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THE WAY OF IDF

Israeli-style carbine course
from MAKO DEFENSE.

BY TIMOTHY YAN // PHOTOS BY ISRAEL DEFENSE FORCES





Recently, I was offered the opportunity to attend an Israeli-style carbine course and evaluate a number of AR accessories in use by the Israeli Defense Force (IDF). Mako Defense provided the training. The Mako Group is the authorized North American importer of Israeli-made firearm accessories and optics from Fab Defense and Meprolight.

The IDF is largely a citizen army. While it has a core component of professionals—both officers and noncommissioned officers—the majority of the IDF is composed of conscripts and reservists. For the last 25 years, the IDF had been shifting emphasis from its armored corps and air force to an infantry-centric counter terrorism and CQB driven doctrine.

THE ISRAELI-STYLE AR

The AR I took to the Mako course featured a Bravo Company USA (BCM) lightweight 16-inch upper with mid-length gas-system and a matching BCM Mil-spec bolt carrier group.

For the course, I used a mix of Wolf Performance 55-grain steel-case ammunition and Black Hills 55-grain remanufactured ammo. There was never any issue.

Most IDF flattop M4s and M16s are using the A.R.M.S. No. 40 flip-up rear sight, but I would use a flip-up Troy Industries Battle Sight. I upgraded the handguard on my AR to a 10.4-inch Apex Machining low-profile modular free-float Gator Grip handguard. The slim diameter and the machined surface textures on the Apex tubular handguard makes it quite handy to use.

Most of the M4s and M16s in IDF service are still using the stock tubular handguard. Accessories such as forward grips, flashlights and bipods are either mounted directly to the cooling holes or by means of rail sections that attach to the handguards or side rails that mount to the conventional A-frame front sight. The IDF has started to upgrade some of those handguards to rail systems for better installation of accessories.



The IDF removes the front sling swivel from their M16s and M4s before their issuance. The standard IDF sling is in OD green or black and about two inches wide with plastic buckets attached on both ends to two shorter loop sections (Mako part number SL-1). The two ends of the sling are usually tied to the stock and either the front-sight base or a nylon band that wraps around the handguard and ties back into the same sleeve. Also included on the IDF sling is a small pocket for earplugs. The sling can be configured into single-, two- or three-point mode. The IDF is moving toward a single-point bungee sling with QD swivel attachment. For my own training, I decided to use a Spec.-Ops. Lonestar Rig single-point sling with a QD sling swivel.

Mako supplied the stock and pistol grip for my AR. Fab Defense manufactures both as the official AR replacement parts for the IDF. The available colors are black, OD green and Flat Dark Earth (FDE). The set I received from Mako is in FDE, but I found the color is closer to a coyote tan. The Mako recoil-reducing GL-Shock stock is an interesting design. I wouldn't call it lightweight, but it's quite robust for its size. There are multiple sling attachment points, including two QD sling swivel sockets with rotation limiters. A gasket-sealed storage compartment for two AA or a CR123 battery is located behind the recoil pad.

The stock has a number of special features. Of note are the patented tension tabs that allow it to be used on either a Mil-Spec or commercial-size buffer tube. While the top of the stock provides sufficient cheek support, there's an optional adjustable cheek riser that has cutout clearance for using the stock AR charging handle. Additionally, there are two recoil-reduction features (purposely designed for use with Israeli fighting postures) that place the butt of the rifle on the operator's chest instead of the shoulder socket, as seen in U.S. military training. The large rubber recoil pad has an anti-slip pattern that reminds me of boot soles. The rubber recoil pad was very comfortable, and it did a good job of keeping the stock in place during the course.

The stock features an additional built-in recoil buffer system that works by the use of a movable buffer tube index pin and a very stiff



spring. During regular weapons handling, the stiff spring keeps the Mako stock feeling like a normal stock assembly. When the weapon is fired, the recoil produces enough pressure to compress the stiff spring in the built-in buffer system. The process helps dampen peak recoil, while the large rubber recoil pad at the rear of the Mako stock absorbs part of the recoil energy.

Initially, I wasn't impressed by the Mako AG-43 pistol grip. It's rather thick with finger grooves. But after two days of intense training, my firing hand didn't experience any cramping from holding the rifle all day. The top of the AG-43 has a contoured extended beavertail for fully supporting the web of the hand. There's an internal storage for two batteries behind the hinged baseplate. The backstrap is made thicker for supporting one-hand holding of the weapon.

Mako also provided me a Meprolight M21 reflex sight. The M21 is the primary reflex sight in use by the IDF on their M4s, M16s and Tavor rifles. It was designed as a robust always-on

optic for IDF infantrymen. The version I used has the illuminated "X" reticle, but the M21 is also available with the 16 MOA triangle reticle. The most common IDF M21 reticles are the plain dot and the bullseye (a dot inside of a circle). The M21 is powered by a fiber optic light collector during daylight and tritium at lowlight. Mako warranties the tritium lamp brightness for 10 years. I was told it typically maintains the same brightness for up to 14 years before the tritium reaches its half-life. The raw tritium comes from the same Swiss company that also supplies Trijicon. Due to the modular design of the M21, the tritium illumination unit is replaceable by factory service. The M21 features dual adjustable QD levers, and the Mil-Spec Picatinny rail mount that is factory calibrated to the sight.

I found the orange-color reticle works fine in daylight in both desert and foliage environments, and it is more than adequate in darkness. Just as importantly, the reticle is very sharp without booming. However, the illumination is barely visible in the low interior lighting of a house. According to the Mako instructor, in situations where the fiber optic does not collect enough light or the tritium lamp is not bright enough, if you can see the target through the objective lens tube, you will hit it at close range.

During the zeroing process at this course, my M21 sample was one inch to the right and $\frac{3}{4}$ inch low at 30 yards with the factory zero. I adjusted.

Other combat optics in use by the IDF are the MARS, MOR, Trijicon ACOG, magnifier and the reflex sight for grenade launcher. The MARS is a combination of a battery-powered reflex sight and combo visible and IR laser designators. It's now being supplemented by the new Meprolight MOR sight, which also added fiber optic for tri-powered illumination. The Trijicon ACOG is usually issued to officers, NCOs or those in more senior positions. The designated marksmen in the unit also use the ACOG. The typical DMR in service with the IDF is issued a standard M16 or M4 outfitted with an ACOG and a Harris bipod (or a variant of the Mako T-Pod). Some of the rifles in service with reflex sights are also supplemented with a Trijicon magnifier. The new Meprolight grenade launcher

The IDF issues the MARS, MOR, Meprolight M21, as well as the Trijicon ACOG. Typically, the ACOG is issued to officers and NCOs in leadership positions.



reflex sight is much like a smaller version of the M21 with range scales and drift compensation. It's also dual illuminated (like the M21) by tritium and fiber optic. Typically, it mounts behind the M21 or MARS on a flattop.

The oddest-looking part of the Israeli-style layout is the dual-magazine setup. It's crudely made by duct taping two 30-round STANAG magazines with a 550-cord tether. Not visible from outside is the use of an empty cartridge to separate the two magazines apart at an angle. The magazines are also placed in an offset to clear the ejection port. The 550 cord tethers dual-magazines to a Velcro sport watchband on the handguard. The idea behind the setup is that the shooter would have 60 rounds at the ready. It functions to allow a quick magazine change with the second magazine right next to the first. The cord tether keeps the magazines attached to the rifle in the event of the magazine being accidentally dropped during a magazine change or when clearing a jam. All the user needs to do is grab the cord and follow it to the dangling mag. During the course, everyone, including the instructor, used this setup to recover dropped magazines. The Velcro allows the detachment of the tether cord so that the empty dual-magazine can be exchanged for a new one. If the duct tape is too unseemly, Mako sells a polymer premade staggered magazine coupler (part no. TZ-M4).

The IDF magazine setup—with two magazines duct taped to one other and then tethered with 550 cord to a Velcro wristband that's attached to the handguard—is quite unusual. However, it does provide the soldier with magazine retention in the case of a fumbled mag swap or in the event a mag drops while clearing a malfunction.



THE MAKO CARBINE COURSE

The Mako carbine course I attended was in Alaska. The training site is located an hour's drive north of Anchorage in the Mat-Su Valley, named after the Matanuska and Susitna rivers, with the snowcapped Talkeetna Mountain as the backdrop.

Garret Machine, a former Israeli special forces operator, was the instructor. The course support came from Mako's Dylan Saunders, a former U.S. Army cavalry scout. The military was well represented among the students by a senior NCO from the U.S. Coast Guard, a U.S. Army Blackhawk pilot and an enlisted U.S. Air Force airman. There were also two law enforcement officers from the Anchorage area.

Range safety was a high priority during the course. In the dry-practice period, every AR had a barrel plug installed. It's the same bright orange polymer rod safety device used by the IDF for training. Once it is installed through the barrel bore and chamber, there's no chance that a rifle could be loaded. The front of the plug protrudes out of the barrel to indicate each rifle was in safe status.

The Israeli method of clearing the AR is interesting. First, face a safe direction, then kneel down. Remove the magazine and physically inspect the magazine well. Charge the weapon twice and check the chamber. Release the bolt, point the rifle toward a safe direction again and pull the trigger. Charge the rifle again, put the selector to safe, close the ejection port cover and stand up to indicate it has been cleared.

The first thing I noticed when the drills started was the aggressiveness in the Israeli fighting method. Movement is constantly forward, closing distance to the target whenever possible. The rifle is always pointed toward the threat and visual contact with the target is maintained at all times. The drills focus on fast movement and the use of any means necessary to neutralize the threat. These drills reminded me of the fighting ethos instilled in U.S. Marines.

All drills start in the ready position, which is standing with feet shoulder width apart. The rifle points forward with the barrel parallel to the ground and held up using only one hand. On command, you transition to the body position by kicking

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the non-dominant foot forward and turning the support foot slightly to form a 45-degree stance. The support hand goes onto the handguard or forward grip. Bring the stock up into the chest and raise the rifle just below the line of sight. On command, point the rifle to the target and pull the stock into the chest. Lock down the rifle with five points of contact: the trigger hand, the support hand, forearm touch on the magazine, stock on the chest and cheek on the stock. The rifle is now ready to fire.


The most interesting drill occurred during an evening session for law enforcement and military personnel only. It was a reaction drill for a suicide bomber. When searching a terrorist suspect, the first team member to spot a bomb vest or explosive device on the suspect's body immediately fires two shots into the head to instantly neutralize the terrorist. It is designed to prevent the terrorist from reaching for a bomb switch. Immediately after the two shots are fired, the team member shouts "bomb" so the others will be made aware of the reason for the shots and to take evasive action from the potential blast area.

There were two other Israeli techniques that I found interesting. The first is the

stomp-stop technique. It's used for slowing down to a stop from a fast sprint without losing balance. It works by changing the footwork from fast running steps into a series of smaller shuffling steps. Just before coming to a complete stop, reenter into the body position and ready to fire.


There was no weak-side shooting in the Mako course because there's no need for it in the Israeli method. From my experience, using the rifle on the weak-side is easy to learn. However, aiming with the nondominant eye and trying to hit with precision is a different issue. The Israeli technique for covering the opposite side in CQB around a barrier such as a wall is by turning the hip in, elbow down and carefully leaning slightly over with the upper body while keeping the lower body still behind cover. All this is done without taking the rifle off the chest on the dominant side.





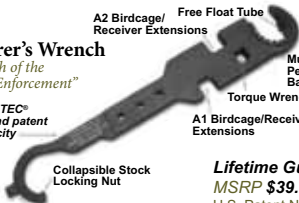



The Israeli techniques and gear configurations are vastly different than the way I was trained in the Marines. However, all of the IDF techniques have been combat proven and were specially developed for its national defense and tailored to its specific needs. I attended the Mako course with an open mind and took a lot away. **AR-15**



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