

Forum: Disarmament and International Security Committee

Issue: Issue # 25-01: Measures to minimize the growth of child soldier armies.

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Introduction

In a world plagued with growing conflict between distinctive religions, ethnicities, and ideologies, societies have been forced to heavily invest and recruit to develop their armies. This has, in turn, casted a massive shadow of doubt over world peace and order. Although the growth of armies and conflict across the globe is a major source of preoccupation, the recruitment of child soldiers is often overlooked. The probable cause for such ignorance originates from the fact that the ends justify the means for many armed conflicts. For many armies, the lives of the youth are not as important as the objectives and desires of an army.

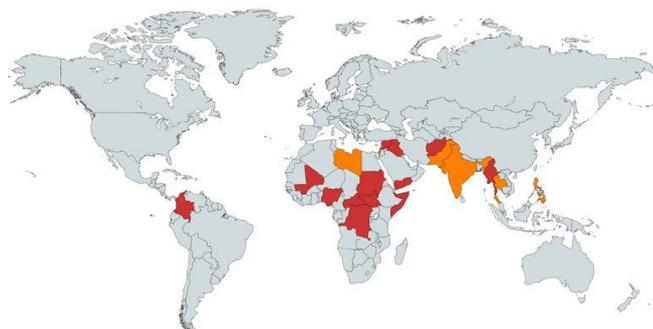
Currently, there are thousands of child soldiers operating in armed conflicts across the world. The ages of these soldiers vary greatly, however some child soldiers are younger than ten years. Child soldiers serve in both extremist organizations and controversial government forces. Their roles, like their ages, vary greatly. Some utilize weapons and fight wars firsthand, while others have less intensive jobs such as spying on the opposition, planting landmines on the battlefield, and distributing secret messages across the armies they serve. The growth of child soldier armies is directly proportional to the proliferation of armed conflict around the world. Children are more susceptible to becoming soldiers when they are located in war-torn regions. Oftentimes, children join armed conflict because they struggle to fulfill their basic needs such as shelter and food. Other armed groups forcefully recruit children to fill their ranks and fulfill many roles within that army. Some armed groups even force children to hurt their family and communal ties so they become completely devoted to war. In almost all scenarios, child soldiers are forcefully recruited as a result of absence of resources and lackluster societies or ruthless armed groups that need to fill their ranks.

Children who live in societies that struggle to provide basic necessities for their populations,

including food, shelter, water and medicine, are exposed to recruitment the most. This is due to the fact that armies promise to provide these necessities to children with the condition that they risk their lives fulfilling the questionable objectives within an armed conflict. In other words, vulnerable children feel like joining armed conflict only as means for survival. This is also seen when the environment is not suitable for healthy civilization. Children who become affected by the dangers of climate change or rapidly declining societies face a similar problem, forcing them to join armies. As a result, it is important to encounter measures to provide resources to regions in need.

When child soldiers become integrated into conflict, where they ultimately risk their lives, not only is their health being jeopardized, but also their growth as humans. For instance, they lack a proper education and childhood. The lack of education is a major obstacle for child soldiers because it becomes increasingly difficult to reintegrate themselves into society. Without proper education and professional experience, children that have finalized their service in armies have nowhere to go, and as a result, have no future.

Concurrently, child soldier recruitment has begun to be outlawed in multiple countries. Regardless, approximately fifty countries continue to allow it. Some countries train infants and integrate them into armed conflicts at a young age, while others train the children until they become older than eighteen. According to the United Nations Secretary General, there are seven main countries that utilize children in armed conflict. These are South Sudan, Sudan, Yemen, Afghanistan, Democratic Republic of Congo, Myanmar, and Somalia. Uganda is also a country that has a huge number of child soldiers. Although most child soldier armies are located around the continent of Africa, they are spread throughout other regions such as the Middle East, Europe, and South America. This is depicted in the following image in which countries that appear red have a higher percentage of child soldiers.



Since 2001, the number of countries that have restricted their armies to only recruit soldiers above the age of eighteen has increased from 83 to 126. This change includes 71% of states that utilized child

soldiers on previous occasions. Furthermore, most countries that illegally employ soldiers have minimized the amount of child soldiers in their respective armies. These numbers however, do not include opposition and extremist groups, such as Boko Haram, that continuously force children into their armies. International collaboration, as well as the introduction of a developing “Straight 18” law, have been largely responsible for such positive improvement.

Although the future for children is slowly becoming brighter, much work is still required to fully resolve the issue. Children of diverse ages are still being deprived of their childhood, education, healthy lifestyles and suitable futures. The issue is one that must not be overlooked in order to finally resolve the moral and security issue that child soldier recruitment poses.

Definition of Key Terms

Child Soldiers:

A child under the age of 18 that fights for a governmental or non-governmental organization within an armed conflict. Usually, child soldiers are forcefully recruited by governmental or non-governmental groups. Child soldiers might also join an armed conflict as a means to acquire resources that are no longer available to them.

Refugee:

A person who has been forced to leave their country in order to escape war, persecution, or natural disaster. The overall goal of refugees is to reach asylum.

Internally Displaced Person:

A person that is affected by war, persecution, or natural disasters but has yet to leave their country as a result of unfavorable conditions.

International Armed Conflict:

Violent conflict opposing two or more States.

Non-International Armed Conflict:

Violent conflict between governmental forces and non-governmental armed groups, or between such groups only.

“Straight 18” Law:

Law established by multiple countries that restricts armies from recruiting soldiers under the age of eighteen. There are approximately 44 countries that have yet to meet the petitions proposed by the developing “Straight 18” Law, however a lot of progress is currently being made. The problem with such regulation is that, even if the government of each country implemented it, the recruitment of child soldiers by opposing forces, which are amongst the main culprits for such issue, would still have to be addressed in another manner.

General Overview

As already mentioned, the threat of child soldier armies has been slightly eradicated through the attempts of multiple countries. There are, as demonstrated by new findings and previous events, many ways to fend off the moral and deadly crisis, without further incentivizing warfare. Throughout contemporary history, there have been many incidents of child soldier armies that have stood out greatly amongst others. These examples clearly showcase the problematic extent of child soldier armies and how they have been attempted to be resolved by other countries.

Hitler Jugend

Amongst the first uses of child soldiers in armed conflict, the Hitler Jugend, a movement designed to transform young individuals to strong and merciless Nazis, stands out. The Hitler Jugend was a movement based on the beliefs of Adolf Hitler that begun in the 1920’s. A few years later, in 1933, approximately 100,000 children were enrolled in the Hitler Jugend.

As the war approached, the number of enrolled participants grew exponentially. In 1936, 4 million underage Germans were being prepared for war. The Hitler Jugend exposed children to the dangers of military service and a degree of preparedness that was met through intense training. The Hitler Jugend was so important that it became the main education institute for Germans.

Apart of being heavily warfare oriented, the program also shared the Nazi discriminatory views. Since a young age, Germans were taught that they were the purest race and that other communities were evil. Like other child soldier recruitment incidents, the Hitler Jugend is a prime example of how children are taken advantage of. After suffering a huge economic loss after World War I and living in a declining

Germany, many children were pressured to join the Hitler Jugend. Others were simply taken advantage of, due to their lack of knowledge, as war tools.

After 1939, it was almost impossible to avoid joining the Hitler Jugend as a German child. Those who were not “strong” or “brave” enough were punished. These characteristics all coincide with many of the main characteristics of more modern child soldier recruitment incidents.

Child recruitment in Colombia

Child recruitment in Colombia stems from the long-lasting conflict between the Colombian government and FARC. The roots of the conflict are found in 1948, in which a ten year long civil war, recognized as “La Violencia”, began. Between 1948 and 1949, the civil war resulted in the deaths of approximately 280,000 people. This civil war developed as a result of the assassination of a beloved politician, which caused the country to divide into two main parties: conservative government of Colombia and the rural communist liberals. The rural rebels developed the FARC, an organization that uses warfare and terrorism against the Colombian government, soon after. Currently, there is an estimate of 10,000 members in the FARC. The FARC committed many crimes such as drug trafficking, kidnapping, and bombings amongst many. In 2016, a peace treaty between the Colombian government and the FARC came to life. Even though the long-lasting conflict is approaching a cease fire, the use of child soldiers by the FARC cannot be ignored. Throughout the 50 year conflict, the FARC had recruited children to complete unspeakable crimes such as serving as spies, drug trafficking, and even participating in guerilla tactics. The dangers that these children have faced are unparalleled and many have been acting involuntarily. Recently, however, the FARC has begun releasing child soldiers. The ages and identities of these individuals have remained a secret to avoid further problems. In addition, the FARC has promised to restrict the recruitment of soldiers under the age.

Joseph Kony

Joseph Kony was a warlord who emerged to power from the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA). The issue of child recruitment is present during Kony’s leadership due to the fact that he forcefully kidnapped and recruited 30,000 children to strengthen his army. Claiming to have spiritual powers, Kony convinced children to fight in his army through rhetoric and intrusive demeanor. The beginning of such issue began in 1986, when Kony took over The Holy Spirit movement, a militaristic and spiritual movement against oppression in Uganda. In an attempt to resolve oppression in northern Uganda, more violence was

created. Kony began abducting children because maintaining his regional supporters throughout a conflict that saw no end became a difficult task. Many children, apart of having to face the dangers of warfare under his leadership, were also forced or convinced, due to Kony's claim of spiritual power, to cut communal ties, end relationships with family members, or even hurt innocent civilians who unfortunately were at the wrong place at the wrong time.

Syrian Civil War Child Recruitment

Starting in the middle of the twentieth century, Syria has been controlled by the al-Assad authoritarian regime. During Bashar al-Assad's rule, Syria's current leader, the population has been massively repressed and left without important resources such as medicine, food, housing amongst others. Furthermore, with the establishment of a secret security force, like in communist East Berlin, the people's privacy was interfered with. Moreover, the population was not allowed to their own political voice if it opposed Bashar's ideologies.

In 2011, when the Arab Spring began in the Arabian Peninsula and Northern Africa, mass protests began occurring around the Middle East, including Syria. In many countries authoritarian regimes were defeated, however, Syria's government resisted. The Syrian Civil war was really fueled, when the government violently opposed the protests by opening fire and releasing chemical weapons. The population of the country was further deprived of their human rights when the migrant crisis began. As protesting continued as a way to dethrone the dictator, an unstable government caused rebellious groups to gain power. With terrorist groups, rebel forces, the Syrian government, and world powers getting involved with the issue, Syria became a battlefield. The population became subjected to collateral damage from the war and their country has become too extreme to continue living within it. This was the immediate cause of the refugee crisis.

Eventually, the Syrian community began to migrate to diverse parts away from Syria to start new lives in places like Europe. Their journey, however, was and continues to be a struggle. Many die on their path due to starvation, sickness or injuries. Even many of those who manage to make it out are illegally being pushed back in the borders of many countries. As a result, many refugee camps in places like Jordan and Greece have been flooded by refugees causing harmful effects to both the host country and the migrants themselves. Many countries, such as Germany, have been very open to refugees while others, like Hungary, have not. The migrant crisis caused by the Syrian Civil War, is a conflict that has no clear foreseeable end and as a result, solutions are need.

In addition to a catastrophic migrant crisis, one of the main repercussions of the Syrian Civil War, a child recruitment increase was also consequential. As mentioned previously, the Syrian Civil War has caused multiple groups and countries to become directly involved in a war of innumerable sides. Opposing forces, including Islamist State terrorist groups like ISIS, have been recruiting child soldiers in order to fight the Syrian government. Also, the situation's severity can be observed from the fact that some children have also been spotted performing executions on footage. Other warring groups have also recruited children. According to UNICEF, most of the cases they evaluated during 2015 demonstrated that the majority of child soldiers were under the age of 7. Furthermore, UNICEF claims that child recruitment is a trend whose growth can be measured since the beginning of the Syrian Civil War and the migrant crisis. As explained in the introduction, many children are especially prone to join armed conflict when they live in poor conditions molded by warfare and lack of resources. Since many children have been left either displaced inside Syria or as refugees, many have had to join armies to satisfy their needs and others have been willing to fight in exchange for these resources.

Major Controversies

The recruitment of children as a means to develop armed conflict, as demonstrated by a series of examples above, is very common. Children have been utilized for warfare purposes for many decades and in nearly every part of the world at a given moment in time. Although the issue is of extreme severity and as a result, must be resolved, it is a very contentious issue that is very controversial.

One of the main controversies that arises from child soldier recruitment comes from the definition of a child soldier. According to international policy, any child that contributes towards the continuation of an armed conflict, whether it is utilizing weaponry or spying, amongst others, is considered a child soldier. Despite the creation of a definition for child soldiers, oftentimes people mistakenly fail to understand the distinction between a child who is a soldier, civilian, or a child who alternates between being a civilian and soldier.

From this definition, another troublesome controversy emerges. Children become soldiers for numerous reasons. As it has clearly been identified in the introduction, children can become soldiers in multiple ways but not limited to: lack of resources and poor living conditions, persuasion from soldiers or leaders of armed conflicts, or forcefully integrated into armies. Due to the fact that the definition states that a child soldier is any child part of armed forces, it means that it is difficult to determine if children who were forced into conflict are equally as guilty as those who decide to become part of such atrocities.

Also, due to the fact that oftentimes children are persuaded or blackmailed, it is difficult to distinguish what it means for a child to make a decision to be part of armed conflict. Lastly, from the definition that is given for the term, the idea of when it is more acceptable to fight in armed conflict is left in a very vague state.

The term child soldier explicitly includes the word “soldier.” According to most dictionaries, a soldier is someone who engages in military activity. Although this is a common definition, the word soldier implies experience and skill. Most child soldiers however have had no military training and instead, serve in armed forces as beginners and with little to no knowledge about armed conflict. This casts a huge shadow of controversy over the wording of the term itself.

One of the major conflicts of dealing with the circumstance of child soldiers is how to handle these individuals. There are multiple arguments for each side. Many people believe that children deserve special protection, others believe that war crimes must be punished in order to complete a mission successfully, and others simply consider child soldiers to be completely dangerous. Child soldiers act in multiple different manners due to the fact that most are introduced to armed conflict in distinctive manners. This leads adults to become scared or unaware of how to handle a situation that involves child soldiers. In order to resolve this issue, proper training for adults is necessary, however, proper training is also difficult to provide because there are so many different perspectives.

Moreover, judging child soldiers for the actions they committed can often become an overwhelming task because it lies in a grey area. Some child soldiers commit crimes that are very small in magnitude or seriousness. However, the controversial side of the judging stems from atrocities committed by child soldiers, such as war crimes. By definition, child soldiers are under eighteen in most regions, unless a law of a particular country objects. This has caused debates across the world on whether or not child soldiers who commit crimes should be punished. More so than just the complex yes or no question, the extent at which child soldiers must be punished is not properly defined yet. In addition to the extent of punishments that must be given, a proper criteria to rank the crimes committed by child soldiers has yet to become established. This has been difficult to accomplish not only because child soldiers have very young ages, but also because child soldiers are often forced to do things by guiltier people that are adults or unfavorable conditions.

There are plenty more controversies that developed as a result of child soldier recruitment. These, however, are some of the most distinguishable problems that the issue of child soldiers have created. In

order to completely eradicate the use of child soldiers in armed conflict, these controversies must be addressed and clearly resolved.

Major Parties Involved and Their Views

United States of America,

As a military and economic powerhouse, the United States of America has massive influence worldwide. In regards to the child soldier issue, the United States of America plays a vital role in supporting the development of training materials and staff for the rehabilitation of child soldiers. Furthermore, as a permanent member of the United Nation's Security Council, the United States has a massive say in the enforcement of laws that restrict the recruitment of soldiers under the age of eighteen.

Sweden,

Sweden, alongside other countries, has an imperative role in hosting and supporting child protection courses. These courses are completely designated, as their name implies, protecting children that have managed to abandon their roles under armed conflict groups and are seeking means to avoid persecution from controversial governments and extremist forces.

Colombia,

There is a misconception that child soldier recruitment is only prevalent in nations around Africa, Europe, and the Middle East. However, Colombia is also a victim of such issue. In Colombia, from the emergence of drug trafficking organizations and the FARC, child soldiers are not rare in the country. The Government of Colombia has attempted to develop measures to neutralize drug lord organizations and develop treaties for the FARC to minimize the growth of child soldier armies.

South Sudan, Sudan, Yemen, Afghanistan, Democratic Republic of Congo, Myanmar, and Somalia,

According to the United Nations, the seven main countries that have large percentages of child soldiers within their armies are South Sudan, Sudan, Yemen, Afghanistan, Democratic Republic of Congo, Myanmar, and Somalia. As a result, these countries could be pro-child soldier recruitment, heavily

contested by opposing forces that recruit children, or paramilitary forces that recruit children.

Timeline of Events

The use of child soldiers in armed conflict has been a practice that has been part of societies around the world for a long time. As a result, the timeline will focus on the most important events ever since the 20th century.

1920-1945	Hitler Jugend (over four million participants in this child soldier initiation program.)
1948	Beginning of Colombian civil war which paved the way for the creation of the FARC, a rebel group that utilizes child soldiers.
1977	Additional Protocols for the 1949 Geneva Conventions prohibiting armies to recruit soldiers under the age of 15.
1989	Conventions on the Rights of the Child which reaffirmed the law on age restriction for soldier recruitment and defined the new age limit to be 18.
1994	The United Nations Human Rights watch begins to publish articles about the wellbeing of child soldiers, raising awareness world wide.
1999	Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention 182 and Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child.
2000	Optional Protocol to the Conventions on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict (OPAC). First international treaty fully focused on combating underage children recruitment.
2002	Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. Recognized the employment of underage soldiers as a war crime.
2002	Development of Boko Haram, terrorist organization that has on multiple occasions condoned the recruitment of underage child

soldiers.

2002	The Security Council of the UN evaluates countries that have failed to follow restrictions.
2003	The UN passes resolution 1460, which states that countries that have failed to completely remove child soldiers from their armies must provide true information on how they have worked on decreasing the amount.
2005	The Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict was established. Resolution 1612 is also passed.

UN involvement, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events

The United Nations, has been an organization that has dedicated a vast amount of time and effort towards the issue of child soldier recruitment. Since the origins of the UN, in the 1949 Geneva Conventions, measures to minimize the growth of child soldier armies has been a main priority. Many resolutions, containing ideas to resolve the issue, have been passed ever since.

- Additional Protocols for the 1949 Geneva Conventions (1977)
- Resolution 1460 (2003)
 - “Call for immediate halt to use of child soldiers.”
- Resolution 1612 (2005)
 - “Monitoring, reporting mechanism on use of child soldiers”
- Resolution 2225 (2015)
 - “Adds parties abducting children during armed conflict to list monitoring grave human rights violators.”

Evaluation of Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

There are multiple organizations that have worked collaboratively in resolving the issue. Even though the issue has not been completely resolved, the problem has significantly decreased in magnitude. Most of the work that has been done has been focused mainly on developing a rule set. In 1977, The Additional Protocols to the 1949 Geneva Conventions, the recruitment of soldiers under the age of 15

became prohibited. It actually became a war crime to recruit soldiers under the age of 15. This prohibition came to be in the Conventions on the Rights of the Child in 1989. Also, in this convention, the age limit rose to 18. Although this has been a major factor in decreasing the amount of child soldier recruitment, this attempt to resolve the problem lacks a method to penalize those that do not abide by the rule. The absence of continuous and strict enforcement in certain countries is missing.

Possible Solutions

Solutions to such a complex problem are hard to be achieved, especially because child soldier recruitment is heavily dependent on multiple conditions that are not universal. For instance, what is necessary to end child recruitment in Colombia, would not match the solutions required to resolve an issue with child recruitment in war-torn Yemen. Certain universal measures, however, can be achieved through collaborative effort to reduce the problem greatly.

Amongst the top priorities, developing a rule set that prohibits the recruitment of soldiers under the age of 18 stands out. In the Conventions on the Rights of the Child (1989) an effort was done to achieve this. In the past, the minimum age for child soldier recruitment was 15, and after the convention, the number changed to 18. In addition to reminding society about this rule, it is important to enforce it. Many governmental armies are fully aware of this restriction and yet, they still secretly recruit child soldiers. Measures to sanction or limit these governments are efficient ways to ensure that the problem doesn't continuously occur.

Moreover, due to the fact that child recruitment also occurs through non-governmental organizations (such as terrorist groups), eradicating these threats could also contribute greatly to the cause. Non-governmental organizations forcefully recruit children and push them to complete tasks that are inhumane and morally challenging. Efforts to defeat these groups would not only ensure that these groups can succeed in spreading terror and hate, but they would also decrease the amounts of children that are recruited into armed conflict yearly.

The problem of child soldier involvement in armed conflict extends much further than just the involvement itself. As explained in the introduction, many child soldiers lack resources before and after participating in conflict zones. Many children end up in governmental and non-governmental armies because it is the only way they can survive. Also, many children complete their service but have nowhere

to go afterwards, because they relied on their service for jobs, shelter, food, water, and medicine. Not only do they depend on armed service for all of these things, but child soldiers also lack education to become successful in the future. When developing solutions for such crises, it is of fundamental importance to encounter ways to rehabilitate child soldiers and provide them with the necessary resources to carry on their lives.

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Appendix or Appendices

- A detailed essay from which the main ideas related to child soldier recruitment controversies were extracted.
<http://the-beacon.info/countries/africa/child-%E2%80%9Csoldiers%E2%80%9D-and-civilians%E2%80%94some-controversial-issues>
- Descriptive reports on resolutions passed by the United Nations in regards to child soldier recruitment.
<https://www.un.org/press/en>
- Information about policies and measures taken to combat the dangers of children in armed conflict in addition to the impact made by a particular organization.
<https://www.child-soldiers.org/international-laws-and-child-rights>
- Paragraph that describes in very brief fashion the definition of child soldiers, their roles within armed forces, and the average ages for these young soldiers.
<https://www.hrw.org/topic/childrens-rights/child-soldiers>
- Article that is mainly concerned with stressing the importance of a developing “Straight-18” law and mentioning the geographical location of areas contested with child soldier recruitment.
<https://www.child-soldiers.org/where-are-there-child-soldiers>
- Short video that summarizes and explains the conflict between the Colombian government and the FARC by going in depth into the pre-conditions, the climax, and aftermath of the deal that was ultimately accomplished.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VFU9La5MFe4>
- Website that explains how the Hitler Jugend became the main form of education in Germany during the 20th century and how they were transformed to child soldiers under these institutions ran by the Nazi regime.
<http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/nazi-germany/hitler-youth-movement>
- Summarized paragraphs about African warlord Kony rise to power and the ways he utilized children to enforce his army during the Holy Spirit Movement in Uganda.
<https://invisiblechildren.com/challenge/kony>

- Quotes about the use of child soldiers by opposition groups as a result of the Syrian Civil War and during the migrant crisis.

<http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-children-idUSKCN0WG0R0>