

THIS BOOK CAN SAVE YOUR LIFE

A Civilian Guide to Survival, Safety, and Humanity in Crisis

Ethan Moret

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HUMANITARIAN & NGO USE STATEMENT

(United States & International Context)

HUMANITARIAN PURPOSE

This publication is intended for civilian harm reduction, humanitarian preparedness, and protection of life and dignity in crisis situations.

It aligns with widely recognized humanitarian principles, including:

- Humanity
- Neutrality
- Impartiality
- Independence

The content is designed to support civilians, families, caregivers, and vulnerable populations in reducing preventable harm during emergencies, disasters, or armed conflict.

NON-COMBAT AND NON-POLITICAL USE

This book is strictly non-combatant in nature.

It does not:

- Provide military, tactical, or combat instruction
- Support armed groups, militias, or hostilities
- Promote political positions, ideologies, or agendas

The guidance herein focuses exclusively on civilian safety, lawful behavior, and de-escalation.

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- Official emergency instructions
- Humanitarian aid protocols
- Medical and psychosocial services
- NGO field guidance and training

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Use of this book does not confer:

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Readers and organizations remain responsible for:

- Context-specific risk assessment
- Compliance with applicable law and policy
- Adherence to organizational codes of conduct

PROTECTION OF VULNERABLE POPULATIONS

This publication explicitly prioritizes:

- Children
- Pregnant individuals
- Elderly persons
- Persons with disabilities
- Individuals with chronic illness

The guidance emphasizes conservative decision-making, early escalation, and avoidance of irreversible harm.

PSYCHOSOCIAL & TRAUMA-INFORMED APPROACH

The content reflects a trauma-informed, dignity-preserving approach:

- Avoiding sensationalism
- Reducing panic and misinformation
- Supporting psychological functioning under stress
- Encouraging social cohesion and mutual support

It is suitable for distribution in humanitarian, educational, and community-based contexts.

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Nothing in this book should be interpreted as encouraging:

- Violence
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- Violation of human rights or humanitarian law

The intent is harm reduction, not control; protection, not instruction in force.

CHAPTER 1 How Ordinary People Stay Alive in times of War

Survival Starts With the Mind: How Ordinary People Stay Alive in times of War

THIS CAN SAVE YOUR LIFE IF

- You feel overwhelmed, frozen, or panicked while danger is unfolding
 - You are pressured to act fast without clear information
 - You must make decisions for children, elderly, or dependents
- If you understand this chapter before crisis hits, you are far less likely to make irreversible mistakes.

PURPOSE OF THIS CHAPTER

This chapter teaches you how survival actually works for civilians.

Most people do not die because they lack strength, gear, or courage.

They die because stress breaks their thinking, leading to bad decisions at the worst possible moment.

Survival begins before water, food, or shelter.

It begins with how your brain behaves under threat.

1.1 The Hard Truth: Survival Is Not About Being Brave

Movies and social media show survival as:

- Fast reactions
 - Heroic risk-taking
 - "Doing something" at all costs
- This is wrong and dangerous.

In real crises:

- Panic kills
- Speed without clarity kills
- Courage without restraint kills

Most civilians who die did not need to move, fight, or act heroically.

They needed to pause, simplify, and avoid irreversible mistakes.

1.2 What Stress Does to Your Brain (And Why This Is Not Your Fault)

When danger appears, your body releases stress hormones. This causes:

- Tunnel vision (you miss obvious dangers)
 - Time distortion (everything feels urgent)
 - Poor memory (you forget plans you made)
 - Impulsive action or freezing
- This happens to everyone, including trained professionals.

Important:

This is biology, not weakness.

Survival is not about eliminating fear.

It is about slowing decisions enough to stay safe.

POINT OF NO RETURN — DO NOT IGNORE THIS

People die when they:

- Rush decisions “because it feels urgent”
 - Follow the loudest or most confident person
 - Act before verifying information
 - Split families without a reunification plan
- Once these happen, you may not get a second chance.

1.3 The First Rule of Civilian Survival

If you are not bleeding, choking, or in immediate danger, the safest action is usually to WAIT briefly and THINK.

Waiting:

- Reduces mistakes
 - Allows better information
 - Prevents panic-driven movement
- Waiting is an action, not passivity.

1.4 The 90-Second Survival Pause (Zero Skill Required)**When something sudden happens:**

1. Stop for 90 seconds
 2. Take 5 slow breaths
 3. Inhale 4 seconds
 4. Exhale 6 seconds
 5. Ask yourself:
 - *What happens if I do nothing for 10 minutes?*
- If waiting does not clearly increase danger, waiting is safer.
This simple pause has saved lives in fires, evacuations, and medical emergencies.

1.5 The SAFE Decision Filter (Use This Every Time)**Before any major action, ask:****S — Safety**

Does this reduce exposure to fire, collapse, crowds, or violence?

A — Authority

Is this legal and based on verified instructions?

F — Feasibility

Can *this household* actually do this, including children and elderly?

E — Exit

Can we stop or reverse this if conditions worsen?

If any answer is “no”, do not proceed.

1.6 Survival Is a Household Activity (Not an Individual One)

People die when:

- Everyone decides independently
- The most anxious person takes control
- Children are left without supervision
- No one tracks time, water, or medications

Minimum safe roles (even for 2 people):

- Decision lead (uses SAFE filter)
- Care lead (children, elderly, sick)
- Resource tracker (water, food, meds)

Roles prevent chaos.

Chaos kills.

HOW PEOPLE DIE HERE (REAL FAILURE MODES)

- Acting on rumors
- Rushing “before it’s too late”
- Letting fear override plans
- Splitting families to “cover more ground”
- Believing calm equals danger and panic equals action

These are predictable errors.

Predictable errors can be avoided.

ZERO-THINKING RULES (READ THIS UNDER STRESS)

- Do not run unless there is immediate danger
- Do not split the household
- Do not follow unofficial orders
- Do not act on social media information
- Do not rush because others are rushing

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Survival starts with thinking, not moving
- Fear changes your brain — expect it
- Waiting briefly often saves lives
- Simple decision tools beat instinct
- Households survive together

CHECKLIST (NO GEAR REQUIRED)

- SAFE filter memorized
- 90-second pause practiced
- Household roles assigned
- Agreement: “We wait unless unsafe”
- Trusted information sources identified

IF YOU ONLY DO 3 THINGS

- Pause before acting
- Keep the household together
- Use the SAFE filter

COMMON MISTAKES

- Confusing urgency with danger
- Letting panic drive movement
- Over-explaining instead of acting simply
- Ignoring children’s stress signals

VERIFICATION NOTES

This chapter aligns with established principles from:

- Emergency management
 - Disaster psychology
 - Human factors engineering
- Top uncertainties: individual stress tolerance, sleep deprivation effects, group dynamics

THIS PART FAILS IF

- No one practices pausing
- Decisions are emotional, not deliberate
- Plans exist only “in theory”

CHAPTER 2 Stay or Go

When Shelter Saves Lives and When Movement Kills

THIS CAN SAVE YOUR LIFE IF

- You are unsure whether to leave your home or stay
 - Others around you are fleeing and pressuring you to move
 - Information is confusing, emotional, or contradictory
- Most civilian deaths during war happen during movement, not while staying put. This chapter teaches you when not to move.

PURPOSE OF THIS CHAPTER

This chapter helps you answer one of the most dangerous questions in a crisis:

Should we stay, or should we go?

There is no heroic answer.

There is only a safer answer for the situation you are in.

2.1 The Dangerous Myth: “Moving Is Always Safer”

Many people believe:

- “Staying is passive”
 - “Movement equals safety”
 - “If others are leaving, we should too”
- This belief kills civilians.

Movement exposes you to:

- Fire and collapsing structures
 - Checkpoints and misunderstandings
 - Crowds, panic, and stampedes
 - Separation from family members
- Staying in a known place is often far safer than moving into uncertainty.

POINT OF NO RETURN — READ CAREFULLY

Once you leave your shelter:

- You lose control over timing
 - You lose protection from walls and roofs
 - You may not be able to return
 - Children and elderly slow movement
- Leaving is often irreversible.
Do not leave unless staying is clearly more dangerous.

2.2 When Staying Is the Safer Choice (MOST CASES)

Staying is usually safer when:

- Your shelter is intact
- There is no fire, smoke, or collapse risk
- Water and basic sanitation are possible
- Authorities have not ordered evacuation

Staying allows:

- Better rest
- Better hygiene
- Better decision-making
- Family unity

Important truth:

Most people who survive war spend most of it staying, not moving.

2.3 When You MUST Leave (Non-Negotiable Triggers)

You should leave immediately if any of the following occur:

- Fire inside or spreading toward the building
 - Heavy smoke you cannot escape
 - Structural damage that worsens
 - Chemical or industrial smoke nearby
 - Direct, immediate threat to life
- If staying means certain harm, movement becomes necessary.

2.4 Authority Matters: Legal Orders Save Lives

Evacuation orders are not suggestions.

If official authorities issue a clear evacuation:

- Follow it
- Do not delay to “wait and see”
- Do not improvise alternative routes

Ignoring lawful evacuation orders is a major cause of civilian injury and detention.

2.5 The SAFE Filter — Applied to Movement

Before leaving, ask:

S — Safety

Is staying more dangerous than moving?

A — Authority

Is this based on verified, lawful instruction?

F — Feasibility

Can *everyone* move safely, including children and elderly?

E — Exit

Do we have a clear destination and stop point?

If you cannot answer all four, do not move.

2.6 Movement Kills Through Fatigue and Confusion

People die during movement because:

- They underestimate distance and time
 - Children become exhausted
 - Elderly fall or collapse
 - People split “just for a moment”
- Fatigue destroys judgment.
Destroyed judgment leads to fatal decisions.

HOW PEOPLE DIE HERE (REAL FAILURE MODES)

- Leaving because others are leaving
 - Leaving at night “to be unseen”
 - Carrying too much and slowing down
 - Changing destination mid-route
 - Separating to “move faster”
- These mistakes repeat across all conflicts.

ZERO-THINKING RULES (USE THESE UNDER STRESS)

- Do not leave at night unless staying will kill you
- Do not split the household
- Do not change destination once moving
- Do not chase rumors
- Do not rush because others rush

2.7 If You Decide to Stay: Make Staying Safer

Staying safely means:

- Staying indoors, away from windows
 - Reducing fire risk
 - Limiting movement outside
 - Establishing routines
- Staying is active survival, not waiting to die.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Movement is dangerous
- Staying is usually safer
- Leave only for clear, immediate threats
- Authority and verification matter
- Families survive together