



# Spartan Firearms Training Group, LLC

## Strategic Engagement:

### The Role of Tactics and Techniques for Self-Defense Combat—Part 1

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*Carrying a firearm in public, concealed or open carry, requires a person to accept the possibility of facing a deadly force threat. Training to effectively and legally use a firearm is crucial if facing a threat is possible. Preparation requires having a strategy for self-defense, envisioning possible threat scenarios while thinking about tactics ("What should I do"), and training to develop or refine firearms handling techniques ("How do I do it"). In this three-part article, the role of strategy, tactics, and techniques for self-defense combat will be discussed. Information about the combat mindset and the relationship among strategy, tactics, and techniques will be presented. Part 2 will go deeper into tactics and techniques. Part 3 will provide additional information about tactics and techniques.*

#### Introduction

A comprehensive understanding of the terms "strategy," "tactics" and "techniques" is crucial for firearms owners focused on personal safety and effective threat neutralization. Though sometimes viewed interchangeably, the distinction between strategy, tactics, and techniques is important for creating effective and legal self-defense.

Strategy is a broad course of action. Tactics are used to achieve the strategy. Techniques are the precise actions used to implement the tactics. The combat mindset concept prepares a person to engage mentally and emotionally in self-defense with a firearm while complying with

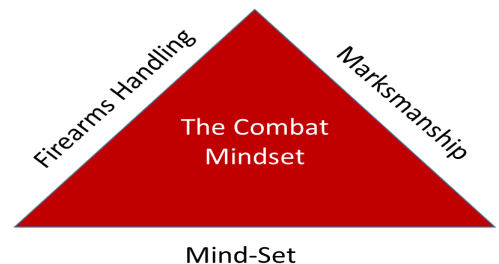
moral and legal self-defense requirements.

#### Understanding Self-Defense Combat

If you ever need to defend your life using hand-to-hand martial arts or a handgun, you must realize that you will be engaged in combat. To prevail in combat with a firearm or by using martial arts you must adopt the combat mindset (see [combat mindset](#)). Cooper's combat mindset concept is shown in figure 1, below

*Firearms handling* refers to techniques required to manipulate a handgun effectively and efficiently and include loading and unloading, clearing

Figure 1: Cooper's Combat Mindset



malfunctions, and drawing from a holster (open and concealed carry).

*Marksmanship* refers to the technical skills to use a handgun to place accurate hits on a target. Marksmanship skills include gripping the gun, sight alignment and front sight focus (for making accurate hits), and trigger press.

*Mindset* refers to the attitude required to survive a lethal force engagement. Cooper describes it by saying that when facing a deadly force threat you should think “I knew this could happen one day and I know what to do about it.”

Self-defense combat means using a firearm (or hand-to-hand fighting) to protect yourself or your loved ones from an imminent threat of violence. This concept is grounded in legal principles that vary by jurisdiction, but generally include:

*Innocence*--you cannot be the aggressor.

*Imminence*--you must believe the threat is going to happen “right now”!

*Reasonableness*—many against one, big vs. small, male vs. female.

*Avoidance*—in states like Maryland, you have a duty to retreat if it is safe to do so. Other states allow you to “stand your ground.”

*Proportionality*--just enough force to stop the threat

Even if all of the above conditions are met, you could still face legal consequences.

The mindset will drive tactics and techniques. How is that

attitude developed? By training the correct tactics and techniques correctly, assiduously, and consistently.

## Understanding Strategy

### *The Meaning of Strategy*

A strategy is a high-level plan designed to achieve one or more long-term goals. It provides a framework and direction for achieving a desired outcome. Strategies have the following characteristics:

- Long-term focus
- Big picture thinking
- Guides decision-making
- May encompass multiple tactics

Example: This is my personal strategy for self-defense with a handgun.

*“Leave the house with a concealed loaded firearm. Never go places with my gun that I wouldn’t go without it. Be vigilant. Avoid confrontations.”*

The terms “strategy” and “tactics” are often used synonymously, but they refer to distinct concepts, especially in the context of planning in business, military operations, and self-defense, among others. Although

distinct, they must be aligned to create effective and efficient self-defense outcomes.

## Understanding Tactics

### *The Meaning of Tactics*

Tactics implement self-defense strategy. They assist in identifying the best and most effective way to counter a threat. For example, choosing to retreat (which is mandated by law in some jurisdictions) or stand your ground are examples of tactical decisions.

Tactics are the actions for achieving strategic goals. The characteristics of tactics are:

- Short-term focus
- Concrete and actionable
- Executes the strategy on the ground level
- Often adaptable to changing circumstances

The use-of-force framework that is permitted by law in your state should serve as the basis for your tactics (see the article “Use of Force for Self-Defense” found at [Use of Force for Self-Defense](#))

Example: Here are examples of tactics I use to support my self-defense strategy:

Strategy: Leave the house with a loaded concealed handgun.

Tactics:

- Check condition of my handgun
- Load the gun with a full magazine and carry a spare
- Conceal the gun inside my waistband
- When exiting the house, look around and pay attention to anything that stands out as unusual (informed situational awareness—see [Beyond the Watchful Eye](#)).

While a strategy outlines the overall approach with high-level plans for achieving broader objectives, tactics are the specific methods or actions taken to implement that strategy.

There are two methods for creating self-defense tactics. The first method is to visualize potential lethal force situations and then imagine what you will do to protect yourself.

The second method is to train with professionals who possess tactical knowledge of self-defense combat. These tactics include quick decision-making, quick threat assessment, informed situational awareness, and efficient use of the surroundings (cover and concealment). In essence, tactics create the road map that directs all of your self-defense efforts to

increase the likelihood of your survival.

### *Factors Influencing Tactical Decisions*

Several factors influence the selection and use of tactics:

**Environment:** Understanding whether you are in an urban or rural setting will dictate different approaches; for example, tactics for use in an urban area will likely differ from those in a rural community.

**Threat Perception:** Accurately and quickly assessing the capabilities, intent, and immediate threat level posed by an adversary is crucial for tactical decision-making.

**Legal Considerations:** Knowledge of local self-defense laws is essential. It ensures that tactical decisions remain within legal boundaries such as when and where to draw and use a firearm.

### **Understanding Techniques**

#### *The Meaning of Techniques*

Techniques in self-defense are the specific mechanical actions and maneuvers performed during a defensive situation. This includes manipulating the firearm, while maintaining control under stress. Techniques are about “the how do I do this”; that is,

the execution of the tactical plan (“what should I do”).

Here are examples of techniques in support of my personal strategy and tactics for preparing for self-defense:

Strategy: Leave the house with a concealed loaded firearm.

Tactic: Check condition of my handgun.

Techniques: While in the garage before exiting the house.

- Retract the slide, lock to the rear, check to see if unloaded
- Release the slide forward and check trigger action
- Repeat a couple times
- Check front sight to ensure it is secure (*Two weeks ago I discovered that the front sight on my carry gun was loose. I applied moderate strength “Loctite” and resecured the sight*).
- Check “red dot” optic to ensure it is secure and that the red dot is visible.
- Load a full magazine into the magazine-well. Release the slide forward to chamber a round.
- Engage the safety.
- Holster the loaded firearm inside the waistband.
- Put a second full magazine in left back pocket.

Techniques are used to implement your tactics. Training in

various techniques such as proper grip, trigger press, shooting while moving, stress management, emergency and tactical reloading, clearing malfunctions, and draw speed enables you to defend human life effectively.

### *Developing Proficiency in Techniques*

Mastery of techniques requires consistent and correct practice. Your neural pathways are coated with a substance called myelin as you practice techniques. The thicker the myelin coating, the more efficient (that is, faster) that skill becomes.

However, there is a problem with the myelin-coating process. If you practice the “wrong” skill or practice the “correct” skill incorrectly, your brain remembers. Then, when you are facing a deadly force threat and you respond with the wrong skill that’s burned into your neural pathways, guess what happens.

Learn the correct skill-sets and practice them perfectly. Perfect practice makes perfect!

### **The Interaction Between Tactics and Techniques**

#### *Integration for Powerful Self-Defense*

Tactics and techniques must work together for effective self-

defense. In the absence of tactics, techniques could be badly performed or put you in legal jeopardy.

However, superior tactics could backfire in real-world situations if ineffective or flawed techniques are used. The tactics must be complemented by the techniques and techniques must be complemented by effective tactics. It’s a reciprocal relationship.

#### *Possible Scenario*

Imagine you are responding to a home invasion. To protect the family, the tactical choice (what do I need to do) might be to secure a strong point and call 911.

Three techniques (how do I do this) required to respond effectively might include barricade the bedroom door, control fear, and have a firearm at the ready.

Every tactic you use affects the techniques used to support it. Every technique you use determines the effectiveness of your tactics. Thus, it is important to integrate tactics and techniques for effective self-defense combat.

#### *Challenges in Integrating Tactics and Techniques*

It’s possible for you to concentrate excessively on techniques by focusing primarily on

shooting skills. Conversely, emphasizing tactics without practicing technical skills can leave you ill-prepared for actual encounters. Your training should include tactics and techniques working together.

### **Training and Preparation**

#### *Importance of Comprehensive Training Programs*

Training programs should equally emphasize tactical thinking and technical proficiency. Instructors can create scenarios replicating real-life threats to provide comprehensive training.

Effective training increases the likelihood of you not only responding effectively in threatening situations, but doing so legally and ethically (see [Evolving From Flat-Range Training To Dynamic Training—Part 2](#) for a list of instructors who provide this kind of training).

#### *On-Going Learning and Practice*

On-going learning and practice to maintain firearms proficiency is very important and includes staying informed about new self-defense trends and tactics and reassessment of skills. After-action reviews of both simulated and real conflicts can provide critical insights for improvement.

## Conclusion

Having effective self-defense strategies supported by efficacious tactics and techniques is imperative for successful self-defense combat with firearms. Strategy and tactics provide the framework guiding your self-defense combat decisions. Techniques help you use your tactics effectively.

Through rigorous training and constant reassessment of your self-defense strategy, tactics, and techniques, you can enhance your ability to protect yourself and your loved ones effectively and legally.

## About the Author

Francis (Frank) Duffy is a veteran of the 6th and 5th U.S. Army Special Forces Groups (the Green Berets), a graduate of the Army Ranger School, and a Green Beret combat diver. He is also a certified executive protection specialist.

He is a certified instructor for the NRA (rifle and handgun instructor), Maryland State Police, and the United States Concealed Carry Association (USCCA). He is also a certified Washington, DC, concealed carry instructor.

He is also a member of the Board of Directors for Maryland Shall Issue, an all-volunteer, non-partisan organization dedicated to the

preservation and advancement of gun owners' rights in Maryland.

He is the co-founder and vice president of the Spartan Firearms Training Group, LLC. He can be contacted at 443-472-0216 or at [frank@spartanftg.com](mailto:frank@spartanftg.com).

Individuals who want to schedule a private, 1-on-1 firearms training session should contact Frank.

## About the Spartan Firearms Training Group

The Spartan Firearms Training Group, LLC, ([www.spartanftg.com](http://www.spartanftg.com)) is a Special Forces Veteran-Owned business formed in 2015. At the end of March, 2025, we entered into our 11th year of business and we have trained thousands of Maryland residents in a variety of ways:

- Concealed carry training
- Handgun Qualification License (HQL) training
- Emergency Casualty Care training
- Long distance precision shooting training
- Home Defense training
- Private, 1-on-1 firearms training
- Private group training

Our training calendar is found at [SFTG Calendar](#)

**YOU WILL FALL TO THE LEVEL OF YOUR TRAINING; NOT RISE TO THE LEVEL OF YOUR EXPECTATIONS WHEN FACING A LIFE-THREATENING EVENT. TRAIN THE WAY YOU FIGHT!**