PUSH OR HOLD: A few thoughts on Dynamic Entries…

With the rash of officer deaths over the last few months, I feel compelled to address the issue on what situations I recommend to use dynamic tactics. I have been teaching Advanced Hostage Rescue and Active Shooter classes for many years now and still press the need for rapid and controlled dynamic action during these situations.

The problem I see is that many agencies are using these techniques when they are not needed and innocent loss of life does not hang in the balance. Many young officers ready for the fight should learn to channelize their aggression and push the fight during active shooter/hostage rescue scenarios and not automatically go dynamic on warrants and barricaded persons, where other options are available.

I have asked a friend and experienced law enforcement officer to help me write this article and to help me understand the rules you live by. I can show you many ways to solve tactical problems, but I need the guidance, wisdom and experience of others to help put together a simple and easy to understand paper that helps outline when to push and when to use other options.

To separate thoughts, I will be writing in black font while Pete will be writing in blue.

In general:

- **Hostage Rescue:** Push/Controlled Push
- **Active Shooter:** Push
- **Officer Down:** Push
- **HR Arrest Warrant:** Dynamic and Pin
- **HR Search Warrant:** Dynamic and Pin
- **Barricaded Person:** Contain, Isolate, Evacuate, Communicate, Neutralize

HR Arrest or HR Search Warrants are two different things. Teams can be dynamic in an arrest warrant even if we surround call out / pin the subject. HR search warrants may cause particular legal issues depending on code of criminal procedures within a team’s jurisdiction.
HOSTAGE RESCUE, ACTIVE SHOOTER, OFFICER DOWN: TIME TO PUSH

We have learned that during hostage rescue operations we need to push the fight to get between the suspect(s) and the hostages as rapidly as possible. I still believe this to be true. I also added officer down as an acceptable scenario to push the fight. I believe officer recovery is as justified as recovering a wounded hostage, even if it means attacking and neutralizing the offender to support recovery attempts. In my view, this is an active shooter/hostage rescue because the offender has the officer under direct weapons fire and without immediate medical aid, the officer will most certainly die.

SWAT team members have an obligation to ensure that all officers on their department understand the priority of life as put by Ron McCarthy:

- Hostages
- Innocent Citizens
- Officers
- Suspect(s)

Therefore in an officer down scenario we must push the fight to rescue the down officer.

HIGH RISK WARRANTS: DYNAMIC AND THEN HOLD, CONTAIN OR CONTROLLED ENTRY

Older more experienced officers and leaders should educate young officers about hazards of pushing a gun fight in enclosed and tight spaces. In general, many of the people involved can get shot. The suspect has the advantage of generally knowing the area and the choke points. They have already walked the ground and planned their attack physically and in their minds. No amount of training can put you on the same preparedness as the suspect. So why push the fight and engage them on their terms?

Most of the time, egos make us do it. The other reason is complacency, getting locked into the same comfortable routine because no one has shot at us for a year or two; or assuming past luck equates to sound tactics. In my humble opinion ... Luck is not a skill set.

It is rumored that some special ops folks were trying to use hostage rescue techniques on high risk targets (warrants) and took many casualties because the bad guys were waiting for them or had set them up. Tactics had to change. It is not worth losing one officer to a bad guy or series
of bad guys who are going to fight and are determined to die. We can make them die, but on our terms and our choice of location.

Many agencies still push the fight and are generally lucky. Some are not. The most recent case in point is the two officers who died in Oakland California. No matter the circumstances surrounding our future raid, we must be emotionally neutral during our planning process. We must look at what is safe, smart and efficient when we take down the person/target.

The leaders of the team must know the members of their team and do the right thing. Upper management must and should rely on the TLs to make the right decision. Team commanders and TLs have the duty to be honest and have the courage to advise upper management on the condition of their team and all members. Remaining emotionally neutral has to be the priority of the senior leadership, team commanders and TLs. This is a fine line that the leadership is walking. Making a decision to activate a mutual aid agreement to have another team execute the HR arrest warrant because leadership would rather not “handle the dangerous warrant” is wrong on all levels.

Requesting mutual aid so another team will execute the same warrant because the leadership has the pulse of the their team and it is the right thing to do due to the lack of emotional neutrality is the right thing to do. Obviously, I am making the assumption that the “leader” in the position to make these difficult decisions is the right person for the job and not some “leader” put in the position for political expediency or based on a good ole boy appointment. Typically these types cower from these types of decisions and would rather make it go away by letting someone else do their job to the point they would rather rely on another organization to do their team’s work. This is what I refer to as the Pontius Pilate phenomenon of washing their hands on difficult decisions.

A leader must also understand what a decision like this can do to their team. The team may resent the fact that the leadership questions their fitness for duty, but a leader who has earned the respect of their team must be able and willing to explain their decision and a “because I said so” will not suffice.

When a department invokes the mutual aid, it should allow their team to participate in some facet of the operation. If two teams are autonomous then this is not the time or place to intermingle team members, but if teams have regularly trained in the past and have worked together, not talking about multi-jurisdictional teams, there may be a role that an “affect team” may play during the execution of a warrant.

First, we must control the venue where we take the person down. It can be during a traffic stop, in a parking lot, at their place of employment, etc. One of the common errors made by
departments, is when they use patrol officers or detectives of the unit who is handling the case to take down a high risk individual away for the subject’s house or apartment. Too many times it is the structure that is considered the high risk due to the obstacles in place at the structure and not the subjects. If the individual is a high risk in the structure, they are high risk outside too. SWAT team should be the ones taking down the subject regardless of the venue. We control the potential battlefield. More simply put, where would we want to fight this individual(s), should a gunfight start? We have the ability to choose the location and this is an important safety issue.

If we push a fight involving violent criminal tight apartment complex, with an individual who will probably fight to the death and has the weapons at his disposal, we are responsible for some of the possible negative outcomes. In this environment, where the walls are made of drywall and wood, we risk endangering all the other tenants unnecessarily. If innocents are injured during the ensuing raid and gun battle, we are partly to blame. We need to be smarter than this.

Listed below are a few scenarios and possible solutions that may enhance your chances of survival and keep the community a bit safer:

VIOLENT CRIMINAL: GUNS/Explosives – HR Arrest Warrant

- Alternate take-down location (Ruse, Traffic, etc.)
- Surround/Breach and Hold/Call out
- Employ Chemical Agents to force him out to you/ Less Lethal option at hand (40mm Exact offer the extended reach out and touch capability).
- Limited Penetration
- Push to Contact and Contain

The reason I would go in this order (not set fast rules of priority, TLs still have to make some tactical decisions as these situation are dynamic). I prefer the Surround/Breach and Hold/Call out in the 2nd choice before limited penetration as limited penetration can come to mean different things to various teams. Some teams may think limited penetration only at the breach points and others as porting windows. I don’t like porting windows as a rule in these cases for the reason that if the team decides to introduce chemical agents, the structure is vented and the chemical agents will escape and have minimal or no effect on the subject. The down side to not porting windows is the subject can move about the structure undetected by the containment elements or the sniper/observer elements.

Generally speaking if there is Intel indicating the suspect is alone or innocent persons are not being held against their will, this should be a very short call. After the Surround/Breach and Hold/Call out with a refusal to exit by the subject the team should not wait a long period of time,
5-10 minutes max. For several reasons, to interrupt the OODA loop and we don’t want to drag this out. Why should the innocent citizens that live and work around this subject be put out from their neighborhood and increase the potential that one of them may be injured or killed?

**DOPE – HR Search Warrant**

- Alternate take-down location (Ruse, Traffic, etc.)
- Limited Penetration
- Surround/Call out

This is a dilemma that upper management, team commanders, and TLs have to work through. Should we conduct the HR Search Warrant to obtain the evidence needed to prosecute the subject and possibly get officers injured or do you throw our hands up and allow these dangerous subjects the ability to continue their criminal enterprise? This is where SWAT teams must work smartly and have sound tactics as the community expects their department to apprehend these subjects.

Depending on a department’s jurisdiction, their code of criminal procedures will dictate how search warrants are planned and executed. Narcotics units typically use CI’s to make an introduction of a UC or the CI will make controlled buys. As a wise detective from a West Texas department put it “would you rather a CI make the buy so a UC is not forced to ingest the narcotic to prove they are not an undercover officer thus putting them at risk? Or would you rather use a CI to make some purchases on high risk targets?” In conducting a controlled delivery it now becomes imperative that when the targeted structure of the search warrant is in the control of high-risk subjects, the SWAT team must now use dynamic tactics to short circuit the subject’s OODA loop.

When determining the dynamic tactics the team will use; teams should be careful not to become complacent and use a cookie cutter approach to all search warrants. In other words, don’t always use the front door as your primary entry point for all warrants. Use dual breaches, breach and delay with window porting to cover as much as of the structure as possible. I am a firm believer in the tactics where the subject cannot determine where the domination is coming from. Breach and hold, breach and delay, NFDs, window porting and the use of area denial tactics are all live saving tools in the SWAT kit bag.

Wanton destruction of any property is unacceptable, but a SWAT commander and/or TL must be able to articulate to upper management and their legal department the reason why all windows were breached. Simply put, this is a tried and proven tactic that saves lives and prevents shootings.
WARRANT/UNK RESPONSE:

- Alternate take-down location (Ruse, Traffic, etc.)
- Surround/Breach and Hold/Call out
- Limited Penetration

SUICIDE BY COP

This is a difficult situation for any officer to be in. The subject will always dictate the amount of force used against them. Officers should limit their exposure so as to prevent the subject from dying in their twisted mind set in a blaze of glory. We all understand the uselessness of an officer being injured or kill in one of these situations.

- Surround/Breach and Hold/Call out
- Chemical Agent: force him out to you/ Less Lethal option at hand (40mm Exact offer the extended reach out and touch capability).
- Limited Penetration
- Allow them die at your tactical advantage

BARRICADED PERSONS:

Contain, Isolate, Evacuate, Communicate, Neutralize

Do not push the fight on a Barricaded Person. First, generally they know and own the ground; the advantage goes to the hunted not the hunter in these situations. So a SWAT team must be smart and tactically sound to regain the advantage. Contain them to the area and then isolate them in target. Attempt to negotiate if feasible and then use the tools listed below to neutralize.

Contain them to a house or residence.
Isolate them to a particular room if possible.
Evacuate innocent civilians within small arms range of the suspect. Do this using shields, armor, etc.
Communicate if feasible with the suspect.
Neutralize the suspect by taking him into custody or if necessary and the situation dictates, taking his life.

TACTICS: MULTI-BREACH POINTS, LIMITED PENETRATION AND CONTAINMENT
When teaching dynamic assault planning, I teach students five ways to breach a door or entry point:

- Breach and Hold
- Breach and enter one room
- Breach and Delay (3-5 seconds)
- Breach and Push to Link-up
- Breach and Pull Back

Many of my techniques can be used on High Risk Warrants without penetrating the target. You can basically plan it as a hostage rescue and then stop once you breach. Generally you can lock down a target using windows and doors and “own” 90% of it with your first coordinated breach.

The odds are you have the suspect under visual and weapon control and their actions dictate whether they live or die. Using this technique, you have short circuited and blindsided their OODA loop. In the 10% case you do not have the suspect in an area you control, you now have denied them movement or access to any other part of the target.

**POSSIBLE HIGH RISK WARRANT SEQUENCE**

I feel that departments and tactical teams should develop a phased sequence for executing high-risk warrants to enhance the survival of its team members. Here is one possible solution.

- **DYNAMIC**
- **SLOW DYNAMIC**
- **SLOW METHODICAL**

**DYNAMIC-HR WARRANT**

- 15 SECOND RULE
- MULTI-BREACH POINTS
- SLOW DOWN

I believe it is still in our best interest to hit a target with Speed, Surprise and Violence of Action. *You can use Speed, Surprise and Violence of Action even with a surround/breach and hold/callout tactic.* This is best accomplished by attacking multi-breach points, both windows and doors and sometimes diversions at the same time or within seconds of each other. Our goal is to disorientate the suspect and exploit their confused state. Generally it is agreed upon that this lasts around 15 seconds. Once 15 seconds is reached and we have not completely secured the target, we go Slow Dynamic.
SLOW DYNAMIC
- LOSS OF MOMENTUM
- GUNFIRE(YOURS/BAD GUY)
- BANGS AND PUSH
- BANGS/PIE AND THEN OCCUPY

We must regain the momentum or prepare for more gunfire. Team Leaders will have to make a
decision on whether to flash bang and push dynamically or to flash bang and pie rooms prior to
entry. If one of your teams has shot the suspect, there is no problem in pushing forward. If the
bad guy has shot at you and retreated, you probably want to go to Slow Methodical. Pinning him
in a specific area allows for possible assaults and/or diversions from team members on
containment.

SLOW METHODICAL
- AGGRESSIVE GUNFIRE(FROM BAD GUY)
- PULL BACK ONE ROOM
- SHIELD UP
- POLE CAMS/CAMERA BALLS/ROBOTS
- GAS/SMOKE/WINDOW BANG
- EXPLOSIVE BREACH/BANGPOLES

If the suspect is shot and we lose visual or they send a heavy volume of fire our way, we need to
take decisive action. Since it is not wise to push into the fire, we should pull back one room and
cover from the door way. This way we have a series of walls providing limited protection and it
is easy to cover a doorway as it is a choke point. Chemical agents from a containment team can
be introduced in the suspect location as an area denial method and force him to the team. This
must be trained to and communication is a must. What limits the suspect’s vision with smoke and
gas will also limit visibility to the team. Let the suspect try and fight his way through your choke
point instead of you fighting through his.

OTHER TOOLS/OPTIONS:

Time of Day

This is a powerful tool to the one that uses it to their advantage. Get with the case detective,
Intel section, or team members to establish sleep cycle and migration habits. Hit the subject
when you are well rested and he is “out of it” whether it is due to sleep deprivation or high on
drugs/alcohol.
**SCOUTING/RECON (preplanned warrants)**

Don’t rule out working in the open. During one of my recons that I was assigned to do as a young SWAT officer, I could not get good angles to obtain the pictures I needed. I called up 2 of my other SWAT officers asked them to get into standard police uniform, had some snap shots photos of kids and we went door to door asking if citizens on that block had seen these “missing kids”. The target opened the door and this allowed us to see the locks and most of the floor plan from the front door. From there we continued the ruse by finishing the block looking for the “kids”.

**CRISIS NEGOCIATORS**

If your SWAT team officers are not your department’s negotiators then bring some of your department’s CNT members along on pre planned warrants. Should a warrant turn to a barricade or the subject takes his family or others in the house hostage you are now under a new set of procedures and tactics. One of these tactics may be to negotiate if you can’t push through in a hostage rescue.

If it is a barricade subject your TL or CNT member can call out to the subject and let them know their safety can only be guaranteed if they come out immediately (don’t give them a time limit, but you know the clock is ticking for them to come out. If SWAT team members are observing the subject fortifying the structure then go to alternate means to push the subject out to you... gas, port windows, flash bangs to disrupt their OODA loop).

**SHIELDS**

It is said that I do not like shields. This is not true. I do not like them when pushing in hostage rescue situations if it slows down officers or slows shooting down or degrades their accuracy. I also think shields put officers in a defensive mindset versus offensive unless the officer practices to use them offensively. Offensive, swift action is needed for Hostage Rescue operations. Shields have a tendency to degrade or slow down discrimination due to the reduced visual window the operator must use. I think shields are great and have their time and place. High Risk Warrants and locking down a target are one such example.

First, shields should be used during movement to protect elements and offer them hasty protection until better hard cover can be found. Next, pistol shields can stop rifle bullets if used in conjunction with hard cover. Why just use the shield as a stand-alone device when you can use it behind hard cover? A door jam is a prime example. Door jams by themselves have degraded many bullets in the past and not allow officers rifle bullets to contact the suspect
effectively. Use this cover to take the energy out of the bullets so when they hit the shield, the bullets are deformed, flat or broken up with a greater surface area.

If you don’t bring shields, they will not get to your target area and be there when you need them. You can bring them to your breach point and then drop them there for easy recovery. Also, learn to shoot using the shield as a single shooter with a handgun and with a cover officer using a rifle. Bring it to the flat range and practice with it. It is the only way you will become proficient and increase your strength and stamina.

Finally, I know teams that successfully employ shields and the shield have saved many of their officers from being struck by gunfire. The difference is they routinely train with shields and conduct live fire training with them. They make them work offensively through range fire and paint marking training scenarios.

*Never use a shield as a crutch to replace poor tactics and believe the shield is the solution to poor leadership, poor team member selection, poor training and/or poor procedures/policies.*

**ARMORED VEHICLES**

Armor is great. I have used armor to get me to the outside of a target, to a breach point and also inside a target (through walls and gates). Use it every chance you get. Use it to recover downed officers, create breach points, as a distraction and to draw fire. Yes, draw fire. This way you can pinpoint where the bad guy is and take more of his ground away or concentrate fire on him. Use it to deliver gas. Use it to protect your officers and keep them rested and cool or warm as the weather dictates. Use armor to blind the suspect with lights that are mounted on your vehicles. Use it to pin the suspect’s vehicle or to keep the suspect from accessing it (or disable it). *The PA incident and others around the country have proven the worth of every team having access to at least one armored vehicle. The saving of one officer’s or civilian’s life far outweighs the expense to a department’s budget. Most departments can fund these vehicles through grants. There is no excuse for upper management not to make one of these a priority purchase.*

**GAS/SMOKE**

Use gas to drive suspects out, degrade their fighting capability and find out where they are. In the event they have a protective mask and use it, you still degrade their capability to fight. *Use gas to push him to a room or portion the structure that is most advantageous to your team.*
POWER/LIGHTS

Cut their power and make them uncomfortable. Flood them light. *Don’t forget to cut the gas supply too. This makes it uncomfortable to the subject in the cold environments and denies them the ability to flood the structure with natural gas or propane.*

WATER

High pressure hoses can knock out windows and curtains, draw fire and create hypothermia in suspects in cold weather climates. Why should the suspect be dry and toasty when you are not? *Most FD will not let LE use their hoses due to their policies. It is a public image thing since the 60s and the hoses were used on the civil right protestors. If a department sees a need for this tactic, one should consider obtaining their own method of deploying high-pressure water supplies.*

LESS LETHAL

37/40 mm/Taser/Bean Bag: Have it available or you will not use it.

DRAWING FIRE AND INDUCING A SUSPECT(S) TO SHOOT AT YOU

Do this in controlled circumstances. A simple hunting rifle can penetrate several buildings. Before creating a gunfight, ensure that you have evacuated any civilians that might be subject to this fire. You have a duty and responsibility to safeguard them.

Again, think about what will happen if the subject starts shooting when you conduct a dynamic assault. The entire neighborhood could be at risk. If this happens and innocent civilians are trapped in their homes and exposed to gunfire, this almost becomes an active shooter type scenario. If they are under direct fire of the suspect’s weapons and control, they are hostages and their lives are in danger.

As for this issue, I am still torn. If an agency pushes a fight on someone in a location that endangers innocent civilians, you become responsible for those civilians. Plan in advance on how you are going to evacuate or safeguard them if the situation goes bad.

CONCLUSION:

- Review your policy/criteria for conducting HR warrants, BP’s, Search Warrants.
- Do not rescue dope or get people killed for it. If the American people, our legal and judicial systems are not serious about it, don’t get your people killed for it. During the
planning phase, ask yourself, “is it worth pushing a close in gunfight for this mission and jeopardizing lives.” Develop other solutions to effect the arrest.

- Develop a simple template plan for when things go bad.
- Bring the tools you need for the fight or they will not get there when you need them.

About the Author
Paul R. Howe is a 20-year veteran and former Special Operations soldier and instructor. He owns Combat Shooting and Tactics (CSAT), where he consults with, trains and evaluates law enforcement and government agencies in technical and tactical techniques throughout the special operations spectrum. See combatshootingandtactics.com for details.

Peter F. Pacillas currently serves a West Texas police department. His 24 years of experience has included 12 ½ years on the SWAT team as an operator, TL and assistant team commander. He currently holds the rank of assistant chief over the department’s training division and specialty teams.