

VIP Protection, Counter Terrorism and High Risk Zone Training



Your vehicles are disabled and your convoy stops. "Get out and fight," be prepared for everything to go wrong and be ready to apply a tactical, proactive response.

» BY COLIN DESPINS

The morning air is cool as I roll out of bed and step out onto the terrazzo balcony overlooking the courtyard of the Israeli Olympic shooting center.

I close my eyes and allow myself a few moments to reflect. I take a deep breath in realization that this calm is not going to last: I'm attending the International Security Academy (ISA) in Israel.

My welcoming committee is Mirza David. Mirza is the Founder and Executive Director of the ISA and he has personally overseen every session of training in 15 years of operation. At

0800, Mirza formally addresses his new group of trainees. The group consists of an assortment of mostly ex-military operators from all over the world. They are, however, all here for the same purpose: to train in the tactics and methods of an Israeli expertise—VIP protection. "Tonight you will receive an introduction to the first and most fundamental principle of the Israeli Method and the International Security Academy," explains Mirza.

The group assembles in the courtyard as instructed. There is a bit of chatter among the group of trainees from Spain as the instructors begin to pull individuals from the group and divide us into teams. I am the sixth person picked by

one of the instructors as they begin dividing us. A lesser developed part of my brain is feeling thankful that I was picked early instead of dead last. After several more rounds of selection, it becomes obvious that we are being chosen and split into teams by physical size. This realization makes me laugh at myself a bit for my rather grade school reaction to being picked early on.

My team consists of Neli, Mary, May, Ari, Jermi, Mini and myself, Desi. These are the members of the original "Ladies" Team. In the Israeli Training Method, Military or Police, no matter what your rank, the moment you enter into any course, you become one of "the children" or one of "the girls." Each participant is

INTERNATIONAL SECURITY ACADEMY - ISRAEL



ISA trainees practice Israeli method of chambering a round in the process of drawing the pistol. Though highly contested for numerous reasons, this method, like any other discipline, is highly effective in the hands of a skilled practitioner and offers its own unique advantages.

given a new "girl" name and it becomes their tag for the duration of the course activities. In a very short time, the team even develops a sense of pride in their female named group. May, our team translator, becomes quite fond of saying, "The Ladies always win."

As a whole, there are 29 students in the course: 14 can speak passable English, seven speak Spanish exclusively and three speak, almost exclusively, Russian. The rest serve as translators between their native tongue and those who speak English. The course participants unofficially represent 12 countries. Other students joining in later weeks for courses concerning Protection in High Risk Zones and Intelligence Gathering

bring that number to almost 20. Mirza describes this as part of the "pepper" his course offers—a special ingredient or part of the spice.

Through the coming weeks, students learn how to function as a team to accomplish objectives despite language barriers. They also discover "what's going on" in one another's countries. Mirza explains, while pointing out members of the group, "If you want to know what is going in Germany, you will ask this man." "If you want to know how to get things done in Bulgaria, ask him. These are advantages available to you in my course and I suggest that you take them."

By occupation, the group can be di-

vided a bit differently. A large cross section of the group actively functions as bodyguards, many for the private sector, though some for governmental bodies. Some participants are attending under sponsorship of their country, some are active military personnel and others represent various governmental agencies. Others give brief occupational descriptions such as businessman, consultant or contractor. As much as this makes some members of the group suspicious, the ISA does not take chances and requires a criminal background check for all participants. Not one member of the group claims to be unemployed. This comes as no surprise, given the growing demand for elite security personnel.

ISA- ISRAEL

ISA High Risk Zone operative keeping low on the move while engaging multiple targets under watchful eye of Chief Instructor Zafir Pazi, a 25-year veteran of the Israeli Secret Service.

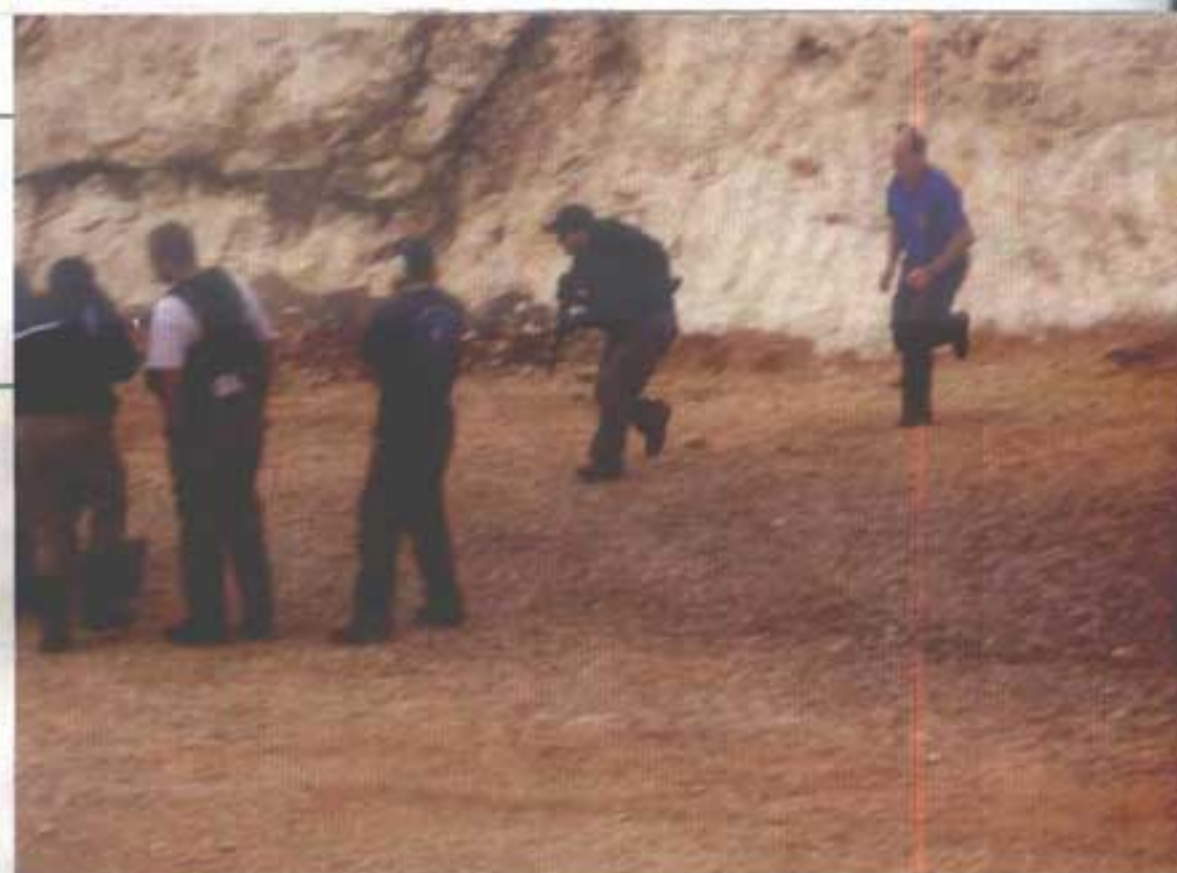
Israel has fought a long and hard battle against terrorism. Lessons have been learned; tactics, techniques and procedures have been developed and they have proven to work effectively. This is the reason why so many seasoned operators of mixed military heritage turn out for instruction at the ISA. You have not *really* been there, done that, until you have learned the methods used to fight terrorist actions from those who live and work on the frontline of terrorist aggression. The International Security Academy, Israel, exposes you to the true climate of challenges you will face in battle. The tactics, techniques and procedures they teach have been developed, devised, refined and practiced by the same individuals the ISA employs to instruct its courses.



Senior Instructor Daron Balahsan readies group to draw and shoot. As tension builds before the whistle blows, he decides the time is right for another 50 pushups.

Participants in ISA courses say that what brings them there is the opportunity to invest in their future, to strengthen their country in the war on terrorism or, for some, simply because they know it looks good on their CV. Coming to Israel to train at the ISA from places as far away as the United States and South America to learn VIP Protection or Protection in High Risk Zones from elite Israeli commandos is a bit like traveling to a Shaolin monastery to learn kung-fu—but maybe that's exactly the point.

Kris, an active contractor in Iraq,



claims to have logged at least 2,500 non-compulsory hours of specialized private training to date and says his primary goal in coming to the ISA to train is to increase his options in dealing with confrontation. During his nine-week stay with the ISA Kris gains more practical knowledge than he expected. "The materials they presented to us concerning Arab/Islamic culture, religion and manners are amazing ... The Israeli perspective concerning Counter Terrorism is unique and highly valuable." Kris recommends, "If you come here [the ISA] to train, be in shape, be motivated and bring an open mind and a clear head."

A prime example of the ISA philosophy that Ford's Gym doesn't build VPOs (VIP Protection Operators) is Mili. I'm not implying that Mili doesn't look the part, but rather that Mili expressed to me his realization that, in this industry, one thing simply does equal another. "People who think they can simply transition from Special Forces or even an elite anti-terrorism unit into VPO work are mistaken." Mili is currently active in the private sector and says he realizes that, before the specialized training he received at the ISA, he was simply an armed escort. According to Mirza David, "There are many ex-military in this field

acting as bodyguards. Do you want to 'act' as a bodyguard? Because it is only acting for these types."

The training methods of the International Security Academy, Israel are built upon the small arms doctrine of the original Israeli Counter Terrorist Unit. The methods of this unit, known as the YAMAM (a Hebrew acronym for special police unit), were honed on the front lines of counter-terrorism operations over decades of conflict. The methods are simple, effective and most importantly teach you how to transform your natural reactions into proactive responses. Another element of the ISA method of instruction is stress. Stress is induced in a number of ways and is both physical and mental. Physically the ISA instruction team grants you little time to rest, yet confidently allows you just enough to survive the day's heat and exercises. Mentally the instructors shock you by yelling unanticipated commands while telling you to "be ready" to execute a different task—all this combined with physical shock elements at the same time. If you execute the task well, you are rewarded with a kick in the stomach, a punch in the kidney or an aggressive slap on the back. "Good," "Steady" and "Stay strong" followed by zap, pow, bang. Many a satisfied customer's initial comments might be "This is punishment" or "I did this brutal crap when I was 18."

Mirza doesn't care when or where his trainees believe they "cut their teeth";

they still have to earn his diploma and to do so they must prove they have the mettle—both physically and mentally. This is the core of Mirza's philosophy and the reason why he has an international reputation for producing some of the finest operators in the industry. Mirza's reputation spans from Honduras to Latvia, from the Saudi Royal family to Moscow and from Kenya to Tokyo.

The ISA instruction team members are the finest the Israeli security establishment has to offer. To the Western ear, names like "Shabak," "Yamam," "Mossad," "Shin Bet," "Sayeret" and "Mistarvim" only lead to confusion. Often it becomes necessary to check the spelling, consult an expert or read a book simply to discover the relationships among these organizations. There are plenty of Israelis ready to train you, and they are banking on potential participants being impressed by such terminology. Mirza's organization does not stand on such a weak foundation. For example, Chief Instructor Zafir Pazi has 25 years with the Israeli Secret Service and has provided close protection services for Shimon Peres, Yitzhak Shamir, Menachem Begin and Ariel Sharon.

What I can tell you personally from my experience with the ISA is that the training they offer will surprise and challenge you. There are times when you will feel confused, lost and even defeated. Some will lead, others will follow and a few will even be dragged to the finish line, but all will leave with a sense of pride and accomplishment in the realization that they elevated themselves and their abilities in the time they spent with the International Security Academy, Israel.

I would like to extend my gratitude to the entire ISA Team and a special thanks to Mirza David, Zafir Pazi, Daron "Be Ready" Balahsan, Avi Katz and an extra special thanks to the "Ladies Team." What can I say? "The Ladies always win!" ©

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