

PreDefence

Self defense before SHTF

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Zombie apocalypse - food for thought

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Want to know what a zombie apocalypse would be like? Well, we can examine certain places at certain points in history to get an idea. Bosnia in the 90's was one of those places.

And who better to give us a glimpse of life at this point in history than Selco, the man who lived through it, and now writes about it.

Here's an interview with Selco where he scratches the surface of what life is like when SHTF on a society-wide scale:

[Selco interview by Daisy Luther](#)

How prevalent was violence when the SHTF in Bosnia?

It was wartime and chaos, from all conflicts in those years in the Balkan region Bosnian conflict was most brutal because of multiple reasons, historical, political and other.

To simplify the explanation why violence was common and very brutal, you need to picture a situation where you are "bombarded" with huge amount of information (propaganda) which instills in you very strong feelings of fear and hate.

Out of fear and hate, violence grows easy and fast, and over the very short period of time you see how people around you (including you) do things that you could not imagine before.

I can say that violence was almost an everyday thing in the whole spectrum of different activities because it was a fight for survival.

*Again, **whenever (and wherever) you put people in a region without enough resources, you can expect violence.***

We were living a normal life, and then suddenly we were thrown in a way of living where if you could not "negotiate" something with someone, you solve the problem by launching a rocket from an RPG through the window of his living room.

Hate stripped down the layers of humanity and suddenly it was "normal" to level an apartment building with people inside with shells from a tank or form private prisons with imprisoned civilians for slave work or sex slaves.

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Nothing that I saw or read before could have prepared me for the level of violence and blindness to it, for the lives of kids, elders, civilians, and the innocent.

*Again, the thing that is important for readers is that **we were a modern society one day, and then in few weeks it turned into carnage.***

Do not make the mistake of saying “it cannot happen here” because I made that mistake too.

Do not underestimate power of propaganda, fear, hate, and the lowest human instincts, no matter how modern and good your society is right now and how deeply you believe that “it can not happen here”.

You’ve mentioned warlords and gangs in several of your articles. Were they responsible for the majority of the violence or was it hungry families?

Fighting of the armies through the whole period of war brings violence in terms of constant shelling from a distance from different kind of weapons.

For example a few multiple rocket launchers (VBR) could bring in 30 seconds the destruction in an area of 3-4 apartment buildings, and being there in that moment and surviving it gives you a completely new view on life.

Snipers were a constant threat and over time you simply grow a way of living that you constant scan area in front of you where your next steps gonna be. Are you gonna be visible and from where? Etc.

Most brutal violence was actually lawlessness and complete lack of order between different factions and militias, so in some periods there were militias or gangs who simply ruled the cities or part of the city where they were absolutely masters of everything in terms of deciding of taking someone’s life.

In lawlessness, you as one person could be really small and not interesting, or join some bigger group of people to be stronger, some family or militia or gang.

An example of a gang would be group of people of some 300 or 500 people who “officially” were a unit or militia and operate for some faction, but in reality they operate mostly for themselves.

That included owning part of the black market, having prison (for forced labor or ransom), attacking people and houses for resources, smuggling people from dangerous areas.

Violence from those kinds of group was the most immediate violence, the most visible in terms of SHTF talking.

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If those people came on your door you could obey, fight, or negotiate, but mostly you could not ask for help from any kind of authority, because there was no real authority.

In any society, no matter where you are living, there are a great number of people who are waiting for the SHTF to go out and do violent things. Small time criminals or simply violent persons who are not openly violent because system is there to punish them for that. It is like that.

Some gang leaders that I knew were actually completely sick people with a strange type of charisma that makes people follow them, weird situations that can happen only in a real collapse.

They are people who just waited for their time to rise.

Those kinds of people together with criminal organization that are already there in any city in the world will be the backbone of SHTF gangs.

Who were the most likely victims?

A very simple answer would be that the most likely victims were people who had interesting things without enough defense.

But it was not always that simple.

For example one of the first houses that got raided in my neighborhood, right at the beginning of collapse while there was still some kind of order, was a rich family's home.

They had a nice house with bars on the windows, a pretty good setup for defense, and they had enough people inside so they could give pretty good resistance to the mob.

But they got raided simply because they were known that they are rich, so they were attacked with enough force to be overwhelmed.

It was not only about how much manpower you had and how well-organized defense of your home was, it was also about how juicy a target you were.

If you are faced with 150 angry people attacking your home because they are sure you have good stuff inside your chances are low, no matter how good and tough you are.

People who were alone were a pretty easy target and old people without support of family or friends.

It was not always about killing someone or violence. For example, if you were alone and without resources but you had something else valuable like some kind of skill or knowledge you could

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easily be “recruited” for some faction or group, not by your will of course.

What were some ways to prevent yourself from becoming a victim of violence? How do you recommend that people prepare themselves for the possibility of violence?

It can be done in steps, or in layers.

Do not be interesting (or attract attention) when the SHTF.

This means a lot of things, for this article I can give a few examples with shortened explanations because it is a huge topic:

- ***Do not look like a prepper*** (before or after SHTF). *There is no sense in announcing that you are prepping for EMP, civil collapse, apocalypse, or whatever. With that you are risking the probability that when the SHTF, people will remember that you have interesting things in your home*
- ***Your home should look ordinary.*** *For example, if you are living in the city on a street where all houses look similar, there is not much sense in making your home look like a fortress. You’ll just attract attention.*
- ***Your defense should be based on more subtle means.*** *Some examples are having means to reinforce doors and windows quickly when you need it, or to reinforce them from inside. Make changes in your yard to funnel possible attackers where you want them to be (trees, fence, bush...). You can make your home look abandoned or already looted.*

Think about what survival is!

Survival is about staying alive, it is not about being comfortable at the expense of losing your life.

I have seen many times people lose their lives simply because they were too attached to their belongings (house, car, land, goods...) so they simply did not want to leave something and run in a particular moment.

Everything can be earned and bought again except life.

Forget about statements like “I will defend it with my life” or “over my dead body” or similar because the real SHTF is usually not heroic or noble. It is hard and brutal. When you are gone you are gone and there might be nobody to take care of your family just because you have been stubborn or trusted in movies when it came to violence.

To rephrase it: Be ready to leave your home in a split second if that means you and your family will survive, no matter how many good things you have stored there.

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Be mentally ready for violence

In a way, it is impossible to be ready for violence, especially widespread violence when the SHTF, but you can minimize shock when that happens with some things.

If you are not familiar with what violence is, you can try to get yourself close” to it today (in normal times). It can be done, for example, by doing some voluntary work for example in a local hospital, ER or similar... or simply by working with homeless people.

Sounds maybe strange but activities like this can get you a bit of a feeling of what it is all about, not to mention that you can learn some practical and useful skills for SHTF.

Have means and skills (physically) to defend – or to do violence

No matter how old or young you are, your gender or religion I assure you that you are capable of doing violence. It is only a matter of the situation and how far you are going to be pushed.

It is not just “some people are capable of violence.” Everybody is capable. Not everybody enjoys doing it or is willing to do it so easily.

In today (normal times) you can learn some violence skills and you should do it, again no matter if you are a woman or old or young.

You should own a weapon and know how to use it. You should practice with it, or have at least some basic knowledge about hand-to-hand combat.

The worst case scenario is to have a weapon that you try for the first time when SHTF.

Be familiar with your means for defense, let your family members know what they need to do in case of attack of your home, have plan, and go through it.

Only through practice will you minimize chances for mistakes.

Use common sense

I know lot of survivalists almost dream about how they are going to use weapons against bad guys when SHTF, and that they will be something like super heroes from movies, saving innocents and killing villains.

*Truth is that in a real collapse, a lot of things are kind of blurred and **you are not sure who the bad guys are**. Good guys turn out to be lunatic gang members who want to bring food to their kids.*

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There are no super heroes when SHTF, and if some of them show up they end up dead quickly.

There is only you and your skills and mindset and what you prepared.

Use violence as a last resort because of the simple fact that by using violence you are risking of getting killed or hurt. Remember when SHTF there is maybe no doctor or hospital to take care of your wound.

It is a time when even a small cut can eventually kill you through infection and lack of proper care.

I'm a single mom with a household full of girls. In an SHTF situation, what would our best strategies be to remain safe?

Just like I have mentioned before, strategy is always same for any part of survival, and shooting from the rifle is pretty similar no matter are you man or woman.

Being single mom with household full of girls on first look make you as a ideal target in some situations, but we are talking here in prepper terms so there is no reason not to be perfectly well prepared as a single mom with girls.

*But yes I admit it is not perfect situation, even if you are prepared well, some things are sure, **you need to connect with other people even more.***

House with couple of girls will always look like easy prey for some people.

It is like that.

Were people in the city safer than people in the country? Can you tell us more about rural living during this time?

In my case definitely no.

In the essence it always come to the resources and people.

City meant more people less resources, country (rural) meant less people more resources, and because that level of violence simply was lower. That was most important reason.

There are few more reasons why it was much better in the country.

People in the country (rural settings) were much more "connected to ground" they were more tough if you like, they grew their own food, had cattle, lived more simple life prior SHTF and when everything collapsed they had less problems getting use to it.

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Yes they also did not have electricity and phones, running water or connection to other places but they adapted easier to the new life because they had more useful skills then people in the city.

Life was harder for them too than prior to the collapse, but they had means to get resources: land, woods, river...

Another thing is that people in small rural communities "in the country" were more connected to each other, people knew their neighborhood and some things were easier to organize, like community security watch, help in case of diseases and similar.

What types of weapons did people have for self-defense?

It was different political system prior the collapse where it was not so usual to own a weapon legally. And to own one illegally could mean a lot of troubles.

Right prior to SHTF, it became possible to buy different weapons on the black market but still, a majority of people did not own weapons.

When it all collapsed, it was possible to get a weapon through trade.

Because of the military doctrine here prior to the collapse, we used "East Bloc" weapons. A favorite was AK-47 in all different kind of editions, or older weapons like M-48 rifle, SKS rifle, 22 and similar.

People used what they had, so in one period you would be lucky if you had any kind of pistol and knife.

Later through the different channels weapon become more available so people had them more. A lot of that was actually junk that some warlords somehow "imported".

Weapons 50-60 years old without proper ammunition, or not in operating condition. A lot of people simply did not have a clue how to use any kind of weapon so a lot of accidental deaths happened.

I remember people storming abandoned army barracks that was mostly looted, but they found in one building a lot of RPGs while other part of the same building was burning.

Two guys were trying to figure out a single-use RPG, and while they were messing with it clearly not knowing how that thing worked, they accidentally armed it and launched a rocket that flew through the crowd, not hurting anyone and exploding in wall 100 meters from where they stood.

They were smiling, clearly happy because they thought they figured out how that thing worked.

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What weapons do you suggest to have for SHTF?

It is a never-ending discussion and a favorite prepper topic, and I must say that whole discussion is overrated.

I have used them in a real situation, and tried and tested lot of different kind of weapons and what works for me may simply not work for you.

For example, here for me good choice is AK-47 rifle, maybe for you wherever you are it is very bad choice.

*Good advice is : **you need to have a weapon that most people have around you** because of multiple reasons: spare parts, repairing, ammunition availability, possibility that you can pick that rifle from other people and you know how to use it.*

What caliber and similar is a matter of discussion again. I am talking from the point of owning a rifle.

Another thing is that you need to know how that weapon works. Luckily, most of my readers live in an area where gun laws are great comparing to region where I am.

You have much more choices when it comes to owning a weapon and practicing with it. Use that.

And do not forget that using weapon in a real life situation is not like shooting at beer bottles with your friends after a barbecue.

In real life you might be in a situation to use a weapon while you are tired, dirty, and hungry and while someone is screaming next to you.

It is going to be maybe when you are not ready to do that, maybe in pitch dark, maybe after you have been awake for 48 hours.

At least think about that.

When should you use violence?

Contrary to some popular beliefs in the prepper community, the point is to use violence only as a last solution.

*The reason is as I mentioned already, the risk that you can be hurt or killed too, but also **once you do violence you change your own rules**, or push it more forward, and it is easy to get lost in violence.*

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There are consequences to that, and you are not going to be the same person ever again.

Violence is a tool, not a toy. You need to know how to use it as best as possible, but also to avoid using it when it is not necessary.

It is a good idea to set up a clear set of rules (mentally too) when you are gonna use violence and to try to stick to it.

For example you will use weapon if someone tries to break your home and attack you, and you need to be ready to do that without hesitation.

What else should we know about post-collapse violence?

Think with your head and research.

One thing that is absolutely important when it comes to understanding how violent it is going to be and what can you expect in your own case of SHTF, is to understand how much media can influence people in making their decisions about violence.

In my case, the media built up situation where people feared so much from other people that they actually hated them. They hated them so much that they actually strip them down from humanity.

In a real-life example, it works in a way that people killed other people, including kids and women, because they hated them so much because media told them.

It may look ridiculous and not possible to you, and you might again think “that can not happen here” but please trust your own resources, look for independent information, not mainstream media, in order to get the right information about what is really happening in the beginning of collapse.

Do not be pulled into “popular opinion” just because the “man from TV” (whoever he might be) told you so.

It is easier today. Because of the internet, you have much more choices for correct information than in my time. But still be careful, you might find yourself rioting together with 500 people just because you trusted some media.