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The ISR Matrix

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*Supporting our Law Enforcement Community*

# The ISR Matrix

Doug Nicholson

*The lights were off. I could faintly see the shadows moving quickly. The annoying sound of the loud music made it difficult to concentrate on what was happening, and I wondered how the shadows themselves were able to concentrate.*

*As my eyes adjusted, the shadows gained some substance, and I watched one dark form throw a series of hard punches at another dark form. The punches were hard enough for me to wince slightly. Even with boxing gloves on, I knew no Police Defensive Tactics Instructor would allow that amount of force to be used in training. Mainly because the students would not be able to defend themselves from it, as current DT's training is of little use with aggressive non-compliant offenders.*

*Not only that, but with the darkness reducing student's vision, the loud, (and really bad), music only permitted the students to hear their own breathing, and then you added torch light being strobed around the room and directly in your eyes; this was a serious training serial.*

*The defending dark form instantly protected his head with the "helmet", practiced hundreds of times in the last 2 days. Within seconds he had moved in and taken control of the attacker, and had him on the ground ready to be handcuffed.*

*But there was no time to stop. The situational awareness training was working, and the second attacker was quickly identified and then used to block the third attacker. And on it went...*

*The attackers went to the back of the line, waiting to do it all over again. Within a couple of minutes one of the attackers traded places with the defender. This went on for a good thirty minutes, at the end of a twelve-hour training day. I know the students were sweaty, out of breath, but they also appeared confident and relaxed.*

*I leant over to the instructor, Dave Pauli of ISR Matrix Australia, and asked, "Do the students normally progress to this level so quickly?"*

*Without stopping his strobing of the torch around the room and into the defender's eyes, Dave said, "Usually they're faster. This group is a little slower than average."*

*I didn't know what to say. I was impressed with the skills that could be taught so quickly, and trained at*

*100% realism / power / At the end of only two days of training, these students were defending themselves against multiple attackers, whilst experiencing sensory deprivation, and exhausted from two long days of training. Even after being marked "competent" in contemporary Australian Police Defensive Tactics training, there was no way on earth that I or my fellow Officers would have been able to perform to this standard. And to do so without suffering injury? Hell no!*

*ISR Matrix Australia* is Australia's representative for ISR Matrix, being "a dynamic full spectrum integrated system of subject control and personal protection that thrives naturally throughout use of force continuums and mission specific modes of operation used by both sworn and non-sworn professionals worldwide," (ISR Matrix website). Dave Pauli, who runs *ISR Matrix Australia*, and has both a Law Enforcement & Military background, has already taught a number of ISR courses in Australia, and I was attending his Brisbane course in August.

ISR stands for *Intercept, Stabilise, Resolve*. For those of us who have been trained in contemporary Police DT / OST skills, ISR is a breath of fresh air. I specifically attended this course with the attitude of ascertaining how it would NOT work on the streets, where Officer Safety is the priority.

I was pleasantly surprised.

With a background in wrestling and jiu-jitsu, the nine core movements of ISR are interchangeable, with each technique linking from and to all other techniques. There is no definitive chain of movement that needs to be followed, with the techniques actually becoming easier the more the opponent moves, meaning that the dynamic nature of street incidents is perfectly suited to the techniques of ISR. And with the tendency today of perception being reality, the defensive blocks and movements of ISR that lead to subject control will obviously be perceived to be less aggressive than punches, kicks, and pain compliance that is taught now; especially in Coronial, Criminal and Civil courts, perception can make or break a case.

The 9 core components of ISR are as follows:

Intercept – "Helmet", "Dive, and "Arm Drag";

Stabilise – "Wrist Weave", "Harness", and "Underhook and Pike";

Resolve – "S position", "Back mount", and "Arm Wrap



and Knee Ride”.

There are other techniques and drills within the system, all of which complement, not replace, the 9 core techniques outlined above.

The initial stance used when practicing ISR is one that all Police should be familiar with; the Field Interview stance, or the common stance used when Police are writing in their field notebook, (although called the “Forklift” during ISR drills). This is just one of many ways that ISR has looked at what Police need, and have applied it to their training methodology. Have a baton or mag-lite in your hand? No problem, the initial movements of ISR can be conducted with those items in your hands.

Another important aspect of ISR that needs to be considered is reassessment, or situational awareness. All Police in Australia are taught the Use of Force model that requires them to reassess an incident constantly, but then are never taught to do that during the practical component of OST. ISR does. Within 4-5 hours of starting the 3-day course, students were defending themselves from, and controlling, multiple opponents, requiring them to constantly remain aware of their surroundings and reassess the situation as required by current Use of Force models. If Officers need to disengage from the threat, again, that is addressed within ISR.

Even offenders using passive resistance are able to be dealt with in a non-violent but effective manner.

Once the subject is controlled, there is no danger from positional asphyxia either. Again, ISR recognises the requirements of frontline Police, and once the subject is on the ground, (itself a simple and pain-free movement for both Officer and subject), the techniques allow an Officer to have control of the subject, whilst being able to free a hand to access their radio or handcuffs, and the subject is in no danger that is normally attributed to being face-down on the ground. The other common problem in Australia DT / OST training today, is that if an offender goes to ground on their back, the techniques used to get them onto their front for handcuffing are easily perceived as being “excessive force”. ISR again addresses this issue, using techniques that easily enable Police to control the subject and situate them into a better position.

All the drills utilised by ISR are basic natural movements, using the natural movements of the offender to control them. Not pain compliance, and not joint-locks. At all times, ISR allows the user to escalate or disengage, depending on the circumstances. It is fluid and dynamic, which current DT / OST systems are not.

ISR training comprises of three streams. Everybody undertakes the initial three-day course, which makes

them proficient in the fundamentals of the system, and then further training is available within the separate streams, being Civilian Defensive Tactics, Law Enforcement, and Military. The Law Enforcement course is an extra two days, which includes retention, disarms, counter-knife, vehicle extractions, and team subject control tactics. The additional material, like everything in all the ISR modules, is interwoven back into the core material - for example, drawing your weapon in the fight if necessary and preventing the subject from drawing theirs, all the while performing subject control.

As of the writing of this article, Dave Pauli of *ISR Matrix Australia*, is in the US with the leaders / founders of ISR, helping write the new training structure for the more advanced components of ISR, including:

1. Ground Survival, Ground Engagement and Resolution
2. Firearm Retention
3. Counter gun
4. Vehicle Extraction
5. Counter edged weapon
6. Team Tactics
7. Clinch with Cloth
8. Close Quarter Combat
9. Close Quarter Battle/Urban survival (includes ECQ firearms)
10. Water survival and combatives
11. Baton
12. Confined Spaces
13. Cell Extraction
14. Intra-vehicular combatives
15. Public Order Arrest Teams
16. Subject control for hospitals

Current DT / OST packages have a very heavy emphasis on joint locks and pain compliance, and due to the pain and injuries resulting from those techniques, the training is predominantly performed on static and compliant subjects, at half speed, or even slower. There is no ability to perfect techniques on non-compliant moving multiple opponents, simply because the likely outcome is injury instead of control. Even when practiced at half-speed, injuries have resulted from current DT / OST training, so I still find it hard to understand how Police Management are happy that the training provided to frontline Police is in accordance with the National Guidelines on Police Use of Force, being that the success of any Use of Force incident will be judged by the least amount of force used. Causing both Police and “clients” to be injured during relatively low-level Use of Force incidents is not a success, but a failure. But the failure is guaranteed by using inferior training and techniques, as using pain compliance techniques when everyone naturally resists pain means that our Police organisations are training frontline Police in techniques that cause people to resist arrest.

The techniques of ISR are able to be practiced at full speed, against multiple opponents, with the most serious injury likely to occur being a few bruises and physi-



cal exertion. That alone makes ISR vastly superior to any contemporary Police DT / OST package in use in Australia today. If no injuries are caused when drilled at full-speed, and control of an offender is still able to be achieved, then naturally there will be less criticism of Police actions; less law-suits arising out of excessive force claims; less costs involved with injured Police; and less likelihood of Police resorting to higher Use of Force options due to the inadequate nature of their DT / OST training. In fact, ISR does not encourage, nor advise, "higher" level of Use of Force.

Another obvious flaw in current techniques that ISR does not have, is gross motor skills. Police DT / OST trainers teach their students about the importance of utilising only a few basic movements as fine and complex motor skills cannot be relied upon during violent incidents, but then go on to teach dozens of complex movements in direct contradiction of the requirement for basic and simple movements.

The entire ISR package is based around 9 core movements, making the learning and application of the techniques a lot simpler.

The frontline Officer is better protected, the Police organisation is better protected from legal liability and other associated costs, and the public are protected from injuries when Police Force is used.

In short, everyone wins.

ISR truly bridges the chasm that exists in current DT / OST training for Police today in Australia. Current training can only be used on static subjects, one at a time, at slow speed, with Officers being unable to apply those techniques in a sweaty full-speed street incident with multiple offenders. Not only can ISR work on the street, but it can be practiced at full speed. Although not mentioned by the ISR site or instructor, I can see the potential of combining both PT and OST training into one package.

Imagine a "standard" length Police Recruit course of 6 months, with Officers undergoing the 5-day ISR training within the first 2 weeks of their course. From then on, their Physical Training during the remainder of the course could include an hour's worth of ISR practice, at full speed, 2-3 times a week. Yes, students will receive bruises, but when it comes to training our Police in how to survive violent incidents on the street, Trainers and Managers need to recognise the difference between bruises and injuries. A bruise is not an injury. If we teach our Police recruits to be scared of bruises in training, how are they going to react when they are assaulted on the job?

And that brings me to the next point about ISR training that I consider to be lacking in contemporary DT / OST training today. ISR students are taught to defend themselves when their eyes are closed; when they are dizzy and unable to stand upright (to simu-

late having been punched in the head); in the dark; or even with painfully loud music playing; all of which combine in producing efficient defensive reflexes in students, even when assaulted without warning, or in the common environment of the real world.

The benefit of having these relevant techniques used as PT, combined with the skills built up during an additional 20-30 hours of ISR training during PT for the remainder of the course will result in Officers who are confident and capable of handling themselves without having to resort to Aerosol Subject Restraints, Electronic Control Devices, Batons, or even simply pain-compliance joint-locks resulting in injured offenders, or even currently-taught techniques such as punches and kicks that never look good to witnesses. That alone would reduce the cost of excessive force complaints and law-suits, not to mention the cost of out of court settlements. Where's the negatives in that?

Even the restraint techniques used by ISR are easily justified in Court, sensibly avoiding the never-taught but oft-used choke/sleeper-hold, with ISR utilising the techniques that lifesavers use to drag drowning victims to safety.

Those Managers and Trainers who have convinced themselves that they are using the "World's Best Practice" (a meaningless claim often stated by naive or non-qualified Police Managers) in DT / OST training are actually justifying their statements by comparing their training programs with other stagnant and inefficient training programs in use by other Australian Police jurisdictions. Australian Police organisations have literally become inbred when it comes to DT / OST training and it is time that better training packages are brought into play. Police DT / OST trainers need to implement the following phrase that at least one Police organisation outlines as a major requirement for its trainers - *members will also be engaged in the research and development of relevant practices and technical advances.*

Australian Police organisations are performing a disservice to their staff, and the community they are expected to serve, by not implementing ISR.

#### **Attached is some YouTube clips of ISR Matrix:**

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2BpEzI7mleY> - ISR PM promo Adelaide.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lbpxDNoEJyI> - ISR PM Promo

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e7UDd3Zgg8I> - Original LE promo

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T\\_Qe2OoSae8](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T_Qe2OoSae8) - Team tactics promo

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QsLStyynEVs> - LE Promo

