



# Firsthand Tips For Surviving a Violent Collapse

Since the trajectory of our society is trending downward at an alarming rate, it serves a prudent purpose to consider how you might respond should you get caught up in the potential violence of dramatic changes in our way of life.

Have you made material plans? For the moment, forget your emergency cache, survival plans, and other preparations. After all, carefully laid plans often fly out the window at the onset of a serious crisis.

So here is another question: are you mentally and emotionally prepared to face the strife and violence that could result from the collapse of our institutions and support structures?

What follows are excerpts from a Selco Begovic interview\* that the humble might find helpful and thought-provoking. For others, let it serve as a reality check.

If you're not familiar with Selco, he survived the Balkan war of the 90's in a city under siege – a brutal, constantly life-threatening situation devoid of the most basic modern comforts such as electricity, running water, and food distribution. From his first-hand perspective of the reality of survival under the harshest conditions he frankly shares what works and what does not.

\*Since Selco is Bosnian, and English is not his primary language, the text has been edited here to make his thoughts more easily understood.

## **How prevalent was violence when the stuff hit the fan (SHTF) in Bosnia?**

It was wartime and chaos. Among all the Balkan regional conflicts in those years, the Bosnian conflict was the most brutal for multiple reasons... historically, politically, and otherwise.

To understand why violence was common and very brutal, you need to first imagine being “bombarded” with a huge amount of information (propaganda) which instills in you some strong feelings of fear and hate.

Violence grows fast and easy out of fear and hate. Over a brief period, you see how people do things that you could not imagine before.

I can say that violence was an everyday thing... an ordinary thing in the various daily activities that became a fight for survival.

## Firsthand Tips For Surviving a Violent Collapse *(continued)*

When you constrain people in a small region without enough resources, you can expect violence.

We were living a normal life, and then suddenly we were thrown into a very different way of living. For example, if you couldn't solve a problem with someone to get a healthy outcome, you might just solve it by launching a rocket from an RPG through the window of his living room.

Hate stripped down the layers of humanity until it suddenly seemed like normal behavior to level an occupied apartment building with shells from a tank.

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

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

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

The thing that is important for readers to understand is that we were a normal modern society one day, and then suddenly drowning in carnage in the span of a few weeks.

### **You've mentioned warlords and gangs in several of your articles. Were they responsible for most of the violence or did it come from others?**

The opposing armies engaged with various kinds of weapons that delivered constant shelling.

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

Snipers were a constant threat. You adapt to a way of living over time that includes constantly scanning the area in front – where your next step is going to be – with considerations like whether you are going to be visible and from what vantage points. It becomes second nature.

The most brutal violence was pure lawlessness, with a complete lack of order between the different factions and militias. In some periods, there were militias or gangs who simply ruled the cities or parts of the cities where they were absolute masters of everything including life and death.



## Firsthand Tips For Surviving a Violent Collapse *(continued)*

In this lawlessness, you could be small and uninteresting as an individual, or join some larger group of people to be stronger... usually with some family, militia, or gang.

Gangs might consist of 300 to 500 people who “officially” were a unit or militia operating for some faction. In truth, they mostly operated for their own concerns.

Those concerns included owning part of the black market, having prisons for forced labor or ransom, attacking people and houses for resources, and smuggling people from dangerous areas.

Violence from those groups was the most immediate... the most visible.

If those people showed up at 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 some people who are waiting for the SHTF to go out and do violent things. These are mostly small-time criminals and violent people... not openly violent when there's a normal system in place to restrain and punish them.

Some gang leaders that I knew were deranged people with an uncanny type of charisma that makes others follow them... people who just seemed to wait for their time to rise.

Those kinds of people, together with the criminal organizations that are already operating in virtually every city in the world, are the backbone of SHTF gangs.

### **Who were the most likely victims?**

Simply put, the most likely victims were the people who had interesting things without sufficient means to defend those things. Although it was not always that simple.

One of the first houses that got raided in my neighborhood belonged to a wealthy family. This was right at the beginning of the collapse while there was still a bit of order.

They had a nice house with bars on the windows – a fairly good setup for defense – and they also had enough people inside to mount a defense against the mob.

Even so, they got raided because they were known to be wealthy... attacked with enough force to be overwhelmed.



## Firsthand Tips For Surviving a Violent Collapse *(continued)*

What are your chances against 150 angry, determined people attacking your home? Your chances are going to be low, no matter how good and tough you are.

People who were alone were also an easy target, as were old people who lacked support from family or friends.

People without obvious wealth and tempting stuff were targeted too for their skill and knowledge. These could be easily recruited by some faction or group, against their will of course.

### **How could a person limit their chances of becoming a victim of violence, and do you have any recommendations for preparing to face the possibility of violence?**

It's an extensive topic, but here are some simple steps to start with:

- Keep a low profile and don't attract attention.
- Don't identify as a prepper, before or after a SHTF scenario. Don't announce or telegraph that you are prepping for an EMP, civil collapse, apocalypse, or whatever. With that you are risking the probability that when the SHTF, people will remember that you have valuables or 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, don't conspicuously fortify your home. You'll just attract attention.
- Your defense should be based on subtler means such as reinforcing doors and windows from the inside. Make changes in your yard to limit the potential of attacks with trees, fences, bushes, etc. Another strategy in the more advanced stages of collapse is to make your home look abandoned or already looted.

Understand what survival really is. Survival is about staying alive, not about maintaining comfort at all costs.

Too often I saw people lose their lives because they were overly attached to their possessions such as land, house, car and other valuables. When they had the chance to flee at a critical moment, they didn't take advantage of it. Remember, everything can be replaced except your life.

Forget about statements like "I will defend it with my life" or "over my dead body." The real SHTF is not about being overly confident and gung-ho. It is hard and brutal. When you're gone, who will be left to care for your family? Trying to deal with violence like you see in the movies will not serve you well.

As a matter of survival, be prepared to leave your home in an instant, regardless of the valuables and possessions you have there.



## Firsthand Tips For Surviving a Violent Collapse *(continued)*

Be mentally prepared for violence. Sure, it may seem like an impossible task in many respects, especially if the violence is widespread... but you can still minimize the shock by taking some steps now.

If you are not familiar with what violence really is, you can get a bit of exposure to it in relatively normal times. For example, you could volunteer at a local hospital, in the ER or similar... or maybe try to work with some homeless people. In addition to getting some small scale exposure, these activities may help you learn some practical skills you can use in a SHTF scenario.

Acquire some means and physical skills to defend yourself and loved ones against violence.

No matter how old or young you are, and regardless of your gender or religion, I can assure you that you are capable of defending yourself – violently if necessary. It is only a matter of being thrust into certain situations, and the intensity of the threat. That doesn't mean that you will be easily willing, much less enjoy it.

Learn some self-defense skills and practice them... even basic skills in hand-to-hand combat.

Acquire a reliable weapon such as a firearm and know how to use it. The worst-case scenario is to have a weapon that you try for the first time in a SHTF crisis, so be familiar with your self-defense weapons. Devise a plan with your entire family to survive a home invasion and practice it to minimize fatal mistakes.

Use common sense.

I know survivalists who daydream about using weapons against bad guys in a collapse... they fancy themselves as the typical movie superhero... saving the innocents and killing villains.

In a real collapse, a lot of things seem surreal and get easily blurred to the point that you can't easily distinguish the bad guys from the good guys. Sometimes the good guys were gang members who acted like lunatics, but they were simply bringing food to their kids.

There are no superheroes when the SHTF. When the fanciful ones show up, they usually end up dead quickly. So, consider yourself an ordinary person, with whatever preparations you've made... your mindset and skills.

Also consider that the use of violence is a last resort. Once engaged, you run the risk of getting injured. What medical help is readily available in a SHTF collapse? At worst, you could get yourself killed.



## Firsthand Tips For Surviving a Violent Collapse *(continued)*

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

### **Consider a single mom with a household full of girls. In an SHTF scenario, what would be her best strategy to keep everyone safe?**

This profile will look like a vulnerable and ideal target.

Whether you are a man or woman, you can obviously point and shoot a rifle, but there are other steps you can take to prepare, particularly connecting with other people who have other strengths, skill sets and resources. Make friends.

### **Was it safer in rural or urban areas, and what was rural living like in your experience?**

In my experience, it was not necessarily safer in the country than it was in the city. It came down to people and resources.

While the city had more people and less resources, the rural areas had less people and more resources – stuff that had real value in a SFTF crisis. With fewer people, the potential for violent conflict was lower.

As another advantage, rural people typically had more grit. They were often more accustomed to physically demanding work. They grew their own food, kept livestock, maintained a simpler life with much more self-reliance. After collapse, they were that much more acclimated to the demands of hardship than city folk. That included things like a lack of electricity, running water, and the sort of fragile connectivity the city folk rely too heavily on.

Rural people were connected in more meaningful ways prior to collapse. They knew their neighbors and were more apt to rely on community. They could organize quickly and easily. They had each other's backs. They also had easy access to shared resources such as farmland, forests, and waterways. And they had the kind of necessary skills for living that collectively got the job done.

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

Prior to collapse, Bosnia had a political system that ensured it was not common to own a weapon legally. Owning one illegally could mean a lot of troubles.

Just prior to the SHTF troubles, it became possible to buy different weapons on the black market, but most people did not pursue it.



## Firsthand Tips For Surviving a Violent Collapse *(continued)*

After the collapse, 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 weapon was an AK-47 in a variety of editions, or older weapons like the M-48 rifle, SKS rifle, 22, etc.

People used what they had, so they were lucky if they had any kind of pistol and knife.

Weapons became more available later, so people acquired them more. Many of those weapons were junk that some warlords "imported,"... 50 to 60 years old, lacking proper ammunition, and/or not in operating condition. Naturally, these caused a lot of accidental deaths.

I remember people storming an abandoned army barracks that was already looted. Still, they managed to find RPG's in one building, while another part of that building was burning.

Two guys were trying to figure out a single-use RPG. 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. It didn't hit anyone but exploded into a wall 100 meters from where they stood.

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

### **What weapons would you have on hand to prepare for a SHTF scenario?**

This is a favorite topic amongst preppers with endless opinions. Frankly, the discussion is overrated.

I have used various weapons in a real crisis, such as an AK-47. I have also tried and tested many different weapons. This much I know: what works for me may not work for you.

I recommend common, easily serviceable weapons for ease of use, availability of spare parts and ammunition.

Matters of caliber and such are up for debate.

Most importantly, you need to know how your weapon works and how to use it.

If you have more freedom of gun ownership where you live, be thankful. You'll have more options and better opportunities to hone your skills.



## Firsthand Tips For Surviving a Violent Collapse *(continued)*

Just understand that using a weapon in a real-life situation is nothing like shooting at beer bottles with your friends after a barbecue.

In a SHTF situation, you may have to fire a weapon while you are exhausted, dirty, hungry, wounded, in the dark... even with folks screaming right next to you.

### **When should you use violence?**

Contrary to some popular beliefs in the prepper community, violence is a last resort.

Aside from increasing your chances of getting wounded or killed, engaging in violence can escalate the situation and you run the risk of getting lost in the violence. This is a very real consequence that can have harmful, lasting effects on you.

Defend yourself and loved ones but use violent means only when necessary.

Try to develop discipline in this area with a healthy set of moral standards. Then stick to it.

### **Any final thoughts?**

Use your head and do some research before a collapse.

Understand how media influences people in forming their ideas about violence.

In my case, the media built up and stoked a situation where people feared certain others to such an extent that they hated them. Kids, women, the elderly... no one was exempt from such hate.

Find solid, independent sources of information and avoid the establishment media at all costs. Don't be among those who joined the riot simply because they followed the misguided influence of popular media.

