



## Uncivil War

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THIS SERIES OF ARTICLES on physicians and Terrorism/Warfare began with the March/April 2001 issue of Sierra Sacramento Valley Medicine, at the request of editor Ed Rudin. Because of September 11, the entire media is now on board this surreal train of words, and further comment from me will not add much to the freight of ideas.

So this is the last in my terror series, and I devote it to the War on Civilians, which seems to me the sine qua non of the conflict we now face.

Though war has nearly always brought much civilian suffering, we are accustomed to warfare chiefly among warriors, who usually adhere to certain standards. They are romanticized in mythic tales of knights, or samurai, and currently in those heroes of screen and print, who glorify and beautify brutality and bad taste.

We have become accustomed to war being "over there" — somewhere, anywhere unreal. What is new to us, though not new to the historic, or even the modern world, is warfare where civilians are targets.

"Over there" were the massacres of Stalin, Mao, and Pol Pot. "Over there" is the carnage in Africa today for those who may read of, but can't smell or taste, the blood.

Set in Somalia, the book, *Blackhawk Down*, is a window on this kind of war. That moving, graphic narrative reveals how civilians can be driven into acts of war that seem incredible: women using babies to shield their weapons; futile mid-street charges by armed people of all ages, whether individually or among hundreds; the reactions and loss of restraint among professional warriors.

A comment in *Blackhawk* is that, in every war, the weakness of one's enemy becomes apparent. It became clear to the Somalis that US forces were unwilling to die. Furthermore, their traditional reverence for life, and for loyalty to one another, lead them to "leave no man behind;" the entire force — then only survivors, the wounded, and the dead — delayed their escape for hours, taking more casualties while one pilot's body was extracted from his wrecked Blackhawk. Like British Redcoats facing cowardly civilian colonists hiding behind trees rather than fighting openly and nobly, they held to a belief in a nice warfare, where no civilians fight, or are killed on purpose.

So old, so new, terrorist warfare is directed at the entirety of culture, particularly that base of real power, ordinary people.

To prevail in such a war, civilians become warriors, with all that implies, including a warrior mentality, quite different from that modern society holds dear. Our current strident debate is not mere rhetoric. It is crucial to an effective response, reflecting an awakening.

Example: When smallpox vaccination is offered to civilians, people can be vaccinated if they choose. It is a small thing they do, perhaps a hesitant misstep. Yet it is a commitment

in the face of worldwide economic chaos and uncivil war.

But much more than fierce defense, and bold action, will be required, though those are essential. It must be understood that the only power of terrorists springs from brutalizing, agonizing, interminable poverty, and hopelessness, far, far, far in excess of any imaginable in more fortunate nations.

There lies the main battlefield.

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