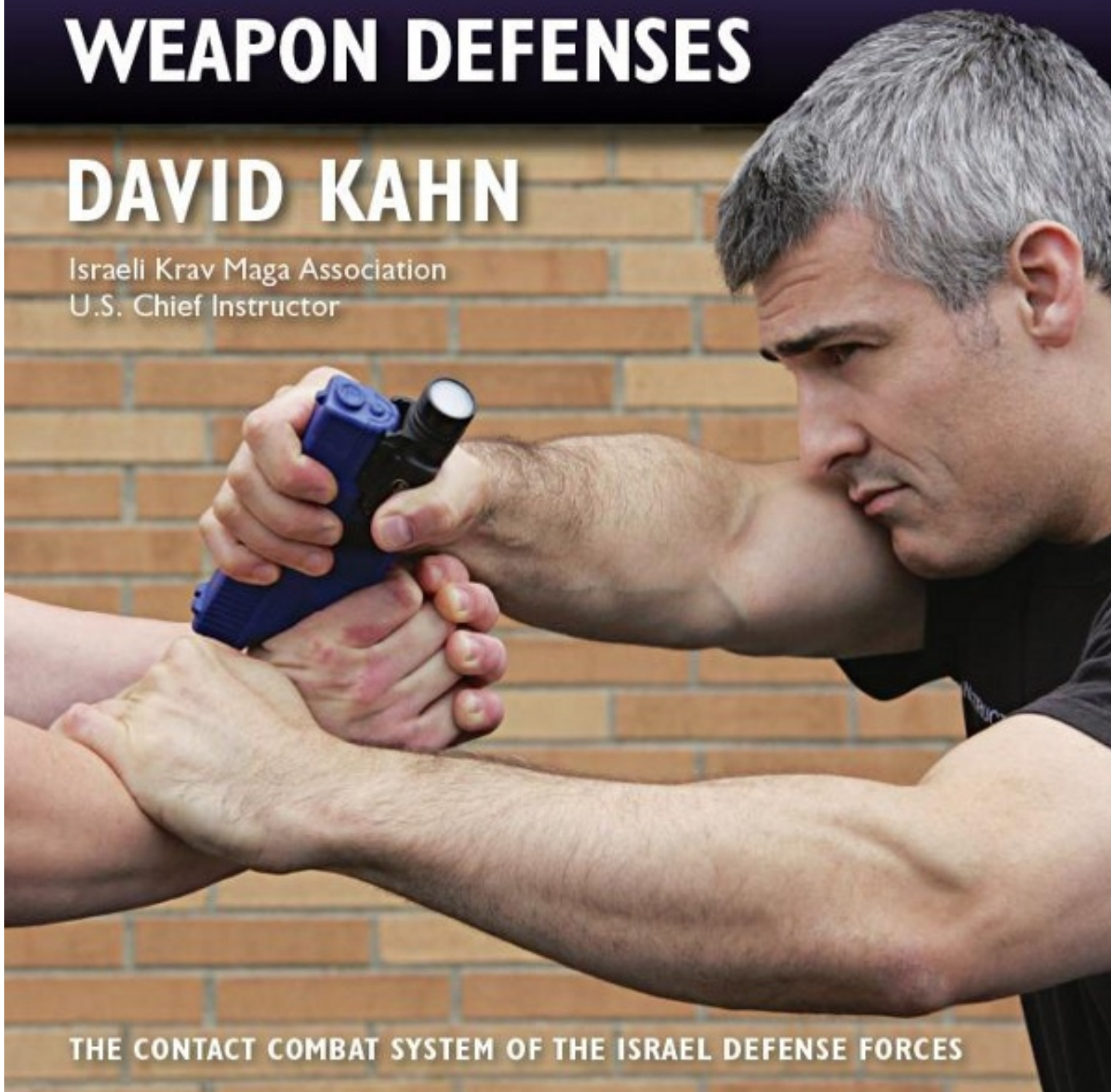
THE CONTACT COMBAT SYSTEM OF THE ISRAEL DEFENSE FORCES

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THE CONTACT COMBAT SYSTEM OF THE ISRAEL DEFENSE FORCES



# Dedication

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For Claire, Benjamin, and Leo  
In Loving Memory of Helen Brener Smith

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Training U.S. Marines. Photo courtesy of USMC Combat Camera.

Before we explore specific defenses in the chapters, there are several principles to keep in mind.

## The Language of Krav Maga

Throughout *Krav Maga Weapon Defenses*, the following terms will appear frequently. Once you understand the language of *krav maga* (means *contact combat* in Hebrew), you can then better understand the method.

**“Negative Five.”** You are caught unaware and at a complete disadvantage. The attacker has the advantage of surprise and positioning.

**Combative.** Any manner of strike, takedown, throw, joint lock, choke, or other offensive fighting movement.

**Retzev.** A Hebrew word that means “continuous motion” in combat. Retzev, the backbone of modern Israeli krav maga, teaches you to move your body instinctively in combat motion without thinking about your next move. When in a dangerous situation, you will automatically call upon your physical and mental training to launch seamless overwhelming counterattack, using strikes, takedowns, throws, joint locks, chokes or other offensive actions combined with evasive actions. Retzev is quick and decisive movement merging all aspects of your krav maga training. Defensive movements transition automatically into offensive movements to neutralize the attack, affording your opponent little time to react.

**Left outlet stance.** Blades your body by turning your feet approximately 30 degrees to your right with your left arm and left leg forward. (You can also turn 30 degrees to your right to come into your right regular outlet stance, so that your right leg and arm are forward.) You are resting on the ball of your rear foot in a comfortable and balanced position. Your feet should be parallel with about 5 percent of your weight distributed over your front leg. Your arms are positioned in front of your face and bent slightly forward at approximately a 60-degree angle between your forearms and your upper arms. From this stance, move forward, laterally, and backward, moving your feet in concert.

**Liveside.** When you are facing the front of your opponent and your opponent can both see you and use all four arms and legs against you, you are facing his or her liveside.

**Deadside.** Your opponent’s deadside, in contrast to his liveside, places you behind his near shoulder or facing his back. You are in an advantageous position to counterattack and control him because it is difficult for him to use his arm and leg farthest away from you to attack you. You should always move to the deadside when possible. This also places the opponent between you and any additional third party threat.

**Sameside.** Your sameside arm or leg faces your opponent when you are positioned opposite one another. For example, if you are directly facing your opponent and your right side is opposite your opponent’s left side, your sameside arm is your right arm (opposite his left arm).

**Nearside.** Your opponent’s limb closest to your torso.

**Outside defense.** An outside defense counters an outside attack, that is, an attack directed at your

from the outside of your body to the inside. A slap to the face or hook punch are examples of outside attacks.

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**Inside defense.** An inside defense defends against an inside or straight attack. This type of attack involves a thrusting motion, such as jabbing your finger into someone's eye or punching someone in the nose.

**Glichia.** A Hebrew term meaning a sliding movement on the balls of your feet to carry your entire bodyweight forward and through a combative strike to maximize its impact.

**Secoul.** A Hebrew term meaning a larger step than glichia, covering more distance to carry your entire bodyweight forward and through a combative strike to maximize its impact.

**Off-angle.** An attack angle that is not face-to-face.

**Stepping off the line.** Use footwork and body movement to take evasive action against a line attack, such as a straight punch or kick. Such movement is also referred to as "breaking the angle attack."

**Tsai-bake.** A Japanese term meaning a one-hundred-eighty-degree or semi-circle step by rotating one leg back to create torque on a joint to complete a takedown or control hold.

**Cavalier.** A wrist takedown forcing an adversary's wrist to move against its natural range of motion usually combined with tsai-bake for added power.

**Elbow kiss.** When securing an edged weapon or firearm held by an assailant and pinning it against the his body, the defender moves to the assailant's deadside creating an angle between the defender's arm and assailant's arm where the tips of their respective elbows touch or "kiss." The defender's forearm and assailant's gun arm create a "V" by the underside of your forearm pressing against the topside of the assailant's forearm

**Trapping.** Occurs when you pin or grab the opponent's arms with one arm, leaving you with free hands to continue combatives with your other arm.

**Figure Four.** A control hold securing an opponent's arm, torso, or ankle to exert pressure. The control hold is enabled by using both of your arms on the joint of the wrist, shoulder, or tendon of an opponent. For example, you have secured your opponent's right wrist (his elbow is pointed toward the ground) with your right hand placed on the flat of his right hand, bending his wrist inward, with his left elbow (tip toward the ground) pinned to your chest while you simultaneously slip your other arm over the top of his forearm to interlock his arm and grab your own forearm. This positional arm control may also be used to attack the Achilles tendon with the blade of your forearm or control an opponent's torso from the rear mount. A Figure Four may also be applied to an opponent's torso by hooking one leg across the torso and securing it in the crook of the other leg's knee.

**Kravist.** A term I coined to describe a smart and prepared krav maga fighter.

**Cold Weapons.** Blunt and edged weapons.

**Hot Weapons.** Firearms.

**Kimura.** Armlock named after its inventor, Masahiko Kimura.

## [Street Violence](#)

Street violence is, by its nature, volatile and unpredictable. To be sure, there are no certainties especially regarding the outcome of a life and death struggle. The last thing on many victims' minds

is that they will be battered, clubbed, stabbed, slashed, or shot. Oftentimes, you will find yourself in “negative five” position or initially unprepared to fight for your life. An attacker will seek every advantage. First and foremost, he will try to use the element of surprise, especially, to deploy a weapon.

In 2010, the Federal Bureau of Investigation estimated 1,246,248 violent crimes nationwide.

- Aggravated assaults (defined by the FBI as “as an unlawful attack by one person upon another for the purpose of inflicting severe or aggravated bodily injury”) accounted for the highest number of violent crimes reported to law enforcement at 62.5 percent. Of this 62.5 percent of aggravated assaults, firearms were used 20.6 percent; knives/cutting instruments 19.0 percent; clubs/bludgeoning objects 33.1 percent; and personal weapons for 27.4 percent of reported cases.
- Robbery comprised 29.5 percent of violent crimes. Of this 29.5 percent, firearms were used 41.1 percent; while strong-arm tactics were used 42.0 percent; followed by knives and cutting instruments 7.9 percent; and other dangerous weapons 8.8 percent of the reported cases.
- Murder accounted for 1.2 percent of estimated violent crimes in 2010. Of this 1.2 percent, firearms were used 67.5 percent; knives/cutting instruments 13.1 percent; other weapons 13.1 percent; and personal weapons for 6.6 percent of reported cases.
- Forcible rape accounted for 6.8 percent of reported violent crime. Reported statistics do not account for the criminal use of weapons, but, past FBI surveys have indicated that approximately 10–20 percent of forcible annual rapes involve the use of a weapon.
- Source: Federal Bureau of Investigation Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Program 2010. For the most current information visit [www.fbi.gov](http://www.fbi.gov).
- In a 2010 National Crime Victimization Survey compiled by the Bureau of Justice Statistics, 852,660 specific weapon related violent crimes were reported in the United States. Of the 852,660 violent victimizations:
  - 337,960 violent crimes were committed with firearms
  - 192,320 violent crimes were committed with knives
  - 266,620 violent crimes were committed with “other” and “unknown” weapons

In this study, the ratio of simple and aggravated weapon related assaults (616,670 incidents) compared to armed robberies (212,390 incidents) was roughly 3:1. Accordingly, one can extrapolate that when a weapon was present, a victim was three times more likely to be physically attacked rather than simply threatened.

Source: For the most current information visit [www.bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov](http://www.bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov).

Criminals who use weapons are often not particularly well trained. For example, a controlled pull on the trigger of a firearm versus a hard pull is not something the average criminal gunman spends much time contemplating let alone practicing. Staving your skull versus simply knocking you unconscious is also a *non-acquired skill*. He may not know the fine line between knocking you unconscious and killing you. An armed assailant’s judgment may also be impaired by an admixture of inebriation, mental illness, or any other human emotion giving vent to violent rage.

Violence is an ugly grisly affair. If you are threatened or attacked, the assailant thinks he can win. You cannot doubt the assailant is committed, through violence, to dominating or destroying you. He is willing to cause you egregious, perhaps deadly, bodily harm by eviscerating, puncturing or spilling

your internal organs, shattering bones, or pulping your brain. When unexpectedly caught in the sites of a deranged attacker or psychopathic predator, you may wonder, “Why is this stranger attacking me?” This thinking may occur, for example, even after the third, fourth, or fifth stab wounds of an ambush. This is why you must hone your mental to physical skills until you can call on them without thinking. With enough practice, you will train to react instinctively and swiftly. Only proper training can trigger this fighting response. Realistic training improves this reaction flow by allowing you to quickly assess violent situations and react under stress.

Training ingrains the appropriate responses into your memory bank improving your reaction time. Whether the threat comes from an edged weapon or gun, you will already know how to react. Equally important, proper training compels the most suitable reaction for a given situation. An attack launched by surprise will force you to react from an unprepared state. Therefore, your self-defense reaction must be instinctive and reflexive. Krav maga training prepares you for just that. Your subconscious mind will turn your instinctive trained responses into immediate action. Instinct assumes control. The autonomic response is vital because your instantaneous reaction will occur just prior to your natural adrenaline dump that can momentarily or permanently interfere with your fine and gross motor skills—your defensive capability. In other words, optimally, you won’t have time to think. You’ll make the defense before you even realize what is happening just as your adrenaline dump reaches its apex.

One of the most effective tactics krav maga can teach you is not to be taken by surprise in the first place. Developing recognition of pre-violence indicators along with impending attack identification skills are instrumental to krav maga training. Once you develop an awareness of your environment—any environment—you will notice at all times who and what surrounds you. By recognizing potential threat, such as the bulge of a handgun sequestered in a waistband, before the assailant can deploy it, you can avoid a life-threatening situation. The best defense against any attack is removing yourself from the situation before the attack can take place. Only awareness of your environment can help you do that.

Situational awareness is all-important and common sense should prevail. In an unknown environment, keep your head subtly swiveling by shifting your eye movements, using your peripheral vision, and panning for potential threats. Constantly survey your surroundings. In a worrisome situation, always watch a suspicious person’s hand movement. Let’s say you are watching a potential adversary’s hand movements. You notice that the hands are hidden in a pocket about to pull out a weapon—stop him. Along the same lines, recognition of a bulge on a potential assailant’s body—possible weapon—also allows you to take the initiative.

Remember, a weapon can be sequestered in many places and concealed from view even when an assailant is grasping it. Krav maga trainees scrutinize how someone can conceal a weapon, such as holding an edged weapon in a reverse grip with the blade parallel to the forearm and shielded from view. An impact weapon, edged weapon, or firearm could be placed behind an assailant’s leg ready for immediate use. Also sensitize your hearing for clues such as the lock-back of a folding edged-weapon clicking or the sound of a round being chambered in a firearm. Awareness and mental conditioning are integral to krav maga training.

Other indicators might be someone who seems distinctly out of place, loitering, or who is mirroring or following your movements. Criminals can telegraph their intent through nervous or abnormal behavior leading up to an attack. It cannot be emphasized enough the need to watch a suspicious person’s hands. A hand concealing a weapon will usually be stiff, contorted, or move in an unnatural way. This can be particularly noticeable when a potentially dangerous person is approaching you and

his arms swing or don't swing—another indicator. If someone's arms are crossed concealing their hands, you should also take note. In addition, an assailant could also distract you by speaking to you or asking you a question such as the time to force you to look at your watch, phone, etc. to catch you by surprise while he simultaneously presents a weapon to threaten or attack you. Be especially aware of someone turning his back to you in close proximity as he pulls his hands in front of his torso; another preferred stealth method for weapon deployment.

Three seminal works, *Meditations on Violence* (YMAA 2008) and *Facing Violence* (YMAA 2011), both by Rory Miller along with *The Little Black Book of Violence* by Lawrence Kane and Kris Wildman (YMAA 2009), provide comprehensive insights into the psychology and physiology of violence. Reading these works will further develop an understanding of street violence's underpinnings. Each of these works also provides a strong foundation for how to best extricate yourself from harm's way before you have no choice but to engage in counter-violence. Many of these authors' key points dovetail extremely well with the krav maga's holistic self-defense approach:

- Understanding the warning signs of impending violence
- How predators operate
- The brutal reality of a violent encounter
- Violence's aftermath including first aid and legal redress or ramifications

To harm you with an edged or impact weapon, an attacker must close the distance. To have better accuracy with a firearm, an attacker may also close the distance. If you see the attacker brandishing a weapon before he can close on you, naturally you would try to escape when possible. The assailant usually knows this and will conceal the weapon until the opportune moment to present it. In addition, a criminally-minded assailant would prefer not to have witnesses or as few as possible up until the very last moment of the attack. Note: If you witness a crime, you may be the next victim because the attacker wishes to eliminate anyone who can identify him.

## [Human Emotional Responses in a Life-threatening Encounter](#)

One of my best friends, Sgt. Major Nir Maman (res.), provides a superb explanation of the range of human emotional responses when encountering a life-threatening encounter:

*“Do not become a victim of shock. When confronting a life-threatening situation, shock can be more of a problem than fear. If you go into shock while under attack, you will freeze and not do anything. The reason people go into shock when attacked is a lack of response preparation. The mind is divided into two sections, the conscious mind, and the subconscious mind.*

*“The conscious mind is your cognitive thinking process. The conscious mind engages when you have the time to assess a situation thoroughly and respond deliberately. If you are caught off guard and are overwhelmed with stress, your conscious mind shuts down and transfers all thought process to your subconscious mind.*

*“This happens because your mind does not have the time to thoroughly go through its four steps of reaction due to the overload of information and stress. The mind short circuits and shuts down. Your subconscious mind is nothing more than an instinctive response command or a data bank of muscle memory. If your subconscious mind has no concrete muscle memory stored to engage the immediate problem, it simply makes your body defend itself the best way it knows how. Often, this is to throw your arms up in front of your face and chest to protect the body's vital areas and crouch*



down to become a smaller target.

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*“If your subconscious muscle memory cannot summon an instinctive response, your conscious mind will still make your body respond with its own primitive defenses described above. Instincts will always dominate over cognitive response under stress.*

*“You may be familiar with the expression ‘I saw my life flash in front of my eyes.’ Many people experience this response when they are in a situation where they think they are about to die. This response happens for a very specific reason that is geared at helping you survive under stress. The reason you see your life flash in front of your eyes is simple. When overwhelming stress shuts down your cognitive or conscious mind, responsibility transfers over to your subconscious mind. If your subconscious mind has no proper muscle memory stored, it is confounded with no solution. Your subconscious mind scans the entire data bank of your life, from the day you were born to the present second, to evaluate if you were ever in a similar situation and how you responded. If there was a similar or parallel situation, your subconscious mind will take that same response and implement it to the current situation to help you survive.*

*“To avoid going into shock under stress, like in the training to deal with fear, constantly visualize yourself in every possible attack situation you may find yourself in and train yourself over and over in your mind until you have effective solutions for those situations.”*

Sgt. Major Nir Maman (res.) served in the Israeli Special Forces (ISF) Central Command Counter Terror and Hostage Rescue Unit and the Special Forces Counter Terror and Special Operations School (CTSO). Nir’s duties included training the CTSO’s instructors in CT Warfare, Tactical Shooting, and krav maga. He also held the Lead Counter Terror Instructor position on the CTSO’s designated Hostage Rescue Take-Over (HRT) Units Instructor Team, where he was responsible for training new recruits and active operational members of the ISF’s designated HRT units in all areas of counter terror warfare and hostage rescue including hostage rescue operations in friendly and hostile/foreign environments; close-quarters combat; dynamic entry; aircraft, ship, train, and bus interdiction; suicide bomber interception; urban warfare; tactical shooting; and krav maga. In April 2009, Nir was awarded the IDF Ground Forces Infantry and Ground Forces Command Soldier of the Year Award of Excellence.

In the case of an edged-weapon attack, there is a good chance if someone attacks you by surprise you will see an arm movement, but you may not always see the weapon. To be sure, running away from a threat or impending attack is a real and sensible option. Do not let ego, a sense of indignity, or just plain anger get you seriously hurt or killed. Of course, there are circumstances when you cannot run, such as being with family or friends who are not mobile. You will have to stand your ground and defend.

Realistic physical training, along with mental training to envision different kinds of attacks, regulates your response. Training “hardwires” your brain to move your body instinctively to bypass conscious thought and streamline the self-defense process: to think without thinking. The self-defense process may be understood by using the following four-part process:

- 1) Threat recognition
- 2) Situation analysis
- 3) Choice of action
- 4) Action or inaction

Krav maga’s goal is to embed your subconscious with the proverbial “[I have] been there done this

(through a training scenario).” Most important, you should have confidence in your krav maga training because all techniques are battle-tested and field-proven. Do not, however, mistake your training for a real attack. In an actual attack, you will experience an adrenaline surge, a likely decrease in your fine motor skills, your heart rate will skyrocket, your hearing will diminish (“auditory exclusion”), and your vision will narrow (often known as “tunnel vision”).

Notably, most people who have survived violent confrontations had the mental commitment prevail. They do not often attribute their survival to a specific technique. With this in mind, krav maga provides latitude in its techniques, and flexibility in its thinking. In a successful defense, while there may be an optimum tactic and strategy, if the defender survives, optimally unscathed, his krav maga worked. Critically important in defending weapons: You do not have the latitude for error that defending an unarmed attack might allow. Technique deficiency can get you seriously injured or killed.

## Krav Maga’s Methodology

The essence of Israeli krav maga is to neutralize an opponent quickly. There are no rules in an unscripted fight, especially in an armed confrontation. This lack of rules distinguishes self-defense from sport fighting. To stop an assailant, krav maga primarily targets the body’s vital soft tissues, chiefly the groin, neck, and eyes. Other secondary targets include the kidneys, solar plexus, knee, liver, joints, fingers, nerve centers, and other smaller fragile bones. In addition, krav maga teaches you to disarm the assailant and, if necessary, turn the weapon against your assailant. Krav maga differs from other self-defense systems that may rely primarily on targeting difficult to locate nerve centers. In the heat of a violent struggle, this type of precise counterattack strategy is extremely difficult. Conversely, a krav maga combative to the groin or strong combative to the head is precise enough to debilitate the opponent while simple to deliver.

When defending against weapons and escape is not possible, krav maga’s essential philosophy is to close the distance between the defender and assailant to neutralize the weapon and, whenever possible, take the defender out of the “line of fire.”

Optimally, the distance between the defender and the assailant can be closed before a weapon is deployed while simultaneously debilitating the adversary with strong combatives, blocking access to the weapon, and achieving dominant control. If the weapon is successfully deployed and put in action, closing the distance allows the defender to deflect-redirect or block the weapon, the majority of time in combination with body defenses while delivering withering counterattacks.

The Israeli krav maga fighting system is designed to work against any attacker. The key is your mindset. As my good friend Nir Maman, Lead Counter Terror Instructor for the Israel Defense Force, explains so well, you must be able to transition from a highly disadvantageous “negative five” position to an advantageous “positive five” position instinctively and instantaneously. You must turn the table on your opponent(s) immediately. Self-preservation is a powerful motivator—so protecting others. If you must defend yourself, you need to dominate your attacker and incapacitate him. Krav maga’s core techniques provide cumulative building blocks for a formidable self-defense foundation. A few mastered techniques go a long way and are highly effective against weapon threats and attacks.

Krav maga’s defensive philosophy is never to do more than necessary, but to react instinctively.

with speed, economy of motion, and the appropriate measure of force. Instinctive reaction paramount and you are taught to strike instinctively at the human body's vulnerable parts. Israeli krav maga training tries to place you in the most realistic training scenarios including weapon attacks with all possible attendant variations. The goal is to present instinctive solutions to overcome threats and defeat deadly attacks. Krav maga uses the same building blocks from the simplest defenses to the most advanced techniques, including empty-handed defenses, and disarms against bladed weapons, firearms, and even micro-explosives, as you will soon learn. Most important, krav maga emphasizes that there are no rules on the street. If a situation is dire, do whatever is necessary to overcome the threat.

A trainee immediately appreciates krav maga's simplicity and universal applicability. Krav maga uses the concept of *retzev*, Hebrew for "continuous motion" to complete a defense. *Retzev*, the backbone of modern Israeli krav maga, teaches you to move your body instinctively in combat motion without thinking about your next move. Training becomes first nature rather than second nature. When in a dangerous situation, you will automatically call upon your physical and mental training to launch seamless overwhelming counterattack using strikes, takedowns, throws, joint locks, chokes, and other offensive actions combined with evasive action. *Retzev* is quick and decisive movement merging all aspects of your krav maga training. Defensive movements transition automatically into offensive movements to neutralize the attack affording your opponent little time to react.

Imi summarized, "it [defensive movements] comes from the head." Your brain absorbs, retains, translates, and harnesses your instincts to launch your body into action. Keep in mind that two attacks will be delivered in the same manner. Defenders are given tools for their toolboxes along with a general blueprint how to use them. Remember, Imi's goal was survival in any defensible situation. You must develop a strong understanding and grasp of how and why you might find yourself embroiled in a violent encounter. How did he (the assailant) get so close to me without my noticing? Was he acting aggressively toward others before he turned on me? Am I a specific target or a random target put in harm's way by bad luck?

To make the method yours and react instinctively, you must put just as much emphasis on mental training as you do the physical. In a potential deadly force confrontation, you may experience a combined surge of stress, fear, and excitement. When you are fearful, the nervous system increases the body's physical capabilities by injecting adrenaline into the blood stream. Although fear helps you to survive by quickening your heart rate and sending more oxygenated blood to your muscles, you must harness your fear and remain levelheaded. You must control involuntary body responses, such as quivering legs, to execute the correct self-defense reactions. You will need both physical and mental training to learn how to harness this fear-induced adrenaline surge.

Mental and physical conditioning allows you to harness your adrenaline and channel it into action. Mental confidence and toughness, in particular, provides a decisive advantage in a violent encounter. When you feel confident, you believe that your training will carry the day regardless of an opponent's possession of a weapon. Confidence, however, must not lead to overconfidence. Do not underestimate the opponent, especially, when he has the mechanical advantage of a weapon. And, always expect the unexpected. Mental conditioning will help build your confidence, preventing the panic that can lead to freezing or poor decision making. Mental conditioning will also allow you to deescalate or walk away (always the best solution if possible) from a potentially a violent situation.

With proper training, you will learn how to use fear and other negative emotions to your advantage. You will harness the energy and power from your body's fight or flight response rather than freezing

under pressure. If you merely read through this book but do not actually train against impact weapons, edged weapons, and firearm threats on a regular basis, physical trauma coupled with fright and shock will most likely negate rational thought, paralyzing you into inaction. When in danger, the brain searches its memory bank for a response. In a violent encounter, if an opponent takes an unanticipated or unrecognized action, the brain cannot find a practiced response resulting in decision paralysis. Denial is the most common obstacle to taking appropriate action. Often, with an untrained mind and body, it is difficult to process or accept that someone else intends you serious bodily harm. An assailant may know this and achieve his purpose accordingly.

Krav maga's goal is to make a trainee proficient in defending himself or herself against any manner of attack in the shortest possible training period. As krav maga is based on our most primitive and natural instincts, a few core defensive movements harnessing gross motor skills can be learned, retained, and applied to overcome numerous deadly force threats while under duress. For example, the same defensive movement can defend against a hook punch, an overhand, forward slash, or a hook stab to the throat or head. This training principle is crucial: good defensive tactics training should rely on a few instinctive and adaptable core techniques.

In krav maga, you will learn a few elementary techniques that you can perform instinctively and apply to a wide variety of situations. You will learn how to protect your vital points and organs. Equally important, you will know how to debilitate an opponent by striking his or her vital anatomy. In the situation requires, krav maga will teach you how to maximize the damage you can inflict by striking, kneeing, kicking, chopping, gouging, choking, dislocating joints, breaking bones, and taking your opponent down to the ground.

You need not master hundreds of self-defense techniques to become a kravist or competent krav maga fighter capable of defeating an armed attack or threat. Non-violent conflict resolution is always your best solution. In krav maga, we prepare for any type and number of attacks and threats. While there are no set solutions for ending an armed confrontation, there are preferred methods using retzev or "continuous combat motion" to prevail. When defending against weapons, retzev is modified ("modified weapons retzev") because the nearside arm often controls the attacker's weapon or weapon arm. Combined with simultaneous defense and attack, retzev is a seamless, decisive, and overwhelming counterattack forming the backbone of the Israeli fighting system. Retzev can be understood using combined upper- and lower-body combatives, locks, chokes, throws, takedowns, and weapons interchangeably without pause.

The human body can withstand a high degree of physical punishment. Certain attacks can be lethal, but even when severely injured, the body can perform nearly miraculous feats. Adrenaline is a powerful energizer and allows the body to momentarily insulate itself against pain. The body's resilience works for both victim and assailant. Note that an assailant under the influence of drugs acquires yet another layer of pain insulation and artificially increased strength.

Keep in mind, however, that the level of force you use to defend yourself should be commensurate with the threat. Developed as a military fighting discipline, krav maga employs lethal force techniques. When faced with a deadly force encounter, you may, in turn, need to employ lethal counterforce. Forging an awareness of your own personal weapons (hands, forearms, elbows, knees, shins, feet, and head) and an opponent's vulnerabilities is essential to fight strategy and tactics, especially when he is armed and you are not. As noted, the human body is amazingly resilient, even when subjected to tremendous physical abuse. Pain may stop some attackers, but other individuals have enormous pain thresholds, especially those taking narcotics.

# Krav Maga Tactics

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Once engaged against an assailant, the key to all krav maga weapons defenses is a deflection, redirection of the weapon combined with a simultaneous body defense and an overwhelming counterattack. This methodology is designed to stop the attack at its inception, or at the earliest possible stage. Closing the distance gap between the assailant and defender is sometimes referred to as “bursting.” The opposite of bursting forward is a bursting retreat to escape or create distance until the correct time to close the gap presents itself. Counterattacks usually target the assailant’s soft tissue including his groin, throat, eyes, and knees. Weapon defenses take into specific account the assailant’s physiological reaction to counterstrikes such as a knee or kick to the groin that will lurch the body forward or a thumb gouge to the eye that will jolt the head back exposing the groin for further strikes.

Footwork and body positioning, whether standing or prone, allow you to simultaneously defend an attack, leading to seamless combative transitions essential to *retzev*. Good balance is a must with your weight properly positioned on the balls of your feet to react; not on your heels. Balance within a stance is essential to redirect your energy and momentum. A good stance, either from the left outline position or even from a passive stance, allows you to press directly into the ground for superior traction and mobility. Accordingly, if you have good balance and mobility, you can burst in to close on the assailant. The key to evasion is moving out of the “line of fire” or the path of an opponent’s offensive combatives. Clearly, positioning yourself where you can counterattack your opponent more easily than he can attack you is most advantageous.

Essential to a successful defense is precise fight timing: using the correct tactic at the correct time. Fight timing is best thought of as the fusion of instinct with simultaneous decision-making to either preempt the attack, move off the line of attack/fire, deflect-redirect, control the weapon and strike, or to retreat from harm’s way. In other words, fight timing is harnessing instinctive body movement while seizing or creating opportunities to defend both efficiently and intelligently.

Defined yet another way, fight timing is your ability to capitalize on a window of opportunity offered by your opponent or to create your own opportunity to end the confrontation, using whatever tactics come instinctively to you. Timing can be improved and honed with realistic training—always krav maga’s objective. While speed is not timing, speed certainly can add a decisive advantage when the defender is faster than the assailant. As the subsequent chapters emphasize, krav maga relies on economy of motion to eliminate wasted movement, which, in turn, improves speed.

Footwork and body positioning, whether standing or prone, allow you to simultaneously defend an attack, providing for the seamless combative transitions essential to *retzev*. The key to evasion is moving out of the “line of fire” or the path of an assailant’s weapon. Clearly, controlling the weapon and positioning yourself where you can counterattack your opponent more easily than he can attack you is optimum.

A punch thrown at your head does not represent the same danger, as does an edged weapon slashing at your throat. Countering an open-handed strike to your head by deflecting-redirecting the attack and simultaneously collapsing your attacker’s windpipe may not be justified under these circumstances (although, of course, the totality of the circumstances must always be taken into consideration). However, when someone tries to slit your throat, you are justified in stopping the deadly force assault as quickly as possible using any means at your disposal. This particular defense against an edged weapon attack to the head involves the defender stepping “off the line” of attack and simultaneously counterstriking the assailant in the face or throat as we will cover in Chapter 4.

Defending against this same example of a face-to-face overhand edged-weapon attack (often called an icepick attack) also serves as a good example how krav maga incorporates open-handed defensive tactics with tactical positioning to put the defender in the most advantageous position. We will examine this particular defense in detail in [Figures 3.01](#) and [4.01](#). As noted, whenever possible, krav maga utilizes both a deflection-redirection combined with a body defense that moves the defender off the line of attack, or in the case of firearm disarms, out of the “line of fire.” By deflecting-redirecting the incoming attack and simultaneously moving away from it combined with a counterattack, krav maga strives to create a fail-safe redundant defense. Not only is the attack thwarted by a deflection-redirection and simultaneous counterattacks, the defender is also not positioned where the assailant anticipated.

**Krav Maga Tactical Thinking When Confronting Weapons While on the Ground.** One of the best ways to stop a weapon from being deployed in a ground struggle is exactly that: prevent the assailant from presenting the weapon. This requires astute recognition, especially in the heat of a vicious fight. Fight positioning determines your tactical advantage. Optimally, a kravist will move quickly to a superior and dominant position relative to his opponent, known in krav maga parlance as the deaside. With the exception of the initial defensive movements against some impact weapon attacks, krav maga weapons defenses strive, when possible, to take the defender to the assailant’s deaside which often provides a decisive tactical advantage. Once superior position and control of the weapon are achieved while simultaneously controlling the weapon to keep both you and bystanders safe, the assailant will have a minimal ability to defend or to counter your retzev counterattack. The defender’s control of the weapon also keeps bystanders safe. Retzev, using all parts of your body seamlessly in coordinated concert, provides an overwhelming counterattack including, when necessary, turning the weapon on the assailant.

If both the defender and assailant are on the ground and the assailant decides in mid-fight to deploy a weapon, krav maga’s weapon defenses on the ground are similar to its standing defenses. Movement on the ground is obviously different than when standing. Accordingly, the defenses must be modified. The nature of groundfighting can allow one opponent superior control and positioning, while the other opponent cannot run or evade as he might while standing. Again, krav maga groundwork against weapons is best defined as “what we do up, we do down” with additional specific groundfighting capabilities. We employ many of our standing combatives on the ground, including groin, eye, and throat strikes in combination with joint breaks and dislocations designed, if necessary, to maim your opponent.

Analyzing the overhand edged-weapon attack example starts to put you in the mind-frame of a kravist skilled in weapons defenses. Let’s go through this particular defense step-by-step (we will cover the technique in detail in Chapter 4). When facing deadly weapon assaults, such as an edged-weapon attack, krav maga provides the defender with the option of striking to vital areas such as the throat. Again, the immediate goal is to stop the assailant. This means neutralizing the assailant with soft tissue strikes and other combatives to then allow the defender to exert decisive control over the weapon.

One of Imi’s more famous sayings was that you should be “so good that you do not have to kill.” Imi also had another saying that some krav maga techniques were only useful to commandos and criminals. Of course, criminals have no place in krav maga. Therefore, some of krav maga techniques are reserved for military and security teaching only.

Krav maga is flexible; instructors do not provide set instructions but, rather, a comprehensive blueprint. Learning by rote would violate krav maga’s practicality and adaptability. However, wherever krav maga might be used, it must be used for the right reason—self-defense with the appropriate level of counter-force. An assailant armed with a weapon can clearly cause you serious bodily harm or kill you. Krav maga is both aggressive and decisive in countering weapon attacks.

you must physically engage the assailant, the goal is to deliver you from harm's way and dominate the assailant.

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The law in most countries evaluates a person's response according to a "reasonable person standard." For self-defense, the operative language becomes "reasonable force." In other words, what would the reasonable person do, or how would he or she react, under the totality of the circumstances? Among the myriad facts involving a violent confrontation, the law analyzes a disparity in size and strength when adjudicating liability and criminal charges. When completing a weapon disarm against an assailant, if you control the weapon and the assailant is no longer a threat, you must cease your defensive actions. The moment you are deemed safe, any additional defensive actions may, in fact, become offensive actions.

If you continue to injure an assailant who is no longer a threat, you could face civil and criminal charges—especially if you deliberately turn the weapon on the assailant. For example, if you disarm a gunman and then shoot him repeatedly with his own weapon, you may be justified provided he kept coming at you. But, if you shoot him center mass and he goes down no longer presenting a threat, and you then walk up to him and shoot him point blank in the head—you have just executed someone and you will answer for it.

In short, to defend yourself, only use the amount of force commensurate with the threat. As tempting as it might be, to severely hurt or kill your assailant, you must make a deliberate conscious decision when to cease your counterattack. Granted, in the heat of the confrontation there is precious little or no time to weigh your options especially when reacting instinctively. Just remember, if the initial violent confrontation ends and you have time to contemplate your next move, the situation is no longer life threatening; do not continue your counterattacks. Disengage and wait for law enforcement officials to arrive or flee if necessary and then contact the authorities.

For armed law-enforcement personnel who have a sworn duty to protect the public, krav maga training teaches an officer to directly handle a threat coupled, importantly, with the ability to quickly de-escalate or escalate the appropriate level of force. Krav maga recognizes that when faced with a deadly threat, most officers will instinctively reach for a sidearm or, in a tactical situation, resort to a rifle/submachine gun (SMG). Therefore, krav maga teaches variations of the tactics incorporating streamlined weapon deployment and higher use-of-force options.

## **The Best Use of This Book**

This book is designed for the novice and expert alike who would like to improve his or her chances of not just surviving an armed attack, but increasing the odds of prevailing against an armed attacker without serious injury. Many students marvel that they can come to one krav maga class and, regardless of their prior self-defense training, they walk away proficient—with a lasting knowledge in the specific weapon disarms they just learned. For example, you could walk away from a single class taught by a qualified Israeli krav maga instructor and decisively disarm someone pointing a handgun at you or attacking you with an iron pipe.

The weapon defenses covered in this book assume you have no choice but to physically engage and defend. To be sure, in any situation involving an adversary with a weapon, the optimum solution would be to recognize the threat and steer clear of it. The best use of this book is to practice each technique as presented. You will find that each technique either builds upon a previous technique or

complements a technique yet to be presented. You will find that the Israeli krav maga system relies on a few core movements that are highly adaptable to the myriad variables when confronting weapon removal and disarms.

Krav maga is designed to work for anyone regardless of athleticism, skill, size, or gender. Krav maga's popularity is in large part attributable to its practicality, simplicity, easy retention, and brutal effectiveness. We train groups of responsible civilians, law enforcement, and military personnel, all of whom have limited training time. We are able to teach them the proven techniques in this book in a condensed training period.

For example, one officer who had never taken any defensive tactics training beyond the basics he learned at his academy was skeptical toward krav maga's efficacy, took a six-hour handgun disarm seminar, and came away marveling at his newfound capabilities. In another large krav maga course I taught, a U.S. special forces operator, who later admitted to taking the course to disprove krav maga's methodology, also came away thoroughly convinced of the efficacy of krav maga's weapon disarm methodology. He wondered why with his many years of top-tier training he had not been exposed to these simple yet formidable combat-oriented building blocks. Similarly, civilians with extensive martial arts background have also come away as krav maga converts, having learned that the same krav maga defense can be used to counter four different outside attacks to the head: a hook punch, an edged-weapon overhead stab, edged-weapon hook stab, or an edged-weapon slash.

Our krav maga trainees come away with a lasting knowledge to defend against weapon attacks that can be performed under stress. Of course, no book is a substitute for hands-on learning with a qualified Israeli krav maga expert instructor, but I hope to impart some of the more important principles and core tactics to hone your weapon defense skills. Most important, when locked in an armed confrontation, you must believe you will survive regardless of the injuries you might sustain while defending your life. There is a fine distinction between confident and over-confident. Do not mistake the latter for the former. If faced with a threat—not an imminent attack—if the circumstances do not favor disarming the assailant and you can comply or run away, do so.

Krav maga's evolution focuses only on street-proven tactics. If a technique should fail, Grandmaster Gidon either removes it or modifies it. Unlike other traditional self-defense systems, krav maga does not insist on implementing a particular strength, whether it is kicking, punching, or throwing, etc., to solve the problem. In other words, krav maga adapts to the nature and necessity of defending a particular weapon and family of related threats or attacks by relying on a few core weapon-oriented principles and tactics. Current Grandmaster Haim Gidon has modified several weapon defenses, which founder Imi Lichtenfeld formally approved in the mid-1990s. Where applicable, these modified defenses are distinguished in the text from the first generation krav maga techniques.



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