

Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu: The Future of Policing

By Chief Dan Flynn

Any serious discussion of the need for police reform or improvement ultimately boils down to police use of force. While few doubt that the police will always need to subdue combative people, i.e., criminals trying to escape, excited individuals high on drugs or alcohol, and mentally/behaviorally ill individuals suffering psychotic episodes; the American public has little appetite for watching images of police officers striking, kicking or even using profanity! In fact, many average citizens see police use of force as **lawful, but awful**.

Traditional police use of force tactics basically prescribe justified ways for the police to beat combatants into submission using pain compliance, striking, and blunt force techniques that never look good; particularly on camera or video. Thus, for those responsible for police policy and training, who concede that the police need a better way to overcome combative active resistance, there is a growing interest in Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu.

Jiu-Jitsu is a Japanese term that translates into “gentle art.” Relying on self-disciplined leverage, weight and special control tactics to subdue combative suspects without beating them into submission. Whereas traditional police use of force techniques rely on striking and the use of wrist and arm locks, Jiu-Jitsu relies on leveraging the officer’s body weight to control the combatant’s torso and hips. It uses neither boxing nor wrestling techniques, but rather weight and leverage control techniques to take someone to the ground and control them once they are on the ground without using blunt force or striking them. It also teaches the officer techniques for escaping the clutches of an attacker, avoiding being struck themselves, and using space to his/her advantage.

One of the goals law enforcement has been striving to achieve by training officers in crisis intervention/de-escalation techniques has been to reduce the number of physical struggles officers engage in to take excited suspects into custody. It follows that Ju-Jitsu has a similar goal of reducing violent action officers need to employ to subdue suspects when a physical encounter is unavoidable. In this regard, it is also noteworthy that officers who receive and utilize Ju-Jitsu training report that it increases their self-confidence and personal calmness when they are confronted with the need to use physical force.

In the decades of the evolution of police use of force, serious police policy makers and trainers have been striving to find better methods for subduing combatants using less violence and brutality. Over time, height and size requirements for officers, blackjacks, batons, and large multi-battery flashlights have given way to more effective and less injurious electronic weapons. Hand to hand combat solutions are also being reduced by crisis intervention and de-escalation training, but the need to go hands-on will never go away completely. Indeed, the vital work of policing is not changing, but the public perceptions of it are, as they have been for decades.

As emerging police leaders confront the challenges of change, we need to look for opportunities to improve in terms that are palatable to all. Considering the feasibility of incorporating and training in the application of martial arts, like Jiu-Jitsu, is an idea whose time has come.