SURVIVING REAL LIFE DEADLY FORCE ENGAGEMENTS

A candid look at the concept of Moving and Shooting in Police training

By: Nir Maman
Moving and shooting versus Shooting then moving

I remember when I was going through my BTOC qualification (the mandated Provincial Basic Tactical Orientation Course required to qualify all Tactical Officers in Ontario) we were on the range undergoing tactical handgun training and the subject of that day, was moving and shooting.

The instructor, a seasoned veteran of a Tactical Unit with a municipal Police service began to explain the concept, mechanics, and importance of moving and shooting to our group. Upon completion of his introduction to the subject, he turned and pointed at me and stated "Nir knows all about moving and shooting, he’s done it many times.”

A year prior to joining the organization I was undergoing this training for, I had just completed my second term of service in the Israeli Special Forces on our Counter Terror Unit. So the instructor automatically presumed that since I had come out of the Special Forces, I must have been heavily trained in and proficient in moving and shooting.

You see, moving and shooting is a dynamic, complex, and advanced skill. Given this fact it is heavily trained and emphasized throughout the Military Special Forces community, where the concept was born, and the ability to master a complex skill is automatically equated with the ability to effectively address real life. A huge fallacy, in my humble opinion.

The second problem that guides much of the thinking and application of theories in both the Military and Policing fields is the perception that if a theory or tactic is used by what is considered to be an ‘elite’ unit, then it must be realistically effective. The fact is that the majority of the world’s special units, even ones who deploy to hostile war zones, don’t ever get a chance to experience or apply most of the tactics they are trained in!

Additionally, many times when tactics are deployed in real life situations, the situations are not ones that push the supporting principles of the tactics to the point of exploiting their weaknesses allowing for a full and realistic evaluation of their effectiveness.

It’s the equivalent of gauging the level of your skills in a specific sport by only training with or competing against competitors that are below your level of skills. Even with poor skills, you will win every time!

The fact is that I cringe in frustration when I see the concept of moving and shooting implemented in a professional setting. Not only do we not use this concept in Israel, simply because it does not lend to an efficient resolve in a real life gunfight, and it’s important to understand the difference between shooting a threat, being shot at by a threat, and being in a gunfight with a threat (where the majority of the world is experienced with the first two points, in Israel the majority of our engagements are the third point) but the concept also negates both instinctive response and tactical capabilities under stress.
Let’s first look at the rationale behind the concept of moving and shooting. There are three main points that constitute the foundation for the implementation of this concept:

1) If you are in a gun fight and you are not moving, then you are a static target and much easier to hit.

2) If you move while you shoot, you open up your visual acuity of your environment which will allow you to further visually assess your surroundings and possibly identify additional threats.

3) Allows you to close distance to the threat/dominating while engaging.

Those are the three theories that support the idea behind the concept of moving and shooting. Like practically every theory, these theories present sound theoretical principles. However, like many theories that make sense in theory, when put to practice against the backdrop of practical facts and statistics, these theories prove that the concept of moving and shooting will not lend to optimal efficiency in a real life deadly force engagement.

Going in order of the above listed theories:

1) Theory: You’re a static target if you’re not moving while you shoot.

   Fact:

   The only thing in a real life gunfight that will keep you alive, is terminating the threat that is trying to kill you and immediately stopping the life threatening action he is sending your way.

   Moving in an attempt to avoid the threat’s fire, is the equivalent of focusing on getting behind cover while under fire as opposed to focusing on terminating the threat. This is a principle I refer to as attempting to manipulate your environment in an attempt to alter the physical elements as opposed to addressing the root source of the problem. The metaphorical equivalent of dealing with a flooding canoe due to a hole in the floor by working hard to bail the water out instead of plugging the hole.

   There are two factual factors that come in to play that kill the ‘static target’ theory dead in its tracks.

   I’ll put it in the context of a drill which I recommend you try in order to see the proof in tangible practice:

   Take a shooter who not only believes in the theory of moving and shooting but who is also proficient at it, and set up this simple drill: have the shooter stand in a designated area on the range floor (execute this drill at various distances to the target ranging from 5 yards out to 50 yards), have a running target as the focus which will begin at one lateral side of the range and that will ‘run’ to the other lateral side (so left to right/right to left).
The preference is to have a target that can move at various speeds, although most ranges only have running targets that move at one speed, which is usually the equivalent speed to that of a fast walk or a slow jog.

Have the shooter begin to walk around the range, weapon at the ready (*he knows what the drill is, there are no surprises*) and as the target begins to run from side to side, have the shooter engage it effectively.

This is what you will see:

First, in many cases, even among experienced shooters who practice moving and shooting, you will see a change in the shooter's pace. Almost every shooter slows down their pace immediately while engaging the target. This is because there is a sudden shift in priorities, from moving to shooting. Even while under cognitive control (*meaning the absence of real survival stress*), the majority of shooters instinctively realize that when they bring their weapon up to fire, that becomes the priority and to ensure they are effectively hitting the target, they instinctively slow down to minimize excess body movement which hinders effective shooting.

Remember what the only principle of moving and shooting is: *Only move as fast as you can effectively hit the target.*

And the fact is, there is a limited pace of movement any human can move at in order to balance effective shooting. During this drill you will see shooters reach that limit, which is generally a pace of approximately 2 steps per second. Faster than that pace, and effective shooting becomes compromised.

Second, even for those exceptional shooters who have forced their muscle memory to overcome instinct (*which only happens when your level of stress does not surpass your level of cognitive reasoning, which essentially means you are not under survival stress*) you will see that they will effectively hit their target! Every shot!

In fact, after you run the above drill, perform this test drill as a follow up:

Find a range that has a lateral running target that can run fast, as close as possible to a sprint!

Then, have the shooter stand at various distances from the target line, up to 50 yards, in the center of the range in a ready position.

When the target runs from one side to the other, have the shooter engage it. Guess what will happen? Most shooters will hit the target effectively with most of their fired rounds.

Now why is this significant? Because usually, a running target moves at a quicker pace than 2 steps per second! So what do these ‘reality check’ points mean? They mean that first, if you want to ensure that you are hitting your target in a gun fight, you will have to drastically limit the pace at which you are moving, and second, based on the fact that almost every shooter can hit a target that is moving exponentially
quicker than the pace that the shooter is moving in while shooting, we know for
fact that moving at the pace of 'not quicker than you can effectively hit your target' is
useless and will still practically guarantee that you are as easy a target to hit than if
you were not moving at all!

If the concern for moving in a gun fight was to ensure or drastically reduce your
propensity for being hit by rounds being directed at you, the pace you will have to
move in will first have to be a sprint at minimum and second you will also have to
move in a pattern that induces movement of the threat’s line of fire, such as in a zig
zag pattern.

Moving in a straight line towards the threat makes you the same complexity, or
ease, of a target whether you are standing still or sprinting, since the threat does not
need to move his line of fire in any direction to acquire you.

The more you adhere to any of those principles, which will augment your
possibility to not get hit over the standard move and shoot principle (which won’t
reduce your ability to not get hit!) the more the ability to effectively hit your threat
disappears.

The preceding looked at the structural issues of the moving and shooting
principle, let’s now look at another important fact that relates to moving and shooting.

Hit ratio.

Every Police training institution looks at one of the biggest statistical problems
that exists in Police gun fighting today, which is the problematic hit ratio for Police
Officers in gun fights in North America. The hit ratio average for Police Officers in North
America has been hovering around 19% (approximately 1 out of every 5 shots fired by
Police hits its intended target). There is one report, I believe by the RCMP, that states
a hit ratio average of 28%, and a newer statistic I learned of on the subject through
the NYPD ESU for 2010 stated 11% to 17% (which makes sense given the rash of new
ambush type of attacks on Police Officers in the US over the last 5 years, while Police
‘shooting’ training remains the same).

We’ll give the Policing community the benefit of the doubt and go with the higher
statistical value of 28%. Even at the higher statistical value of 28%, that is a huge
problem! 72% of rounds fired by Police Officers are missing their targets, and these are
Police Officers that are shooting static!

So now people are grasping hold of this moving and shooting theory. It was not a
heavily known or practiced theory until the U.S.’s war machine was reactivated with
Iraq and Afghanistan and U.S. military vets were returning home and began running
courses all over the place. Moving and shooting, which has a strong perception of
effectiveness (because again it makes sense theoretically, it’s dynamic and relatively
more complex than other shooting tactics, and it’s practiced by the Special Forces
community therefore it must be effective!) suddenly became an integral concept in
Police training all across North America.
It’s also important to note that, moving and shooting has no combat proven basis! You cannot attribute a win in a gunfight to a factor you do not control, such as the chance possibility that you stepped out of a place where a bullet was travelling to just like you could have stood in a place where no rounds were on their way to!

What is a combat proven gun fighting factor that you can measure however, is that shooting your threat effectively will in most cases terminate that engagement and keep you alive.

Either way, the fact remains that Police Officers already have a difficult enough time with hitting their targets while they are not moving, and there is so much focus in Police training on how to remedy that problem, but now the training community want Police Officers to shoot while they are moving.

Not only will this concept not contribute to Officer survivability during a deadly force engagement, but it will contribute to a further compromising decline in the Police Officer hit ratio average!

2) Theory: If you move while you shoot, you open up your visual acuity of your environment which will allow you to further visually assess your surroundings and possibly identify additional threats.

Fact:

Every Police instructor already knows that the number one negative physiological side effect of survival stress, which every Police Officer experiences during a deadly force engagement, is tunnel vision.

First, it would be negligent and tactically counter productive to ask a Police Officer to take his or her eyes off the threat while they are engaging. That is why no one teaches that to begin with. Therefore, it simply becomes a contradictory point to profess this theory for moving and shooting.

Second, even if you attempted to train Officers to scan while they are engaging, it would be humanly physiologically impossible for them to do so, given that they will be experiencing tunnel vision which will keep their focused vision on one thing only which is the threat they are engaging until they no longer perceive that threat as a threat.

It’s also important not to confuse the idea of scanning while shooting and scanning while you are moving upon ceasing to engage.

Therefore again, moving and shooting will not assist in any way in contributing to visual dexterity while in a gunfight. It is practically impossible to vocalize verbal commands while you are shooting (actually focusing on your sights/line of fire and squeezing the trigger) never mind trying to look somewhere else. That is why no matter how much you profess for your Officers to issue loud verbal commands while they are shooting, verbal commands are actually delivered before the trigger is squeezed or after the last round is fired!
3) Allows you to close distance to the threat/dominate the engagement.

**Fact:**

Dominating the engagement is the only move and shoot principle I agree with. However, the physical end result usually dominates the attempted psychological process. If you’re shooting was compromised and the threat was able to effectively hit you because you were busy trying to ‘psychologically dominate’, your effort was futile at best.

Additionally, your survival instincts will dominate over tactical training cognition under stress. If you are face to face with a threat who is actively trying to kill you by shooting at you, and you have a firearm in your hand, you’re body will not move forward towards the threat!!! Your body will plant itself, raise your weapon, and focus on unloading rounds as fast as possible!

Again, just another point that shows the unintentional contradiction in training practices. Police Officers today are trained to shoot in the isosceles/Israeli stance and no longer in any other shooting platform because it has finally been realized that under stress your body will square off to the threat, it will drop, your legs will base out wide, and you will not move anywhere or face any direction other than the direction of your threat.

So, if this is what the factual response for an Officer will be in a gun fight, how are they now expected to move while engaging?

In Israel we have been engaged in endless violent conflict for 65 years. Our tactical methodology for deadly force engagements/gunfights is to stop, establish a strong shooting platform, focus on shooting, and once the threat is down or has dissipated due to running away etc., then you sprint as fast as possible to close the distance allowing you to dominate safely and to have less distance from the threat to maximize effective shooting during the next volley if the threat re-engages.

Our hit ratio average for our Soldiers and Police Officers in violent gunfights hovers around 70%. There are two factors that contribute to our higher hit ratio average, and one of them is the fact that we do not move and shoot! When you move and shoot, you are executing movement that is 50% it’s potential and your shooting will be 50% it’s potential.

Our philosophy is to be 100% effective when it’s time to shoot and 100% effective when it’s time to move! If moving and shooting actually provided tangible and effective results, we would be the first fighting force to implement it.

So is there any practical application for moving and shooting? Yes, there are three predicaments when moving and shooting can actually physiologically and tactically be applied:

1: The most common application, during an open field or urban combat environment where you suddenly come under fire and only have a general idea of the direction the
enemy fire is coming from or know where the enemy fire is coming from but do not have effective access to directly engage the threat. In this predicament, you’re natural and tactical inclination will be to run out of that area or for cover as fast as humanly possible (which is the correct response) and while you are running to get out of the line of attack, it may, and I emphasize may, not hurt to raise your weapon and fire off some rounds in the direction of the enemy fire.

The focus is not on the conventional moving and shooting platform or concept, since you do not have a target to focus on, the focus is on getting out of the danger area as fast as possible and by blindly shooting in the direction of enemy fire, you might get lucky and distract the enemy buying you time to safely get to cover. I also need to point out that cover is the emphasis in this predicament only because you can’t identify or effectively engage the source of fire.

2: Another potential example is a ‘stalking’ situation. Examples of stalking can be during a covert, stealth approach to an enemy position where the enemy does know that you are present, or during a hostage rescue operation where you are moving covertly and stealthily to a certain position (usually a final approach point before the breach) and again the enemy is unaware of your presence.

In both cases, an unsuspecting threat might calmly appear, such as walking out of a room while you and your team are stalking down the hall, but before the threat has the chance to face you, direct his weapon towards you, and engage you, from the low ready (the position your weapon is already in during stalking) you can raise your weapon and engage the threat while continuing to move.

You will be able to execute moving and shooting in this predicament because you are not being engaged, you are not under the effects of survival stress, and both you and the threat are moving at a pace that allows for balancing an effective application of shooting while moving.

And finally 3: If you are playing the role of a cool guy SWAT cop in a Hollywood action movie, because moving and shooting will not only look real cool, but it will also work here!
Nir Maman

Nir served in one of the most elite units in the Israeli Special Forces, the Central Command Counter-Terror Unit (C.T.U.) and the Special Forces Counter-Terror and Special Operations School (C.T.S.O). During his service he held several positions including Commander of the Counter-Terror School’s International Training Section where he was responsible for developing and delivering specialized Counter-Terror, Hostage Rescue, and Krav Maga training to Special Forces Units from various countries around the world including the United States (Army Special Forces, Delta, Marines Special Operations Command, Rangers, and Asymmetrical Warfare Group) that attend the Israeli Special Forces Counter-Terror and Special Operations School in preparation for high risk deployments such as Iraq and Afghanistan.

He also held the position of Lead Counter-Terror Instructor on the Counter-Terror School’s Designated Hostage Rescue Take-Over Units Instruction Section, where he was responsible for training new recruits and active operational members of the Israeli Special Force’s Designated Hostage Rescue Units in all areas of Counter-Terror warfare and Hostage Rescue including Hostage Rescue Operations in domestic 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.

Nir was also assigned to the C.T.S.O. School’s Chief Instruction and Research and Development Section where he was responsible for enhancing and developing operational Counter Terror tactical methodologies that are currently deployed by all Israeli Special Forces Units. Some of the methodologies he developed or enhanced for the Counter Terror School include: Active Shooter Intervention in open terrain, Fighting in Built Up/Urban areas, Deployment of the Ballistic Shield in Urban Warfare, and Single Operative Combat Tactics. His duties in this section also included training the C.T.S.O. School’s instructors in Counter-Terror Warfare, Tactical Shooting, and Krav Maga.

Additionally, he also held the position of Operational Team Leader on the Central Command Counter-Terror and Hostage Rescue Unit during high risk deployments which included Direct Action Operations, Active Shooter Interventions, Arrests of high threat terrorists, and high risk entries and searches throughout the West Bank and Gaza Strip regions.

In April 2009 Nir was awarded the Israeli Defense Force Ground Forces Command Soldier of the Year Award of Excellence for his service in developing Tactical Methodologies for the Israeli Special Forces and for excellent service in commanding the Counter-Terror School’s International Training Section.

Nir is a certified Provincial Use of Force Instructor through the Ontario Police College and a certified Police Tactical Operations and Use of Force Instructor through the Atlantic Police Academy in Prince Edward Island Canada where he was a sworn Police Constable working as a Tactical and Use of Force Instructor. He also has 30 years of extensive Martial Arts and Unarmed Combat experience in Israeli Krav Maga, Jeet Kune Do, WTF Tae Kwon Do, and Hap Ki Do.

Another of Nir’s areas of expertise is Close Protection. He was responsible for organizing and deploying Close Protection details for dignitaries and representatives of the Israeli Government while they were in Canada engaged in political functions.

Currently, Nir is an operational member on a Nuclear Tactical Unit as well as a Sworn Peace Officer for the Province of Ontario on a Judicial Enforcement Agency. He continues to deliver Counter-Terror, Active Shooter Intervention, Tactical Shooting, and Krav Maga training to Police and Military organizations around the world.

To date, he has trained over ten thousand Special Forces Soldiers, Police Tactical/SWAT Officers, Police Officers, Customs and Immigration Enforcement Officers, Tactical and Armed Security Officers, Close Protection Agents/Bodyguards, and Instructors in all those fields from various Countries around the world including Canada, the United States, Israel, and others.