

## Combatives: Military Martial Arts

Many martial arts are derived from military combatives; the study of hand-to-hand combat in warfare. After all, the term "martial art" means "art of warfare." For example, the sport of [judo](#) comes from [jujitsu](#), which comes from samurai grappling, which was part of the training Japanese warriors received as preparation for battle.

Many weapon-oriented arts, such as [iaido](#), [kendo](#), [kyudo](#), and [naginata-do](#), originated in schools of martial techniques for warriors. These weapons, the sword, bow and arrow, and pole arm, were the assault rifles and machine guns of their time--the default weapons of military fighters--and as such were key components in combat training.

Today, most military personnel are trained in battlefield-expedient combatives; namely, the techniques that would be most effective to stop or kill an enemy fighter. As such, a look at the training programs of the different martial arts branches turns up techniques from striking arts, like [karate](#) and [kung fu](#), and grappling arts, like jujitsu.

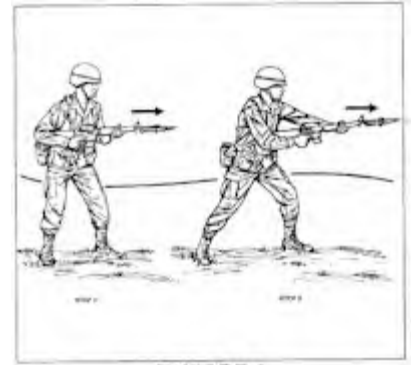
For example, the U.S. Army's Combatives program includes striking, grappling, knife, and bayonet techniques.

Striking techniques include basic punch/kick techniques, as in sport martial arts like karate or [tae kwon do](#), but emphasize combat-oriented striking like knee and elbow strikes.



Many grappling techniques are familiar to sport grapplers, such as this simple standing armbar.

Other techniques are unique to military situations--most notably bayonet usage and sentry removal.



Most nations emphasize well-rounded, effectiveness-oriented martial arts techniques in their military training. Several recently-developed martial arts are derived from modern military combat training:

- Krav Maga (Israel)
- ROSS and SAMBO (Russia)
- San Shou (China)
- Tukong Moosul (South Korea)

We say "recently-developed" here because all of these arts came about in the past few decades, unlike most other martial arts that have centuries of history behind them.

## Krav Maga

Krav Maga is the official combat art of the Israeli military forces. Krav Maga originated in the 1940's while Israel was still under British rule, and ordinary citizens were not permitted to own weapons. Unarmed combat skills were developed for self-defense. (Note the similarity to the beginnings of Okinawan [karate](#)). The words "*krav maga*" translate to "contact combat" in Hebrew.

Imi Lichenfield, founder of the art, became Chief Instructor of hand-to-hand combat and physical fitness for the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) in the late 1940s. Beginning with special forces units like the Haganah, Palmach, and Palyam, Krav Maga became the official combatives training for all military personnel and Israeli police and security forces. Lichenfield retired from the IDF in 1964 and began teaching Krav Maga to civilians.

Krav Maga, like the other military-oriented arts described in this article, is very combat-oriented. There are no kata or forms, or set combinations as reactions to attacks. Instead, the art emphasizes improvisation using a core set of techniques--since attacks don't always occur in the same manner (e.g. body position, speed, distance), reaction-based responses rather than rote practice was thought best. Many techniques originated in [boxing](#) and [wrestling](#), not surprising given the background of the founder. Other techniques are from [jujitsu](#) and karate. However, most techniques seem adapted for modern battlefield combat, much as in the other military-oriented systems.

Because of the art's combat-orientation, there are no competitions or tournaments in Krav Maga. Like other arts, Krav Maga issues colored belts to denote higher levels of expertise.

## ROSS and SAMBO

ROSS and SAMBO are often described in the same breath, as they share many similarities. Both are acronyms: ROSS standing for *Rossiyskaya Otechestvennaya Sistema Samozashchity* (Russian Native System of Self-defense), and SAMBO standing for *SAMozashchita Bez Oruzhiya* (Self-defense Without Weapons). Both, as you might have guessed from the acronyms, originated in Russia. And since we're talking about military martial arts here, both have roots in the Russian military, with ROSS taught to the Spetsnaz Special Operations units (similar to the [US Green Berets](#) or UK Special Air Service), and SAMBO used during World War II by soldiers on the Russian front.

SAMBO is the older of the two, originating in the 1930's as a collection of the different wrestling styles of the nations comprising the former USSR. It's said that the art evolved with the addition of street-savvy techniques known only by criminals--prisoners were released from prison to fight on the front lines, and passed along their combat knowledge to their fellow soldiers.

ROSS is a more recent development, developed by General Alexander Ivanovich Retuinskih of the Cossack Military. In 1991, ROSS was recognized by the Russian Olympic Committee as the representative Russian Martial Art.

How are ROSS and SAMBO connected? ROSS seems to incorporate SAMBO as part of its technique repertoire, and adds other techniques derived from traditional Russian fist fighting and modern biomechanics. SAMBO is mostly seen as the third style of international [wrestling](#) competition--this "sport sambo" looks much like [judo](#) but lacks chokes. It's "combat-flavor," though, is more like other military combative programs, emphasizing neutralizing the enemy rather than scoring points.

## San Shou

### *San Shou shi Wushu de Jinghua (San Shou is the Quintessence of Wushu)*

The [Chinese](#) saying "San Shou is the Quintessence of Wushu" describes the art perfectly. San shou is the full-contact fighting art of modern wushu. In the 1960's, the Chinese government brought together the masters of [kung fu](#) from all over China to define a standardized martial system. The resulting art became the standard combatives training for the Chinese military and police forces.

San shou, therefore, incorporates all the best techniques of wushu and kung fu, including kicks, hand strikes, grappling, and throws.

Most san shou competitions look like [kickboxing](#): spectators usually watch two competitors fight as in a kickboxing match, except that the fighters get to use takedowns. In san shou competition, fighters can win by scoring points, knocking out their opponent, or by forcing their opponent out of the ring--similar to [sumo](#) wrestling, [WWF SmackDown](#), or [Virtua Fighter](#) in that regard. Often, san shou matches are fought on a raised platform known as the "*lei tai*"--making knocking your opponent out of the ring a ballistic event. While this might sound just like other mixed martial arts events, like the [Ultimate Fighting Championships](#), there are some limitations: knee, elbow, and head butt strikes, and joint locks and chokes, are forbidden.

Military san shou doesn't have such restrictions. Like the division between sport [sambo](#) and combat sambo, military san shou incorporates the techniques of sport san shou and emphasizes neutralizing the enemy. As with [krav maga](#), there are no forms, or set sequences of techniques--just pure hand-to-hand combat.

## Tukong Moosul

Tukong moosul takes its name from the elite *Tu Kong* (Special Combat) commando unit of the South Korean Army. As with the other military martial arts described in this article, the originators of tukong moosul strived to take the best of other martial arts and evolve the techniques into combat-oriented, effective training. Tukong incorporates techniques from other Korean arts like [tae kwon do](#) and [hapkido](#), as well as [judo](#) and [kung fu](#).

General Chang K. Oe, commander of the Tu Kong unit, enlisted Won Ik Yi from army headquarters and several top fighters from within the Tu Kong unit to develop the training. Won Ik Yi was trained in Shaolin-style martial arts as a child and incorporated many [kung fu](#) techniques in the original tukong moosul curriculum. Others, including Tukong Moosul Association Grandmaster In Ki Kim, one of the Tu Kong unit masters, have added techniques in more recent years.

Tukong moosul, like other military martial arts, is all about taking out the enemy. Some of the tukong moosul organizations specifically prohibit children from learning tukong moosul, instead recommending that they study the sport-oriented [tae kwon do](#) instead.