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MASTER OF DEFENCE STUDIES

**Child Soldiers:
Preparing Canadian Forces Members for a Unique Threat**

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ABSTRACT

The recent past has been witness to significant changes in the way wars are waged and fought. Battlefields that once saw states pitched against states in a legitimate struggle for power have been replaced by rebel groups and resistance movements inflicting violence to advance their own political and economic causes. These non-state groups fill their ranks with society's most vulnerable members: children. Estimates place some 300,000 children in the world's armed struggles. Despite advances in international humanitarian and human rights laws to proscribe the use of children in combat, the practice persists in countries the world over.

It goes without saying that the Government of Canada and the Canadian Forces (CF) will continue to honour their international obligations and commit troops to help in the achievement of world security and stability. The places across the globe that are most in need of the CF's intervention are the same places that employ children to fight their wars. As such, the CF must prepare its members to confront the threat of child soldiers in a legal, professional and ethical manner.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

On Jan. 4, 2002, Sgt. Nathan Ross Chapman was the first U.S. serviceman to be killed by hostile fire in Afghanistan. A 31-year-old Green Beret who also served in the Persian Gulf War, Chapman was killed by sniper fire after meeting with local tribal leaders in Paktia province. He knew the dangers he faced but probably never imagined he would die from a bullet fired by a child soldier.¹

Far from being an isolated incident, the above passage represents a growing phenomenon on the modern battlefield. Twenty-first century warfare is no longer solely defined by states pitted against states in a conventional fashion, involving foes who are more or less symmetrical in training, equipment and doctrine. Today's battles are more and more frequently being fought in urban areas and, by extension, are much less concerned with minimizing civilian interference in operations.² Conflicts of the recent past have made it abundantly clear that war is no longer the exclusive domain of government controlled combatants nor is it solely the domain of adults. The strict codes of conduct in war that once protected civilians and children from the effects of war are blatantly disregarded by rebel groups, non state actors and some governments alike. Further, they ignore traditional proscriptions against attacks on non-combatants, torture, sexual abuses and other human rights violations. What is even more startling is the fact that these groups fail to offer protections to children, society's most vulnerable members.

¹Timothy W. Maier, "Children are being used as soldiers; Third World countries increasingly are coercing child soldiers into military action, raising moral dilemmas that can be matters of life and death for Western troops," *Insight on the News*, 10 December, 2002.

²Melinda Mansour, "More than a COIN toss: Do modern militaries require greater emphasis on counterinsurgency or conventional skills?" (Toronto: Joint Command and Staff Program Decisive Manoeuvre Paper, 2010), 1.

Quite to the contrary, they deliberately recruit, train and employ them in hostilities that serve to advance their own political and economic causes.

Although reports vary, the most frequently cited number of child soldiers worldwide is in the order of 300,000, with the vast majority being employed in non-state armed groups. As many as twenty-four government backed paramilitaries, armed opposition groups, and factional groups employ child soldiers in aggressive combat roles, as spies, messengers and porters, to commit human rights and to loot and destroy.³ These groups do not discriminate between boys and girls; in many countries girls are used as sexual slaves and are often given to commanders as wives, and are used to alleviate the “sadness of combatants.”⁴

The use of children in conflict is not limited to non-state actors and rebel groups. The International Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers (CSC) stated in its Global Report 2008 that between 2004 and 2007 at least nine countries used children in their government controlled forces. Additionally, the report showed that fourteen governments recruited children, in some cases using them in hostilities. Further, they employed them in auxiliary forces, civilian defence groups or in illegal militias and armed groups acting as alternatives for government controlled armed forces.⁵ A news note published by UNICEF in February 2008 tells the tale that, with an increase from forty to fifty-seven

³ Coalition to Stop the use of Child Soldiers, “Child Soldiers Global Report 2008” <http://www.childsoldiersglobalreport.org/content/facts-and-figures-child-soldiers>; Internet; accessed 18 March 2010.

⁴ Timothy W. Maier, “Children are being used as soldiers,” December 10, 2002.

⁵ Coalition to Stop the use of Child Soldiers, “Child Soldiers Global Report 2008” <http://www.childsoldiersglobalreport.org/content/facts-and-figures-child-soldiers>; Internet; accessed 18 March 2010.

armed groups and armed forces employing children around the globe; the problem is far from diminishing.⁶

The military superiority and sophistication of developed countries renders it such that it is unlikely that the use of children in armed conflict will provide decisive victories for the groups that employ them. Children on the battlefield are nevertheless a serious concern not only from a humanitarian perspective, but also from a security perspective for the western soldiers they come into contact with.

The majority of what has been written on the topic of child soldiers speaks to the necessity of ensuring their protection from recruitment, re-recruitment and employment in armed struggles. There can be no doubt that these endeavours are both noble and important; however these are not challenges that should fall to a military to overcome. More important from a military perspective is the necessity to prepare Canadian Forces (CF) members to confront child soldiers in a legal, professional and ethical manner. The consequences of not preparing CF members for this new threat are far reaching; they range from the loss of public support to psychological stress disorders or, worse, the death of a child or CF member. Accordingly, this paper will address the challenges that child soldiers present for the CF and its members. Through an analysis of current policy, doctrine and training, this paper will demonstrate that insufficient attention has been paid to the issue. In an effort to close the gap, it will propose recommendations that can aid the CF and its members in accomplishing missions in parts of the world where the risk of confronting child soldiers exists.

⁶UNICEF, "Number of Armed Groups and Forces using Child Soldiers increases from 40 to 57," http://www.unicef.org/media/media_42833.html; Internet; accessed 22 January 2010.

CHAPTER 2

CHILDREN'S SPECIAL STATUS UNDER INTERNATIONAL LAW

With the changing nature of armed conflict, the impact of war on children has become more devastating than ever before. Although children on the battlefield are not a completely modern phenomenon, their growing presence in conflict situations has caused the international community to pay increased attention to their protection. Over the course of the past six decades, legal instruments designed to protect children in armed conflict situations have evolved into legal protection frameworks and international standards aimed at preventing the recruitment of children into armed conflict.

Not unlike other professions, the profession of arms is bound by a series of norms, rules and laws. As such, a soldier's job is not one that allows for the "no holds barred" adage. The age-old law of armed conflict (LOAC) was codified to ensure that wars were fought justly, allowing for only those actions deemed imperative to defeat the adversary in a fashion that minimized injury to people and damage to property. Falling under the heading of International Humanitarian Law, the LOAC sets the conditions for how wars can be waged, and by whom.⁷

In addition to, and arguably overlapping with the International Humanitarian Law, Human Rights Laws have also been codified over time. Since the creation of the Geneva Conventions in 1949, the body of customary and conventional law has evolved. Beyond the general protections accorded to civilians in times of conflict, these laws have come to include special protections for children but have done so in a language that often further confounds the complex problem of engaging children in combat. The remainder of this

⁷ Leslie C. Green, *The Contemporary Law of Armed Conflict* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), 118.

chapter will provide an analysis of the evolution of International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights Laws as they pertain to both children and child soldiers. Further, it will consider their status as combatants in accordance with the principles of the Law of Armed Conflict.

The initial *Geneva Conventions of 1949* did not make specific provisions for children involved in armed conflict, however it was the first body of international law that codified protections for civilians, and in particular children during times of armed conflict. Specifically, the *Geneva Convention Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War of 12 August 1949* singled out the protections that parties involved in armed conflict should afford to children.⁸ What the body of law did not do was make specific reference to children participating in armed conflict, but rather classified them as innocent bystanders or victims of war. Further complicating matters, there was no specific reference to the age that defines a child in the *Geneva Conventions*, leaving a clear demarcation point between child and adult to be resolved.

In 1977, *Additional Protocols I and II* to the *Geneva Conventions* were developed, taking steps toward the protection of children from use in war and combat. The first supplemental document, *Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the Protection of Civilians of International Armed Conflicts, 8 June 1977* stipulates that countries should take all feasible measures to prevent children who have not attained the age of fifteen from being recruited for, or being used directly in armed conflict. It further stipulates that if persons who have attained the age of fifteen

⁸ICRC, *Convention (IV) Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, Geneva, 12 August 1949* (Geneva: ICRC, 1949): Art. 14, 17, 23, 24, 38, 50, 82, 89, 94, 132; [document on-line]; available from <http://www.icrc.org/ihl.nsf/FULL/380?OpenDocument>; Internet; accessed 16 March 2010.

but have not yet attained the age of eighteen have been recruited, parties to the conflict should endeavour to offer priority to those who are older.⁹ Despite this step forward, the language was once again weak and ambiguous. An argument could be made that, by not expressly prohibiting the employment of children under the age of eighteen, the Protocol condones such practices. Further, it could be argued that children under the age of eighteen could be used in support roles, as the article only references direct hostilities.

The second supplemental document, *Additional Protocol II*, was developed to protect the victims of non-international conflicts. *Article 4* of this document, *Fundamental Guarantees*, establishes further prohibitions by stating that children under the age of fifteen shall be neither recruited nor allowed to engage in hostilities in non-international conflicts. Additionally, *Article 4, 3(c)* further restricts the involvement of children in armed conflict by removing the words “direct involvement”¹⁰ One can only assume that by “indirect”, *Additional Protocol II* means to include such roles as spies, camp workers and, in the case of girls, as sex slaves because once more, the language is subject to interpretation.

Recognizing the need to award additional special protections to children, in 1989 the United Nations *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (CRC) was established. The CRC spells out the basic human rights of children worldwide; the right to survival; to develop to the fullest; to protection from harmful influences, abuse and exploitation; and

⁹ICRC, *Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts* (Protocol I) (Geneva: ICRC, 8 June 1977): Art. 77; [document on-line]; available from <http://www.icrc.org/ihl.nsf/FULL/470?OpenDocument>; Internet; accessed 16 March 2010.

¹⁰ICRC, *Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the Protection of Civilians of Non-International Armed Conflicts* (Protocol II) (Geneva: ICRC, 18 June 1977): Art. 4; [document on-line]; available from <http://www.icrc.org/ihl.nsf/FULL/475?OpenDocument>; Internet; accessed 16 March 2010.

to participate fully in family, cultural and social life. It was the first international legal instrument to establish a clear definition of child: any person under the age of eighteen unless, under the law applicable to the child, the age of majority is attained earlier. In keeping with *Additional Protocols, Article 38* of the CRC established the age of fifteen as the minimum age of allowing children to be used as combatants.¹¹ As of November 2009, 194 governments had ratified the CRC leaving only Somalia and the United States (US) to ratify.¹² It is fair to note, however, that Somalia is in a state of political uncertainty and currently has no recognized government by which it can legally ratify such documents. Further, the United States was instrumental in the development of the convention, with several of the articles originating directly from their Constitution. The challenge rests with the cautious approach the US takes to the ratification of treaties. By way of example, the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination* was ratified twenty-eight years after it was signed by then President Lyndon B. Johnson.¹³ The Obama administration has signaled its intention to revive efforts to see the US ratify the CRC, but to date this has not occurred.¹⁴

Unsatisfied with the standards established in the Additional Protocols and the CRC, in 1994 a world body working group was formed to further advance the cause of

¹¹United Nations General Assembly, *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (New York: UN, 1989): Art. 1; [document on-line]; available from <http://treaties.un.org/Pages/CTCTreaties.aspx?id=4&subid=A&lang=en>; Internet; accessed 12 March 2010.

¹²UNICEF, "Convention on the Rights of the Child," http://www.unicef.org/crc/index_30229.html; Internet; accessed 6 March 2010.

¹³Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, International Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination, <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/cerd.htm>; Internet; accessed 22 March 2010.

¹⁴The Huffington Post, "Obama Administration Seeks to join U.N. Rights Of The Child Convention," http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2009/06/23/obama-administration-seek_n_219511.html; Internet; accessed 22 March 2010.

the protection of children in armed conflict. Because the United States and United Kingdom were still using children under the age of eighteen in armed conflict, they resisted having higher standards codified in International Law. As a result, progress was stalled.

In 1998, the Rome Statute of International Criminal Court (ICC) established *Article 8* which, in language stronger than had been previously seen, declared it a war crime to conscript or enlist children under the age of fifteen into national armed forces or groups or to actively use them in hostilities.¹⁵ Once more, however, it is unclear what is meant by actively using children in hostilities and does not distinguish between combat and support roles.

In June 1999 the International Labour Organization (ILO) made their own contribution to the protections of children in armed conflict. Specifically, *Convention 182* included the use of a child soldier as one of the worst forms of child labour and prohibited the forced or compulsory recruitment of children under the age of 18 for use in armed struggles.¹⁶

In 2000, the aforementioned world body working group was able to reach a consensus on raising the standard for the use of children in armed conflict. The UN General Assembly subsequently adopted this new standard, the *Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict*.

¹⁵International Criminal Court, *Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court* (Rome: ICC, 17 July 1998): Art. 8; [document on-line]; available from <http://www.icrc.org/ihl.nsf/FULL/585?OpenDocument>; Internet; accessed 13 March 2010.

¹⁶International Labour Organization, *Convention Concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour (Convention No. 182)* (Geneva: International Labour Organization, Nov 1999): Art. 2; <http://www.ilo.org/ilolex/cgi-lex/convde.pl?C182>; Internet; accessed 12 March 2010.

Unfortunately, this new protocol used the same weak language present in previous related documents, requiring states to take all *feasible measures* to ensure that members of their armed forces who may not have attained the age of eighteen years do not participate in hostilities.¹⁷ However, somewhat more progressively, it requires states to raise the age of voluntary recruitment from fifteen to eighteen and prohibits the conscription of anyone under the age of 18 into state controlled armed forces.¹⁸ The Optional Protocol prohibits rebel and non-governmental armed groups from using persons under the age of eighteen in their forces and requires states to criminalize such practices. Finally, it imposes a number of expectations on ratifying states, demanding that they “take all necessary legal, administrative and other measures to ensure the effective implementation and enforcement of the provisions of this Protocol within its jurisdiction.”¹⁹

In a bid to ensure compliance, ratifying states are further required to submit, within two years of ratification, a binding declaration of the minimum age of recruitment for their respective armed services and a report including detailed information on steps

¹⁷United Nations General Assembly, *Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child* (New York: UN, 2000): Art. 1; [document on-line]; available from <http://www.icrc.org/IHL.NSF/FULL/595?OpenDocument>; Internet; accessed 15 March 2010.

¹⁸United Nations General Assembly, *Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child* (New York: UN, 2000): Art. 3; [document on-line]; available from <http://www.icrc.org/IHL.NSF/FULL/595?OpenDocument>; Internet; accessed 15 March 2010.

¹⁹United Nations General Assembly, *Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child* (New York: UN, 2000): Art. 6(1); [document on-line]; available from <http://www.icrc.org/IHL.NSF/FULL/595?OpenDocument>; Internet; accessed 15 March 2010.

taken to implement the provisions of the protocol.²⁰ The Optional Protocol entered into force in February 2002; some eight years later 134 countries have ratified.²¹

In addition to agreements of an international nature, regional agreements have also been developed. The *African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child*, developed in 1990, recognizes that a child's physical and mental development requires particular care and that children require legal protection in the areas of freedom, dignity and security. As such, the charter encourages states to "undertake to respect and ensure respect for rules of international humanitarian law applicable in armed conflicts which affect the child" and to "take all necessary measures" to avoid the recruitment or use of children under the age of eighteen in combat.²² As of February 2004, thirty-seven of fifty-three African countries had ratified the charter.²³ Unfortunately, as will be demonstrated in subsequent chapters of this paper, a vast majority of African countries continue to employ children in their armed struggles.

The United Nations has taken a leadership role in raising awareness and making attempts to tackle the use of child soldiers on the world scene. Recognizing that the use of children in armed conflict has dire consequences for international peace and stability,

²⁰United Nations General Assembly, *Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child* (New York: UN, 2000): Art. 8(1); [document on-line]; available from <http://www.icrc.org/IHL.NSF/FULL/595?OpenDocument>; Internet; accessed 15 March 2010.

²¹Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, *United Nations Treaty Collection*, http://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg_no=IV-11-b&chapter=4&lang=en, Internet; accessed 26 February 2010.

²²African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, *African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child*; [document on-line]; available from <http://www.africa-union.org/child/home.htm>; Internet; accessed 26 February 2010.

²³Africa Union, "Status of Ratification of the Charter," http://www.africa-union.org/Official_documents/Treaties_%20Conventions_%20Protocols/List/African%20Charter%20on%20the%20Rights%20and%20Welfare%20of%20the%20Child.pdf, Internet; accessed 26 February 2010.

the Security Council has adopted resolutions concerning the protection of war affected children. Since 1999, six resolutions have been adopted which include: incorporating child protection into operational mandates; allowances for special provisions concerning the disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration of former child combatants; the encouragement of other countries to ratify the Optional Protocol; and the development of mechanisms to collect and provide “timely, objective, accurate and reliable information on the recruitment and use of child soldiers in violation of applicable international law and on other violations and abuses committed against children affected by armed conflict.”²⁴

The Security Council's focus on children in armed conflict has also served as a call to action for policy makers in regional organizations like the Economic Community Of West African States (ECOWAS), the Organization of American States (OAS), the African Union and the Commonwealth, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the European Union (EU) to incorporate children and armed conflict concerns into their own agendas. ECOWAS has been especially proactive in this area adopting a peer review framework on the protection of children as well as establishing a Child Protection Unit in its Secretariat. The EU has adopted "Guidelines on Children and Armed Conflict" which speaks to the promotion and protection of the rights of children as a priority concern for the EU at large.²⁵

In addition to the ambiguous language laid out in the various pieces of legislation and conventions listed above, further complicating the matter are the principles of Just

²⁴United Nations Security Council, Resolution 1612, para 2(a), 26 July 2005.

²⁵European Union, “EU Guidelines on Children in Armed Conflict,” <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cmsUpload/GuidelinesChildren.pdf>, Internet: accessed 26 February 2010.

War theory. Just War theory frames the basic moral rules of war in three distinct categories. First, *jus ad bellum*, translated to justice of war, relates to the political rules of waging war. Second, *jus in bello*, or justice in war, relates to the rules of conduct during war. Finally, *jus post bellum*, or justice after war, speaks to the transition from conflict to peace. Most relevant to the discussion of child soldiers is the category of *jus in bello* and in particular, the requirement of distinction. Distinction holds that it is not acceptable for combatants to deliberately attack non-combatants.²⁶ Traditionally, this group included members of the civilian population and children in particular, given that they require special protection because of their physical weakness, level of maturity and impressionable emotional state.

As the theory goes, individuals with lawful combatant status forfeit a number of their human rights when they become soldiers. To enjoy the privileges of a lawful combatant, the four following criteria must be met: they must fall under the command and control of an individual responsible for subordinates; they must wear a fixed and distinctive insignia or signs that are recognizable at a distance; they must carry arms openly and they must fight according to the laws of war.²⁷ The privileges extended to a lawful combatant include protection as prisoners of war and the assurance that they can take the lives of other soldiers without fear of reprisal. They cannot, however, deliberately kill civilians.

While the application of the theory is fairly straightforward with regards to adult soldiers, the matter becomes complicated when civilians, and more specifically children,

²⁶Department of National Defence, B-GJ-005-104/FP-021 *Law of Armed Conflict at the Operational and Tactical Level* (Ottawa: DND Canada, 2001), 2-2.

²⁷Department of National Defence, B-GJ-005-104/FP-021 *Law of Armed Conflict at the Operational and Tactical Level* (Ottawa: DND Canada, 2001), 3-2.

are involved. According to the LOAC, civilians are offered protections in times of war, yet if they take up arms and pose a threat to soldiers, they assume combatant status, automatically making them unlawful combatants. As an unlawful combatant, the civilian loses their protections and, by extension, become a legitimate target for the time that they take part in the hostilities. This theory also extends to children, who, despite their age, maturity or vulnerability, are considered responsible for their actions according to the principles of *jus in bello*. Direct interpretation of the theory suggests that it is permissible for adult soldiers to fight against child soldiers in the same manner that adult combatants fight against each other; that is to say that a member of the CF could, according to the LOAC, take the life a child who is participating in hostilities.

SUMMARY

The analysis of the evolution of International Humanitarian Law, Human Rights Law and Just War theory presented in this chapter served to develop an understanding of the complexities surrounding the issue of child soldiering from a legal perspective. Despite the considerable attention that has been paid to the issue of child soldiers in international legal arenas, and the vast number of countries who have signed or ratified the various documents, the problem persists. Additionally, although the LOAC was designed to safeguard human rights and protect children during times of conflict, the application of the principle of distinction makes it such that the death of an armed child is considered morally legitimate. The very laws that were designed to make a clear distinction between a combatant and non-combatant can also add to the confusion of confronting a child in combat.

CHAPTER 3

CHILD SOLDIERS AROUND THE WORLD

The practice of using children in combat is more pervasive than most people realize. As previously indicated there are approximately 300,000 children serving as soldiers in either combat or support roles the world over, accounting for almost ten percent of the world's combatant bench strength. What's more, there is an estimated half-million children serving in armed forces that are currently not at war.²⁸ Profound changes in the nature of warfare have contributed to the growing presence of children on the battlefield. Chief among these factors are the proliferation of lightweight, easily operated weaponry, the rise of failed and failing states, protracted internal wars and a growing trend in guerilla warfare. Today's geo-political landscape is home to conflicts that are occurring in countries almost exclusively characterized by internal wars, abject poverty, social and economic exclusion and the pursuit of political and economic power through violent means.

In order to fully appreciate how grave and widespread the situation is, this chapter will explore the nature and extent of child soldiering in a number of different countries around the world. First, a brief history of children involved in armed conflict will be provided. Second, to illustrate the point that the threat of engaging a child in either combat or peacekeeping roles is a distinct possibility for members of the CF, a broad view of child soldier employment in both government controlled forces and rebel groups in Africa, Latin America, Europe, the Middle East, and Asia will be provided.

²⁸P.W. Singer, *Children at War* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 3.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF CHILDREN IN CONFLICT

The use of children in armed conflict is not an entirely new phenomenon. During the Medieval period, boy pages were employed by knights of medieval Europe to help arm and maintain them in battle. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries small boys were used as “powder monkeys” to run ammunition to naval and army cannon crews, while Napoleon employed them as drummer boys, drumming his troops into battle during the 1815 Battle of Waterloo.²⁹ The practice of using children in armed conflict continued throughout the ages as evidenced some 120 years later when children were used to fight insurrections during World War II (WW II). Most famous is the group called “Hitler Jugend,” translated as Hitler Youth. During the war, the Germans equipped an entire SS Panzer Tank Division with sixteen and seventeen year-old boys from Hitler Youth brigades. As the war waged on and Germany continued to suffer casualties, more teenagers volunteered and were accepted for battle. The German ethic of the boy soldier not only encouraged such service but towards the end of the war, the Germans began drafting boys as young as twelve into their forces. These children saw extensive action and were among the fiercest and effective German defenders in the Battle of Berlin.³⁰

Despite these facts, according to scholars Singer and Vautravers, the use of children in combat up to and including WWII was not the norm, as children were never intended to represent core capabilities for the groups they served. Singer argues that it was the wars of de-colonization and the outbreak of internal wars in the 1990s that gave rise to the use of child soldiers as integral parts of both organized military units and non-military

²⁹P.W. Singer, *Children at War* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 11.

³⁰*Ibid.*, 14.

organizations including rebel and terrorist groups.³¹ Today, children are employed as combatants in approximately 75 percent of the world's conflicts in as many as twenty different countries, with their predominant concentration in Africa and central Asia.³² Their roles are not limited to combat alone. They perform a variety of roles as infantry shock troops, raiders, sentries, spies, trench diggers, porters, cooks, sex slaves and suicide bombers. Further, girls are now a growing feature on the battlefield, a trend that is unmatched in history. Singer reports that approximately 30 percent of armed forces employing children count girls among their ranks. They have served in the armed forces of fifty-five countries, twenty-seven of which abducted the girls for service and thirty-four of which employed them in combat.³³ In short, the participation of children in armed conflict is now neutral in gender, pervasive in scale and immense in number.

In their 2008 report, The Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers' *Child Soldiers: Global Report*, indicated that by the end of 2007, child soldiers were directly involved in seventeen armed conflicts worldwide. While this number has decreased from twenty-seven conflicts in 2004, it is still a staggering figure when one considers that the Canadian Forces, a professional military organization, are only engaged in sixteen operations worldwide, many of which are low-intensity peacekeeping missions.³⁴ While this decrease seems to represent improvements, the report attributes the downward trend

³¹P.W. Singer, *Children at War*, 15.

³²Mini Atlas of Human Security. *Child Soldiers*. (Brighton, UK: Myriad Editions, 2008): 41.

³³Peter W. Singer, "The New Children of War," *Air and Space Power Journal*, (Spring 2008): 3; <http://www.airpower.maxwell.af.mil/apjinternational/apj-s/2008/1tri08/singereng.htm>; Internet; accessed 26 February 2010.

³⁴Department of National Defence, "International Operations," <http://www.comfec-ccfcom.forces.gc.ca/pa-ap/ops/index-eng.asp>; Internet; accessed 13 February 2010.

to a reduction in armed conflicts worldwide, rather than a reduction in the use of children in armed conflict.³⁵

In order to appreciate the context of child soldiering beyond just the global scale of the issue, the following section will provide regional and country-specific information. A selection of specific conflicts in various regions around the globe will be used to describe some of the most egregious uses of children as soldiers.

AFRICA

Angola

Africa is considered by many to be the home of the child soldier phenomenon. Armed groups using child soldiers are represented in nearly every one of its innumerable internal wars, making children, warfare and Africa all but synonymous. To illustrate this point, a survey conducted in Angola revealed that 36 percent of all Angolan children had either served as soldiers or accompanied troops into combat over the course of the twenty-five year power struggle between the socialist government of Angola and the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA).³⁶ Over the course of the war, Angola became a divided country with one part controlled by the Angolan government and the other part controlled by UNITA.³⁷ The result saw some 4.5 million people internally displaced and an additional 450,000 flee to neighbouring countries.

³⁵Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, *Child Soldiers: Global Report 2008* (London: Bell and Bain, 2008): 12; [document on-line]; available from <http://www.childsoldiersglobalreport.org>; Internet; accessed 22 February 2010.

³⁶Richard Reid, "The Impact of Armed Conflict on Children's Rights," in *Children at War*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 19.

³⁷Michael Wessells, *Child Soldiers: From Violence to Protection*, (Cambridge; Harvard University Press, 2006), 12.

Although both parties signed the Luena Peace Accords in 2002, reports indicate that low intensity conflict continued until at least 2008.³⁸

Uganda

Comprising only two hundred adults, the northern Ugandan sectarian Christian rebel group the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) has gained international infamy for being comprised almost exclusively of child soldiers. Since the beginning of the armed rebellion against the Ugandan government in the late 1980s, the LRA has reportedly abducted more than 30,000 children, some as young as seven years old. Once kidnapped, the children are abused and turned into deadly warriors. In the LRA camps, new recruits are forced to march until the point of exhaustion, sexually violated and subjected to horrific initiations which include killing another child, often a brother or sister, or face death themselves.³⁹

Somalia

The intense fighting that has occurred in Somalia over the past decade has resulted in a marked increase in the recruitment and use of child soldiers. All parties to the conflict have been found to employ child soldiers, including the Transitional Federal Government, who have reportedly recruited boys aged fourteen to eighteen to fight in the war.⁴⁰ Anti-government groups also employ children in the Somalia conflict. According

³⁸Coalition to Stop the use of Child Soldiers, *Child Soldiers Global Report 2008*, <http://www.childsoldiersglobalreport.org/content/angola>, Internet; accessed 15 March 2010.

³⁹Alcinda Manuel Honwana, *Child Soldiers in Africa*, (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 29.

⁴⁰UNHCR, Refworld, http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/country_COI,,,SOM,,4b9e52bdc,0.html; Internet; accessed 17 March 2010.

to the UNHCR 2009 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices, the Islamist insurgency group Al-Shabaab conscripted children as young as eight into armed conflict and military operations, training and employing them to plant bombs and other explosive devices and to carry out assassinations for financial compensation.⁴¹

Rwanda

A tale familiar to most Canadians is the Rwandan genocide of 1994. Thousands of children are thought to have participated in the genocide which was perpetrated by the Hutu ethnic group against their fellow Rwandans, the Tutsis. When the fighting stopped, some 486 suspected *genocidaires* were housed in one rehabilitation camp alone. The boys were all younger than fourteen when they allegedly took part in the slaughter.⁴²

Democratic Republic of the Congo

Child soldiers have also become a prevalent feature of the continent's largest and deadliest conflict, the war in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). The fighting in the DRC began in 1996 when rebel leader Laurent Kabila, whose army had an estimated 10,000 child soldiers between the ages of seven and sixteen, overthrew the president of what was then Zaire.⁴³ Despite a transitional government being put in place in 1998, the country remains fraught with violence and hostilities continue in several areas. Most notably, in the provinces of Ituri, Katanga and North and South Kivu

⁴¹UNHCR, Refworld, <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/country.COI...SOM..4b9e52bdc.0.html>, Internet; accessed 17 March 2010.

⁴²Peter Singer, "Child Soldiers: The New Faces of War," http://www.brookings.edu/articles/2005/winter_islamicworld_singer.aspx; Internet; accessed 4 April 2010.

⁴³International Labour Organization, "Wounded Children: The Use of Children in Armed Conflict in Central Africa" (Geneva, 2003), [document available on-line] available from http://www.ilo.org/employment/Whatwedo/Publications/lang--en/docName--WCMS_116566/index.htm; Internet; accessed 21 March 2010.

⁴⁴ In an effort to stabilize the region, a United Nations Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo was established in 1999. The CF contribution to UN efforts at stability in the DRC currently includes a task force comprising twelve officers and one senior non-commissioned member based out of Kinshasa and Goma.⁴⁵

Sierra Leone

Conflict in Sierra Leone began in 1991 with attacks coming from its neighbour to the east, Liberia. Over the course of the eleven year war, fought between government forces and the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), an estimated 10,000 children participated in the conflict. The RUF is said to have filled half of its ranks with children but the use of child soldiers is not limited to this group alone. In fact, in an effort to protect themselves from the RUF, a number of civilian groups came together to form the Civil Defence Force (CDF) which supported the government. In May 2000, the United Nations reported that the CDF employed children aged seven to fourteen in its ranks, with as many as 25 percent of the forces in one town being children. Further, a group of former Sierra Leone army officers staged a coup in 1997 and formed the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) to fight alongside the RUF. Once more, this group is reported to have used children in combat and as sexual slaves. The fighting eventually

⁴⁴ Coalition to Stop the use of Child Soldiers, Child Soldiers Global Report 2008, <http://www.childsoldiersglobalreport.org/content/congo-democratic-republic>; Internet; accessed 15 March 2010.

⁴⁵Department of National Defence, “International Operations”, <http://comfec-cefcom.forces.gc.ca/pa-ap/ops/crocodile/index-eng.asp>; Internet; accessed 2 April 2010.

ended in 2000 when the leader of the RUF was captured, after which time an international body known as the International Military Advisory Training Team (IMATT) was fielded to help Sierra Leone build a “democratically accountable, effective, sustainable armed forces capable of performing any security task assigned by the government.”⁴⁶ Operation SCULPTURE is the CF contribution to the IMATT and comprises seven officers who have been operating out of Freetown since November 2000.⁴⁷

The depiction of African children in armed conflict provided above is in no way exhaustive. Indeed, children can be found in great numbers in the violent struggles that have or are occurring across the continent, including countries such as Chad, the Central African Republic, Guinea, Côte d’Ivoire, Liberia and the Republic of the Congo.

Sudan

In the Sudan, the Muslim dominated north has been in conflict with the predominantly non-Muslim south in a civil war that has lasted more than two decades. The war has involved almost 100,000 children, giving Sudan the dishonour of employing the largest number of children in the region. Since 1995, the Islamic government in the north has conscripted boys as young as twelve into the army and the paramilitary Popular Defence Forces. The government has also targeted children in the towns it holds in the south to fight their fellow countrymen in the rebel group Sudan People’s Liberation Army (SPLA). In Wahda province alone, 22 percent of the primary school population have

⁴⁶Department of National Defence, International Operations, <http://www.cefcom.forces.gc.ca/pa-ap/ops/sculpture/index-eng.asp>; Internet; accessed 2 April 2010.

⁴⁷Department of National Defence, International Operations, <http://www.cefcom.forces.gc.ca/pa-ap/ops/sculpture/index-eng.asp>; Internet; accessed 2 April 2010.

been recruited into the Sudanese army or pro-government militias, with the youngest combatant being only nine years old.⁴⁸

The SPLA rebel group, in turn, has relied greatly on child fighters in its battle with the government. Although the group recently demobilized three thousand child soldiers, they continue to employ seven thousand children, a figure that represents approximately 30 percent of its forces. In the mid 1980s the SPLA began a practice of “warehousing” recruits whereby they encouraged young boys to flee to refugee camps located beside its bases on the Ethiopian border. Once inside the boys’ only camp, those older than twelve would be provided full-time military training, while the younger children received training during school breaks. These boys were the basis of the group known as the Red Army, and for a period, were even subcontracted out to the Ethiopian army. Many of these boys later became the core of the famous Lost Boys of Sudan, a group of some 27,000 ethnic Dinka boys who were displaced or orphaned during the second civil war in Sudan.⁴⁹

LATIN AMERICA

Colombia, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico, Nicaragua, Paraguay, and Peru have all been home to child soldiers since the early 1990s. Referred to as “little bees” because they “sting” their enemies before they realize they are under attack, Latin American child soldiers are most prominent in Colombia. Estimates suggest that one in four irregular combatants in Colombia is under the age of eighteen, representing a total of

⁴⁸Peter Singer, “Child Soldiers: The New Faces of War,” http://www.brookings.edu/articles/2005/winter_islamicworld_singer.aspx; Internet; accessed 4 April 2010

⁴⁹Ilene Cohn and Guy S. Goodwin-Gill, *Child Soldiers: The Role of Children in Armed Conflicts*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 29.

11,000 children. Most of these children were forcibly recruited and served in the forty year battle between the Colombian government's military and rightist paramilitary and rebel groups, a war which many of them have no understanding.⁵⁰

The Child Soldiers Global Report 2008 found that The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) employed children in a variety of roles including direct combat, to lay explosives, ferry supplies, act as guides and message carriers. Girls were sexually abused and forced to abort the resulting pregnancies. In 1998, when the FARC attacked the Guatapé hydroelectric facility, it was reported that many of the attackers were children, some of whom were under the age of eight. While the FARC is based out of Colombia, the porous borders of the area enable them to recruit children from as far away as Venezuela, Panama, and Ecuador.⁵¹

In 1998 The National Liberation Army (ELN), a revolutionary Marxist guerrilla group signed the Puerta del Cielo accord signalling their commitment to cease child soldier recruitment. However, according to the 2008 Child Soldiers Global Report, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights continued to receive messages of children being recruited into the ELN. In fact, reports indicate that indigenous families actually left their homes in an effort to prevent their children from being recruited into the group.⁵²

⁵⁰Human Rights Watch, "You'll Learn Not to Cry, Child Combatants in Colombia," <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2003/colombia0903/>; Internet; accessed 2 April 2010.

⁵¹Coalition to Stop the use of Child Soldiers, Child Soldiers Global Report 2008, <http://www.childsoldiersglobalreport.org/content/colombia>; Internet; accessed 15 March 2010

⁵²Coalition to Stop the use of Child Soldiers, Child Soldiers Global Report 2008, <http://www.childsoldiersglobalreport.org/content/colombia>; Internet; accessed 15 March 2010.

It is not just rebel or guerrilla groups that employ child soldiers in Colombia. Although government security forces are not reported to have recruited children since 2008, they did use captured children to collect intelligence, despite it being a prohibited practice. In addition, the government backed paramilitary group Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (AUC) continued to employ children, often enticing them to join by offering them money or clothes. Children demobilized from the AUC reported that they were forced to kill captured members of opposition groups as part of their training.⁵³

EUROPE

While the problem of child soldiering is most often associated with Africa, it is certainly not limited to the “dark continent” or exclusive to the developing world. A significant number of child soldiers have fought in opposition groups in Eastern Europe serving in Chechnya, Daghestan, Kosovo, Macedonia, and Nagorno-Karabakh. Children fought with the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) in the 1997-1998 Serbian conflict and many others have joined Albanian rebel groups attempting to break away bits of territory from Serbia and Macedonia. In Chechnya, child soldiers from the age of fourteen continue to be employed in armed groups opposing Russian rule, fighting in factional groups in an effort to protect territory from rivals and the Russian forces.⁵⁴ This occurs despite the fact that the Russian Federation has established eighteen as the minimum age for military recruitment.⁵⁵

⁵³Coalition to Stop the use of Child Soldiers, *Child Soldiers Global Report 2008*, <http://www.childsoldiersglobalreport.org/content/colombia>, Internet; accessed 15 March 2010.

⁵⁴P.W. Singer, *Children at War*, 2006, 18-19.

⁵⁵Coalition to Stop the use of Child Soldiers, *Child Soldiers Global Report 2008*, <http://www.childsoldiersglobalreport.org/content/russian-federation>, Internet; accessed 15 March 2010.

THE MIDDLE EAST AND CENTRAL ASIA

The Middle East is yet another area where child soldiers have become a core capability in conflict. Children today are engaged in fighting across the region in Algeria, Azerbaijan, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Sudan, Afghanistan and Yemen. Youth in their early teens are also at the center of fighting in Palestine, representing as many as 70 percent of the participants in the intifada.⁵⁶

Iran

The first modern employment of child soldiers in the region occurred during the Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s. According to Sharia Law, which Iran practices, the recruitment of children under the age of sixteen into armed forces is strictly forbidden. However, as the war waged on the Iranian regime began to lose the war. In an effort to regain the initiative, Iranian President Ali-Akbar Rafsanjani ignored Sharia law and in 1984, pronounced that all Iranians from the ages of twelve to seventy-two should volunteer for the Holy War. Thousands of children were pulled from schools, indoctrinated to the glory of martyrdom, and sent to the front lines only lightly armed with one or two grenades or a gun with one magazine of ammunition. Wearing keys around their necks to remind them of their pending entrance into heaven, they were sent forward in the first waves of attacks, effectively performing the role of mine clearers.⁵⁷

Iraq

⁵⁶Peter Singer, Child Soldiers: The New Faces of War, <http://www.brookings.edu/views/articles/fellows/singer20051215.pdf>; Internet; accessed 4 April 2010

⁵⁷Peter Singer, Child Soldiers: The New Faces of War, <http://www.brookings.edu/views/articles/fellows/singer20051215.pdf>; Internet; accessed 4 April 2010

Under Saddam Hussein's dictatorship, an entire group was created with the express purpose of bringing children into conflict. *Ashbal Saddam* (Saddam's Lion Cubs), a paramilitary force of boys aged ten to fifteen was formed after the first Gulf War. The group, still in existence, sees these young boys attend military training camps and learn how to use firearms and infantry tactics. The children are also exposed to frequent beatings and cruelty to animals in an effort to desensitize them. While the precise number of child soldiers in the group is not known, there are an estimated eight thousand members in Baghdad alone.⁵⁸ During the most recent war that ended Saddam Hussein's regime, American forces confronted Iraqi child soldiers in at least three cities, including Nasariya, Karbala, and Kirkuk. As the insurgency intensified between spring 2003 and spring 2004, rebel leaders sought to mobilize this cohort of trained and indoctrinated young fighters. By spring 2004, child soldiers also served in radical Shia and Sunni insurgent groups. The total number of Iraqi children involved in the conflict is yet unknown, but indications suggest that their role is not insignificant.⁵⁹

Afghanistan

Afghanistan has been beleaguered by war for over thirty years since the days of the Soviet invasion. In retaliation against the Soviets, the Mujaheddin Afghan resistance movement developed a command structure that extended down to village level commanders. These commanders often recruited children to perform a variety of roles, including girls as sex slaves and dancing boys for their personal entertainment and sexual

⁵⁸Peter Singer, 'Facing Saddam's Child Soldiers,' http://www.brookings.edu/papers/2003/0114iraq_singer.aspx?p=1; Internet; accessed 3 April 2010.

⁵⁹Peter Singer, Child Soldiers: The New Faces of War, http://www.brookings.edu/articles/2005/winter_islamicworld_singer.aspx; Internet; accessed 4 April 2010.

exploitation. When the Soviets withdrew and the Taliban took power in 1995, they began recruiting thousands of children from madrassas.⁶⁰ The CF's engagement in Afghanistan bears testimony to the fact that children make worthy battlefield opponents. To illustrate this point, one need only look back several months to the fall of 2009 when, in an area falling under Canadian command, a twelve year old boy was caught placing a homemade bomb under a road in the Zahari district. With the knowledge that he had been caught, he grabbed a baby to use as a human shield to protect himself from the US helicopter that had spotted him. Sadly, this incident was not an anomaly. In the seven month period spanning from March 2009 to October 2009, twenty-nine incidents of children involved in either carrying out attacks or aiding the Taliban in other ways were reported by the CF to have occurred within their area of responsibility (AOR) in the southern regions of Afghanistan. These children have proven to be lethal adversaries, placing improvised explosive devices in the paths of coalition forces, the very weapons that have been the greatest killer of both Canadian and coalition troops in Afghanistan.⁶¹ Estimates place some eight thousand children under arms in Afghanistan, many in the pay of regional warlords.⁶²

ASIA

Children are active members of insurgent warfare in Cambodia, East Timor, India, Indonesia, Laos, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, Sri

⁶⁰Michael Wessells, *Child Soldiers: From Violence to Protection*, 15.

⁶¹Matthew Fisher, "Taliban using more children as bombers, shields: military, Insurgents use NATO rules of engagement to work against coalition forces," *CanWest News Service*, Mon 26 Oct 2009.

⁶²IRIN, "In-depth, Child Soldiers," <http://www.irinnews.org/InDepthMain.aspx?InDepthId=24&ReportId=66989&Country=Yes>; Internet; accessed 4 April 2010.

Lanka, and the Solomon Islands. In India, approximately seventeen different rebel groups are thought to use child soldiers, including along the unstable border between Kashmir and Pakistan.⁶³

Sri Lanka

Fraught by civil war for decades, the Sri Lankan government has been engaged in hostilities with the separatist group the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) since 1983. In 1987 Indian peace keeping forces intervened in the conflict, causing LTTE to face a shortage in soldiers. As a result, they began recruiting boys as young as 9 years old into their two armed children's units, the Baby Brigade and the Leopard Brigade, with the Leopard Brigade filling its ranks from LTTE orphanages. While the exact numbers of children the LTTE has recruited and employed is unknown, they continue to recruit children despite signing a cease fire that pledged to protect the civilian population from human rights abuses.⁶⁴

Myanmar

Myanmar is believed to have the highest number of child soldiers of any country in the world, with estimates in the order of 75,000. Children serve both within the state army and the ethnic armed groups bent on overthrowing the regime. The army recruits children through its Ye Nyunt, translated as Brave Sprouts, camps with as many as 45 percent of its strength under eighteen years of age. Twenty percent are less than fifteen

⁶³Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, Child Soldiers 1379 Report to the Security Council, November 2002, http://www.child-soldiers.org/library/themed-reports?root_id=158&directory_id=206; Internet; accessed 10 April 2010.

⁶⁴United Nations Foundation, UN Wire, http://www.unwire.org/unwire/20020313/24613_story.asp; Internet; accessed 12 April 2010.

years old, with some as young as eleven. In addition, various rebel groups are estimated as having six thousand to eight thousand child soldiers in their ranks.⁶⁵

SUMMARY

The problem of child soldiering is not one that is isolated to remote corners of the globe; they are employed in the vast majority of conflicts occurring around the world today. Instead of respecting the various laws described in Chapter 2, many government and non-government groups alike choose to ignore them, making the law the exception and the child the rule. As will be described in the following chapter, there are a number of factors that contribute to the recruitment and employment of child soldiers. Each country has its own set of peculiarities that serve as the underpinnings of their use in armed conflict.

⁶⁵ Peter Singer, "Child Soldiers: The New Faces of War," http://www.brookings.edu/articles/2005/winter_islamicworld_singer.aspx; Internet; accessed 4 April 2010.

CHAPTER 4

HOW CHILDREN BECOME CHILD SOLDIERS

Understanding the methods, underlying causes and motivations for children to join and remain with armed groups is an important first step in contextualizing the problem of child soldiering. Two separate narratives attempt to explain why children become involved in armed conflict, both of which speak to the underlying complexity of the problem. The first narrative speaks to forced recruitment, whereby children are abducted, press-ganged or recruited by quota to achieve the political, economic and often criminal goals of both state and non-state militaries. In Wessells' view, this method "is comforting in its depiction of wicked people as the cause of children becoming soldiers."⁶⁶ The second, and more contested narrative describes the process of involvement as voluntary. Debate in scholarly circles ensues on two fronts of this narrative, with one side representing "push" factors and the other representing "pull" factors. Similar to the case of forced recruitment, the "push" argument portrays child soldiers as victims, but in this scenario their victimization does not occur directly at the hands of ruthless warlords and unscrupulous governments. Instead, they are described as victims of circumstance, born into war torn areas and who do not have the cognitive capacity or mental maturity to make an informed decision to join. The "pull" argument portrays children quite differently; it challenges the notion of children as victims and describes them as active agents who make the deliberate choice to take up arms. Whether pushed or pulled into armed conflict, children voluntarily join because they are subject to the interplay of multiple factors and situational influences, including poverty, peer

⁶⁶Michael Wessells, *Child Soldiers: From Violence to Protection* 2006, 31.

pressure, politics and ideology and the presence of war itself. Their decision to take up arms is seldom informed by one motive alone rendering voluntary recruitment much more difficult to eradicate than forced recruitment.

The first section of this chapter will consider the methods by which children are forcibly recruited into armed groups, focusing on such methods as abduction, press-ganging and recruitment by quota. The second section will discuss the debate around voluntary recruitment and will present some of the situational influences that fuel a child's decision to "join up." Finally, the third section will discuss the socialization and indoctrination process that occurs once children have become members of armed groups.

FORCED RECRUITMENT

Over the past two decades children have become increasingly forced into combat, especially in the revolutionary and ethnic struggles that plague developing countries. Recruitment of children into rebel groups most often occurs as a deliberately planned process of abduction. Often being the sine qua non of armed groups, children are abducted in an effort to fill the ranks of armed groups to compensate for a shortage of adult soldiers. Because the adult death tolls associated with war, poverty and disease in developing countries is considerable, critical shortages of adult soldiers means that armed groups run the risk of defeat.⁶⁷ As a consequence, an armed struggle will end swiftly if the group does not find a means to replenish its ranks. As Singer points out, armed groups abduct and employ child soldiers "in order to delay defeat or create valuable

⁶⁷Alcinda Manuel Honwana, *Child Soldiers in Africa*, 2006, 44.

breathing space for their regular army to regroup and rebuild.”⁶⁸ In Wessells’ view, the fact that children can be intimidated makes them easy targets for forced recruitment.⁶⁹

In the case of forced recruitment, “recruiters” typically target places where children are most vulnerable and gathered in greatest numbers, such as schools, orphanages, madrassas, stadiums and churches.⁷⁰ During these recruiting drives, selection criteria are often based on physical condition and size, two key factors which determine a child’s ability to carry arms. In the case of young girls, the attractive ones are taken, usually to work as attendants.⁷¹ The suitable children are abducted, often raped, endure severe beatings and forced to kill relatives or fellow villagers in a bid to both intimidate them and create a situation which makes it nearly impossible for them to return to their homes. Resistance is most often met with threats on the children’s lives, leaving them with no choice but to join the rebel group as a new recruit.⁷² A young girl who had been abducted by the RUF when she was sixteen had this to say about her experience: “I was captured in Kono where I was with my aunt. Initially I tried to escape to the bush, but the RUF captured me and offered me two options – kill or be taken.”⁷³ In Uganda, as a consequence of lack of popular support for the violent struggle for power, abduction has become the preferred method of recruitment of child soldiers into the

⁶⁸P.W. Singer, *Children at War*, 2006, 97.

⁶⁹Michael Wessells, *Child Soldiers: From Violence to Protection*, 2006, 37.

⁷⁰*Ibid.*, 35.

⁷¹P.W. Singer, *Children at War*, 2006, 58.

⁷²P.W. Singer, *Children at War*, 2006, 57-61.

⁷³Michael Wessells, *Child Soldiers: From Violence to Protection*, 2006, 38.

Lord's Resistance Army. As many as thirty thousand children have been abducted into the LRA, some as young as seven years old.⁷⁴

Two additional methods of forced recruitment commonly used are press ganging and recruitment by quota. Press ganging is a form of group abduction and is used for mass recruitment. In this case rebel groups raid schools or sweep streets and marketplaces. El Salvador and Afghanistan have both been reported to employ this practice, having soldiers show up at schools, line children up against the wall to select the most suitable and then load them into a van.⁷⁵ Refugee and internally displaced people camps are often targeted during recruiting drives for a number of reasons. First, these locations provide large numbers of manpower resources and yield far greater results than individual abductions. Second, there is generally little or no security presence surrounding these camps to prevent the press ganging from occurring.⁷⁶

Dispossessed children, those who are poor or come from marginalized backgrounds and who live in the streets generally run a greater great risk of forced recruitment. As Wessells argues, "before war erupts, children from lower socio-economic classes carry a heavy burden of poverty and social exclusion" factors that cause them to be in situations and locations that places them at greater risk of forced recruitment.⁷⁷

In the case of recruitment by quota, any child, regardless of their socio-economic situation, is a prospective candidate. Rebel groups use this method to recruit children from specified areas. They require a particular number of recruits from the area, often a

⁷⁴Michael Wessells, *Child Soldiers: From Violence to Protection*, 2006, 14.

⁷⁵*Ibid.*, 38.

⁷⁶*Ibid.*, 38.

⁷⁷*Ibid.*, 41.

village, and operate under the threat that if the requisite numbers of children are not surrendered, the whole village will pay the price. In these cases parents and village leaders are left to choose between the lesser of two evils; in the end, they normally hand the children over in order to protect the entire village from death and destruction.⁷⁸ The quota method is used by the Taliban in the north eastern provinces of Afghanistan, where Taliban commanders demand that villages hand over a defined number of children for a three to six month period of service. Once they complete their service, the children are returned to their villages and another group of children are demanded as their replacements.⁷⁹

These strategies of abduction, press ganging and recruitment by quota are widely used practices among rebel groups, yielding large numbers of children to help bolster their ranks and sustain the conflict. These practices portray child soldiers as the defenceless victims of the brutality of adults, but they only consider one side of the debate.

VOLUNTARY RECRUITMENT

The other, and more divided part of the discussion involves children performing as active agents who voluntarily join armed struggles. While many humanitarian organizations portray children as victims of war, and many of them are, research has shown that there are a considerable number of children who choose to join armed groups voluntarily or without force. According to Singer “the rough trend line seems to be that roughly two of every three child soldiers have some sort of initiative in their own

⁷⁸Michael Wessells, *Child Soldiers: From Violence to Protection*, 2006, 42.

⁷⁹*Ibid.*, 42.

recruitment.”⁸⁰ Statistics from the International Labour Office indicate that 64 % of all children participating in armed groups in Central African countries have joined these groups under no threat of violence.⁸¹ Estimates indicate that 40 percent of child soldiers employed within the FARC are forced into service, but that 60 percent joined of their own accord.⁸² Another survey in East Asia found that 57 percent of child soldiers had volunteered for service.⁸³

The discussion, however, is divided on the exact meaning of voluntary, and, by extension, the nature of a child’s motivation to join. One group argues that children become soldiers of their own volition, with no pressure being exerted on them. They are depicted as having a strong sense of agency and the capacity to exercise choice. Armed conflict in these cases is perceived opportunistically by children who willingly join “to obtain things – protection, a sense of family, education and training, power, money, or a sense of purpose, among others – denied to them in civilian life.”⁸⁴ Countering this, the other group argues that children do not have the cognitive capacity to rationally make such a decision. Instead, this group believes that a child’s motivation to join armed groups stems from a host of external influences that are beyond their control.⁸⁵

⁸⁰Singer, *Child Soldiers: The New Faces of War*, 2006, 61.

⁸¹ ILO, 2003

⁸²John Otis, “Rebel Held: Child Soldiers,” *Houston Chronicle*, August 3, 2001 cited in Peter Singer, *Child Soldiers, The New Faces of War*, (Berkeley; University of California Press, 2006), 8.

⁸³Singer, *Child Soldiers: The New Faces of War*, 2006, 62.

⁸⁴Wessells, *Child Soldiers: From Violence to Protection*, 2006, 31.

⁸⁵Singer, *Child Soldiers: The New Faces of War*, 2006, 8.

In an effort to explain the complexity and nuances of what motivates children to join and remain with armed groups, the remainder of this chapter will provide discussion on a variety of conditions that contribute to this decision. These macro level factors are broadly divided into the headings of socio-cultural, economic and political.

SOCIO-CULTURAL FACTORS

A number of socio-cultural drivers contribute to a child's decision, however voluntary it may be, to join armed groups. First are the notions of power, excitement and glamour. Armed groups offer disenfranchised children opportunities to fulfill what they consider to be honourable roles. The roles of protector, hero and leader have a certain allure associated with them, particularly to children who are powerless, as children in war affected areas often are.⁸⁶ The sense of prestige that comes with membership in armed groups is made evident in this quote by a young Pakistani boy who joined the Taliban: "I enjoyed the task of patrolling Kabul in a latest model jeep, with a Kalashnikov slung over my shoulder. It was a great adventure and made me feel big."⁸⁷ Wielding a state of the art weapon offers a great deal of excitement for children who wish to escape the monotony of their lives. Young boys in search of a thrill may turn to battle to satisfy their desire. A fifteen year old child soldier from Sierra Leone explained his reason for joining this way: "I come from a farmers' village and life was boring. Patrol with the CDF [Civil

⁸⁶Wessells, *Child Soldiers: From Violence to Protection*, 2006, 50-51.

⁸⁷A. Laeeq and Jawadullah, "Flowers on the Frontline," *Child Soldiers Newsletter*, September 2002, 7 cited in Michael Wessells, *Child Soldiers: From Violence to Protection*, (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2006), 51.

Defence Forces] was exciting and I like the thrill of combat. It was no play – it was kill or be killed.”⁸⁸

Vengeance can be a compelling reason children choose to join armed groups. In parts of the world that experience conflict, many children have either directly experienced or been exposed to some of the most serious of human rights violations: massacres, ethnic cleansing, death squad killings, indiscriminate bombings, torture, rape, and the looting and devastation of homes and property.⁸⁹ Many have also witnessed the deaths of parents and siblings; avenging their deaths can be a powerful motivator to join armed groups. Children who are born and raised in violent, divided societies have untold reasons to become soldiers. For many children, violence becomes a permanent way of life. The duration of the war in Angola meant that many children were not only born into conflict but also grew into adulthood making war a building block of their identities.

Security and self-defence have also been cited as main contributing factors to a child’s decision to join armed groups, not only for the child, but also for their family. Having a child in the military often means protection not only for the child, but also for the family and the community. Divided societies are generally violent societies, so belonging to an armed group brings safety and power and is often the least dangerous of all options. As a former soldier from Angola pointed out “[N]o one messes with you when you have a gun.”⁹⁰

⁸⁸Wessells, *Child Soldiers: From Violence to Protection*, 2006, 50.

⁸⁹Center for Defence Information, *The Invisible Soldiers: Child Combatants*, The Defense Monitor, <http://www.cdi.org/dm/1997/issue4/>; Internet; accessed 21 March 2010.

⁹⁰Honwana, *Child Soldiers in Africa*, 2006, 58.

Another socio-cultural factor is the oppressive restrictions that come with systems such as the Indian caste system, which sees lower castes socially suppressed by higher castes. For many from the lower castes, joining a militant movement can be viewed as a way to escape oppression and advance themselves in social standing. It has been argued that children who take up arms with the Sri Lankan group Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) do so as a way out of oppression. Similarly, for younger women experiencing socio-cultural oppression against their gender, joining armed groups allows them to break with gender stereotypes and provides them a sense of freedom they would not otherwise enjoy.⁹¹

ECONOMIC FACTORS

As Mahatma Ghandi once said, poverty is the worst form of violence. It is no coincidence then that internal wars are typically characterized by poverty and economic hardship. These factors are often the main reasons for modern conflicts and as such, poverty is considered a macro issue that interacts with many other factors making young people particularly susceptible to involvement in an armed struggle. Therefore, poverty is commonly cited for being the most prevalent motivator that causes children to take up arms.⁹² In particular, orphaned children or those living in refugee camps suffer from abject poverty and may choose to join any group that brings the hope of regular meals and access to medical attention. As one young boy in the Democratic Republic of the Congo explained, “I joined [President Laurent] Kabila’s army when I was thirteen because my

⁹¹Radhika Coomaraswamy, “Root Causes of Child Soldier Phenomenon in UN initiatives”, http://transcurrents.com/tc/2009/03/post_331.html, Internet; accessed 2 April 2010.

⁹²Rachel Brett and Irma Specht, *Young Soldiers: Why They Choose to Fight*, (Boulder, Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2004), 14.

home had been looted and my parents were gone. As I was then on my own, I decided to become a soldier.”⁹³ Surveys of demobilized child soldiers in the DRC found that almost 60 percent originally joined armed groups because of simple poverty. The same ratio was found in a separate survey of child soldiers half the globe away in East Asia, indicating that the trend is international.⁹⁴

Broken economies have a direct impact on other aspects of children’s lives, including limiting education opportunities which is yet another factor that influences a child’s decision to join armed groups. According to Article 28 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, education is considered a fundamental right.⁹⁵ Despite having ratified the CRC, many countries fail to provide education to their youth. This is due primarily to the fact that a consequence of war is the destruction of schools. Teachers flee for their own safety and the public resources once allocated to education become diverted to the war effort. This results in a generation of uneducated children who have little promise of a better life. The other side of the poverty-education relationship is the removal of children from schools so that they can work to generate income for their families. If a child spends their day in a school house, it means they are not able to work to help contribute to the survival of the family. It is not necessarily safe work that parents want their children to undertake; parents frequently see the potential for material gain if their children join armed groups. According to a study conducted in Sierra Leone,

⁹³Honwana, *Child Soldiers in Africa*, 2006, 19.

⁹⁴*Ibid.*, 19.

⁹⁵United Nations, Convention on the Rights of the Child, New York: UN, 1989; Document on-line; available from <http://treaties.un.org/Pages/CTCTreaties.aspx?id=4&subid=A&lang=en>; Internet; accessed 14 March 2010.

many mothers take great pleasure in seeing their children dressed in new military attire carrying fully automatic rifles. For some families, the spoils of war that a child soldier brings home confirms the need to send more children to the war front to supplement the meagre family income and combat the effects of poverty.⁹⁶

POLITICAL FACTORS

Many children choose to join armed groups for political and ideological reasons. They often view violent struggle as a means of achieving liberation from oppressive political regimes; teenaged Palestinian suicide bombers provide a classic example of youth fighting for both political and ideological causes. Simultaneously, they fight *against* the domination of the Israelis and *for* the spiritual rewards that come with martyrdom.⁹⁷ Not only do these factors galvanize children to take up arms, ideology also acts as a moral defence against the feelings of guilt and remorse normally associated with violence. Recent experience in Afghanistan has proven that Afghan children are prepared to sacrifice their own lives to kill the foreigners they believe are trying to dominate Muslim populations.

SOCIALIZATION PROCESS

Regardless of the method by which children are recruited into armed groups, a process of socialization or indoctrination occurs to transform them into effective warriors. These processes are designed to create a dependency situation whereby children's attempts to escape the group are all but eliminated.⁹⁸ One of the essential parts of the

⁹⁶ Center for Defence Information, "The Invisible Soldiers: Child Combatants," *The Defense Monitor*, <http://www.cdi.org/dm/1997/issue4/>; Internet; accessed 21 March 2010.

⁹⁷ Wessells, *Child Soldiers: From Violence to Protection*, 2006, 81.

⁹⁸ Singer, *Children at War*, 2006, 57.

transformation from child to soldier is indoctrination. The indoctrination process provides child soldiers with a new perspective of the world which creates and sustains the motivation required to remain in combat. This type of motivation aims to keep child soldiers in the rebel group in spite of the known risks of battle.

Coercive motivators are used to retain child soldiers and also to force them to commit violent acts which, under normal circumstances they would refuse to carry out. Coercive motivators, normally in the form of physical punishment, are particularly popular among rebel leaders. These motivators rapidly transform children into soldiers, as high levels of obedience are achieved through the use of brutality, fear and psychological manipulation. Threats, manipulation and persuasion have proven to be effective ways to ensure obedience and to foster a climate of brutality.⁹⁹ João F, a child soldier from Angola told Human Rights Watch that if children did not comply with orders "you would be punished, sometimes killed. Myself, I was whipped twice for disobeying orders. Other children were beaten with heavy sticks."¹⁰⁰

Children are often socialized into armed groups by conducting ritualized killings. It is not uncommon for children to have to return to their homes to kill relatives or fellow members of their communities. In a bid to prevent the child from attempting to escape back to their homes, these killings often occur in public places with members of the community watching. These killings force the child to cross a sacred moral boundary

⁹⁹*Ibid.*, 71.

¹⁰⁰Human Rights Watch, "Forgotten Fighters: Child Soldiers in Angola," <http://www.hrw.org/en/reports/2003/04/29/forgotten-fighters>; Internet; accessed 20 March 2010.

which breaks their ties with their home community and strengthens their ties with the rebel group.¹⁰¹

The desired result of the process of indoctrination is to render child soldiers dependent on their leaders for protection and needs. Terror and propaganda are used in order to compel the children to identify themselves with the goals of the rebel group. This process contributes to the creation of moral disengagement from the violence they will use as soldiers. By way of example, during the 1994 Rwandan genocide, in an effort to dehumanize the Tutsi people, radio stations broadcasted incitements to eliminate the “Inyenzi”, which, translated means Tutsi cockroaches.¹⁰² This process of dehumanization creates a situation where attacks are justified, thereby diffusing any sense of responsibility for violence.¹⁰³ The resulting “us versus them” strategy creates psychological distance between the child and their target, which facilitates the violence they are required to carry out.

Finally, one of the most significant factors contributing to the transformation of a child into a soldier is the construction of a new identity. The process of re-identification helps divorce the child from their past, enabling them to become a committed and devoted member of a rebel group. A variety of methods facilitate this process which include shaving a child soldier’s head or branding their skin with the group's name or insignia. Arms, chests or foreheads of child soldier recruits are often carved with sharp objects, resulting in scars that will easily identify them as a member of a particular rebel

¹⁰¹Singer, *Children at War*, 2006, 74.

¹⁰²Romeo Dallaire, *Shake Hands with the Devil: The Failure of Humanity in Rwanda*, Toronto: Random House, 2003, 142.

¹⁰³Singer, *Children at War*, 2006, 71-73.

group. Further, the adoption of alternative personas is a common step in the transformation of a child into a soldier and rebel group member. These new personas help to complete the break with the child's former identity. A key step in assuming a new persona is the adoption of a new war or jungle names, such as "Laughing and Killing," "Blood Never Dry" and "The Castrator." Once again, these names help dissociate children from the violence they inflict, enabling them to carry out their duties as killing machines in the absence of guilt or remorse.¹⁰⁴

SUMMARY

The recruitment and employment of child soldiers is a deliberate practice the world over, despite the laws and conventions described in Chapter 2. The ways and means by which children become involved in armed conflict are varied and often interconnected. As Wessells claims "the causes of soldiering are contextual, vary across individuals and are embedded in wider systems of exploitation and violence."¹⁰⁵

Ruthless warlords and rebel groups seek to fill their ranks with children and turn them into unpredictable and lethal threats. For the child soldier themselves, survival may be the single motivating force in their lives. Dealing death is often the only way to avoid their own death and for many violence is all they have ever known. Further, the process of socialization renders it such that these children are left with little choice but to be loyal to their new group.

¹⁰⁴Singer, *Children at War*, 2006, 73.

¹⁰⁵Wessells, *Child Soldiers: From Violence to Protection*, 2006, 56.

CHAPTER 5

THE IMPLICATIONS OF CHILD SOLDIERS FOR THE CANADIAN FORCES

The current global security environment is considerably different from that which informed Canada's defence policies of the past. As the saying goes, every new beginning comes from some other beginning's end. In this particular case, the end of the Cold War marked the beginning of a significant shift in the world's geopolitical framework. As a result, contemporary threats have become both less predictable and more diverse. The threats that once resided in the world's peripheral vision - economic competition, regional rivalries, religious and ideological hostilities, ethnic schisms and mass migration - have replaced the state on state conflict that once defined the battle space. Consequently, the types of operations the CF has been called upon to conduct have changed. They are less defined by conventional, high-intensity conflict where the objective is to influence the adversary's government and minimize civilian interference in operations. Instead, they have shifted towards engagements where foes are asymmetric and comprised almost exclusively of sub-state groups. These sub-state groups attempt to achieve their objectives by fighting in a manner that is inconsistent with the traditional norms of war. This is not to suggest, however, that combat operations are passé. In fact, the September 2006 CF led Operation MEDUSA proved that the Canadian military is still in the business of offensive operations. Hailed as being the largest offensive operation they have been involved in since the Korean War, CF members killed two hundred Taliban fighters in a fifteen day period in southern Afghanistan.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁶Adam Day, "Operation Medusa: The Battle for Panjwai," *Legion Magazine*, January 26, 2008 www.legionmagazine.com/en/index.php/2008/01/operation-medus-part-3-the-fall-of-objective-rugby/; Internet accessed 4 April 2010.

In addition to the shift in the nature of conflict the CF can expect to be engaged in, members can also expect to confront threats that are much different than those to which they are traditionally accustomed. No longer will CF members exclusively engage in battle with an enemy that is easily identifiable. Instead, they will face a range of different actors who challenge western conceptions of a soldier or warrior. Adversaries on the modern battlefield include those members of society that laws were developed to help protect during times of conflict - women and children alike.

As the Government of Canada and the CF contemplate defence missions after Afghanistan, it seems that attention is being directed to the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). While nothing has been confirmed, rumours abound that the next mission the CF will undertake will be a peace support operation in the DRC. Given that the US set up a separate command for Africa last year, it is clear that the troubled continent is of growing importance and concern. If recent history provides any indication, it can be assumed that the concerns of our neighbour to the south will ultimately translate into concerns for Canada. As discussed in the previous chapter, the current UN mission in the DRC, known by its French acronym MONUC, has been in the African nation since 1999. It is the largest UN mission in the world with more than 19,000 troops and 3,000 civilian staff.¹⁰⁷

The DRC is as violent as it is poor. It has been rocked by wars since the late 1950s but the most recent conflict has taken the lives of approximately five million people over the past twelve years. Local armies abound in the Congo. With support from neighbouring regimes, these armies are heavily armed and have proven they will not back

¹⁰⁷United Nations Organization Mission in DR Congo, Fact Sheet, <http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/missionsz/monuc/facts.shtml>; Internet; accessed 12 April 2010.

down from a fight. If and when Canadian troops are deployed, they will likely be involved in combat with adult and child soldiers alike.¹⁰⁸ To illustrate the reality of this statement, in an interview in 2006, the Division Commander of MONUC indicted that confrontation with child warriors was so frequent in the DRC that he was surprised he was being questioned about their mere existence.¹⁰⁹

Whether the next CF mission is in the Congo, Darfur or some other part of the world in desperate need of humanitarian and military intervention, remains to be seen. The contributions that militaries of democratised nations make are those which are decided by their political masters, and not by the military itself. If the Government of Canada wishes to see the CF lead a mission in the Congo, or even deploy in a supporting role, they will make the final decision. What can be determined with relative certainty, however, is that the next mission will occur in a part of the world that falls under the heading of failed or failing state, in an area that is rife with violent struggle and the pursuit of political, ideological or economic ends. These are also the part of the world, as described in Chapter 3, that employ child soldiers in significant proportions.

The importance of sending properly prepared CF members into such complex conflict situations cannot be underscored enough. The consequences of doing otherwise can have devastating consequences that reach from the political down to the individual soldier level. The electorate of industrialized democracies expect their governments to

¹⁰⁸Jack Granatstein, "Defining Canada's Role in Congo," *Globe and Mail*, 2 April 2006, <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/opinions/defining-canadas-role-in-congo/article1525307/>; Internet; accessed 2 April 2006.

¹⁰⁹North Atlantic Treaty Organization, Research and Technology Organization, *Transactional Analysis of Child Warriors* (pre-released RTO Technical Report, NATO Research and Technology Agency, Paris, FRA, November 26, 2007), with the kind permission of the NATO/RTO, 2-8.

ensure the missions they send their militaries on are conducted in a manner that is both within the law and consistent with the values of the society they represent. As such, the success or failure of a mission can be determined in the living rooms of a nation. This reality is exacerbated by the fact that the Canadian public is better informed about global issues today than at any time in history. In addition to its volume, the speed at which information is made available is almost instantaneous through computer based media, radio and television. As a result, the media plays an increasingly important role in shaping the opinions of Canadians. Images of children in conflict are often cast in the light of helpless victims who have fallen prey to the hands of ruthless warlords. These images of children as victims inform the public's opinion; these are the same opinions that can greatly influence the success or failure of a mission, for a lack of public support can have consequences as real as those generated by poor leadership or out-dated equipment. The Somalia scandal provided a prime example that the Canadian public does not want to see children mishandled or become casualties at the hands of their military.

The same images of innocent children coerced into battle that are portrayed in the news resonate with CF members who are only too aware of the fact that their actions are being judged on the television screens, computer monitors and newspaper columns 'back home.' This knowledge places an additional burden on CF members who may vacillate when deciding to shoot or be shot. A decision to either use or not use force could have significant consequences resulting in mission failure or the loss of a CF member's life.

WHAT HAS CANADA DONE?

It is often said that a government's policies can be better measured by what they do as opposed to what they say.¹¹⁰ There can be little doubt, then, that the Government of Canada is committed to eliminating the use of children as soldiers and ensuring that children affected by war are protected. Canada has signalled its commitment by ratifying virtually all international humanitarian and human rights laws, including those related to the topic of child soldiers and the protections afforded to children during times of conflict. Prior to ratifying the *Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflicts* (OP CRC) in 2000, Canada amended the *National Defence Act* (NDA) to further entrench into law the policy of prohibiting individuals under the age of eighteen from being deployed to hostile areas. This amendment was reflected as Section 34 of the NDA and entered into force on 29 June, 2000.

In addition to the various humanitarian and human rights laws Canada has ratified, the country's position on the matter has been signalled through a number of different initiatives including hosting the first International Conference on War-Affected Children in Winnipeg in 2000 and establishing and chairing the Group of Friends on Children and Armed Conflict. In February 2007, Canada also endorsed the Paris Principles which provide guidelines for all actors working in the field to prevent the recruitment and use of children in conflict and to reintegrate children affected by war.¹¹¹

¹¹⁰Lydia Miljan, *Public Policy in Canada: an Introduction*, 5th ed., (Don Mills, Oxford University Press, 2008), 4.

¹¹¹ Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, Children and Armed Conflict, http://www.international.gc.ca/glynberry/child_soldiers-enfants_soldats.aspx?lang=eng; Internet; accessed 12 April 2010.

WHAT HAS THE CANADIAN FORCES DONE?

As described above, the Government of Canada has signalled its condemnation of child soldiers via its ratification of almost all relevant conventions and laws. Despite this, the CF is only just beginning to take the necessary follow on actions to ensure its members are adequately prepared to confront them. In fact, a review of CF policy, doctrine and training reveals that there is scant reference to child soldiers in relevant CF publications. The references that do pertain to children and/or child soldiers are found in; *The Law of Armed Conflict at the Operational and Tactical Level*, *The Code of Conduct for CF Personnel*, *Prisoners of War Handling*, *Detainees*, *Interrogation and Tactical Questioning in International Operations*, *Land Operations*, and *Counter-Insurgency Operations*.

Land Operations Manual makes reference to child combatants in the context of a broader demobilization, disarmament and reintegration (DDR) program.¹¹² Similarly, the *Counter Insurgency Operations Manual* also makes reference to a DDR program, stating that “special programs will have to be developed to deal with situations involving child soldiers.”¹¹³ These manuals treat the problem as a post-combat issue, and ignore the possibility of engaging a child in combat. The important point to be made here is that a child had to have once been armed to become involved in a DDR program. This suggests that the possibility of a CF member confronting an armed and dangerous child is very real.

¹¹²Department of National Defence, B-GL-300-001/FP-001 *Land Operations* (Kingston: Army Publishing Office, 2008), 7A-10.

¹¹³Department of National Defence, B-GL-323-004/FP-003 *Counter-Insurgency Operations* (Kingston: Army Publishing Office, 2008), 6-22.

The *Prisoners of War Handling, Detainees, Interrogation and Tactical Questioning in International Operations* doctrine manual offers relatively clear direction regarding children as prisoners of war (POW). By extension of their recognition as POWs, the document recognizes the fact that children may be employed as combatants in other parts of the world. However, unlike the other CF references to children in conflict, and the various laws pertaining to them, this document refers to children as juveniles but does not define the meaning. Despite this, the document offers clear guidance on the detention of children. It states that members must take steps to determine the age of children detained. If uncertainty exists, members must assume the POW is a child. In either case, the manual states that the POW shall be treated in accordance with the applicable International Humanitarian Laws.¹¹⁴

TRAINING AND EDUCATION

Although the CF has no formally institutionalized training or education programs specifically related to the topic of child soldiers, some efforts to prepare CF members have nevertheless been made. The Canadian Forces Peace Support Training Center (PSTC) offers some guidance to CF members as they prepare for overseas deployments, but the education is limited to the various laws protecting children from being recruited and re-recruited into armed groups. The training that is offered is for those deploying in non-combatant or static echelon positions as well as UN Military Observer roles. These jobs are normally relatively benign and present only a remote possibility of contact with a

¹¹⁴Department of National Defence, B-GJ-005-110/FP-020 *Prisoners of War Handling, Detainees, Interrogation and Tactical Questioning in International Operations* (Ottawa: DND Canada, 2004), 3-2, 3B-4, 4-2.

child soldier.¹¹⁵ Furthermore, the CF does not train a considerable number of Military Observers; therefore the PSTC would not be the most appropriate venue for child soldier specific training or education.

Outside of the CF, work is being done by various humanitarian organizations to foster the protection of children in combat. In response to the growing phenomenon of child soldiers on the battle field, the Child Soldiers Initiative produced a (draft) field guide aimed at raising the level of awareness on the matter of child soldiering and to provide guidance on how to “deal appropriately with all children in armed conflict.”¹¹⁶ The targeted audience of the guide ranges from members of international organizations like the UN to regional organizations, like the African Union, down to national organization such as militaries and police forces engaged in peace support, conflict and post-conflict operations worldwide.

The express purpose of the draft guide is to contribute to the process of eliminating the use of child soldiers by both military organizations and armed groups alike.¹¹⁷ The guide is presented in six chapters and covers a variety of topics that range from the collaboration and coordination required of various agencies to the prevention of recruitment and re-recruitment of children into armed conflict. In the opening chapter, the issue of child soldiers is presented as a “serious security issue that presents professional military and police forces with specific and unique difficulties for which they

¹¹⁵Department of National Defence, Peace Support Training Center, http://armyapp.dnd.ca/pstc-cfsp/ipt_e.asp; Internet; accessed 10 April 2010.

¹¹⁶ The Child Soldiers Initiative, “Child Soldiers: A handbook for collaboration and concerted action,” (Draft Field Guide), 11.

¹¹⁷*Ibid.*, 11,

are currently under-prepared”¹¹⁸ Unfortunately, while the guide acknowledges the issue of child soldiers as more than just a legal, human rights and child protection issue, it offers little by way of practical recommendations on how to deal with an armed child intent on fulfilling the orders of his or her rebel commander.

The work that has been done by the CSI is on-point from both the perspective of protections for the child soldier and from the perspective of the comprehensive approach required of complex peace support operations. Much of what has been recommended however falls more appropriately within the purview of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other government departments (OGDs). While protecting children from recruitment, re-recruitment and employment in armed struggles is an important humanitarian goal, it is equally important to consider the issue from the perspective of the CF member whose interactions with children in conflict may not be innocuous.

SUMMARY

The nature of threats that CF members will encounter are vastly different than those that defined the Cold War period. Conflicts have moved from classic state-on-state warfare to those where battlefield opponents defy traditional norms. Child soldiers are a common feature of the modern battle space, but unfortunately this reality has not been directly reflected in CF doctrine, training or education programs to the extent necessary. Given the growing trend of their employment in conflict situations, and the regions of the world to which the CF is likely to be deployed, the possibility of CF members coming into contact with children on the battlefield is becoming more and more real. As a

¹¹⁸*Ibid.*, 13.

consequence, it is necessary to prepare members to confront this threat in both conflict and post-conflict situations.

CHAPTER 6

PREPARING FOR THE THREAT

“Fortune favours the prepared mind”
Louis Pasteur

Given the magnitude of the child soldiering problem as outlined in Chapter 4, and the dearth of information on the subject of confronting children in combat, the next question to be addressed is, “what can the CF do about it?” From the outset, it should be recognized that the eradication of child soldiers is not a problem that can be solved militarily. In fact, it could be argued that child soldiers are not the problem at all, but a symptom of a much more nebulous problem, a breakdown in global social structures that create the conditions for child soldiering. Social scientists refer to problems such as child soldiers as wicked problems. Wicked problems are defined as “difficult or impossible to solve because of incomplete, contradictory, and changing requirements that are often difficult to recognize.”¹¹⁹ Moreover, because of complex interdependencies, the effort to solve one aspect of a wicked problem often reveals or creates other problems. What this suggests is that any steps taken to enable military members to confront child soldiers must take into account second and third order effects.

This chapter will examine various courses of action that could be adopted by the CF that would ultimately enable its members to effectively deal with the threat of child soldiers. It will begin with a brief analysis of a draft field guide titled “Child Soldiers: A handbook for collaboration and concerted action.” The guide was prepared by the Child Soldiers Initiative in collaboration with a host of OGDs and NGOs and was kindly pre-

¹¹⁹ Wikipedia, Wicked Problems, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wicked_problem; Internet; accessed 9 April 2010.

released for research purposes to academic staff at the Canadian Forces College in January 2010. The guide will not be discussed in its entirety as much of what is discussed falls within the purview of OGDs or NGOs. Accordingly, only those aspects that are considered most relevant to the CF will be presented. The second part of this chapter will provide recommendations for preparing CF members to confront the threat of children in combat.

THE DRAFT FIELD GUIDE

The express purpose of the draft guide is to contribute to the process of eliminating the use of child soldiers by both military organizations and armed groups alike.¹²⁰ Much of what is presented in the six chapter report focuses on the actions that should be taken to ensure children are protected from use in armed struggles. In keeping with the thesis of this paper, the opening chapter depicts child soldiers as a “serious security issue that presents professional military and police forces with specific and unique difficulties for which they are currently under-prepared.”¹²¹ It goes on to acknowledge the issue of child soldiers as more than just a legal, human rights and child protection issue.¹²² Unfortunately, with the exception of a chapter dealing with situational awareness, the remainder of the guide offers little else by way of recommendations on how to prepare military forces for this unique challenge.

Chapter 2 of the draft field guide provides a useful and practical recommendation that is relevant to military audiences. It discusses the need to consider and evaluate a host

¹²⁰*Ibid.*, 13.

¹²¹*Ibid.*, 13.

¹²²The Child Soldiers Initiative, “Child Soldiers: A handbook for collaboration and concerted action,” (Draft Field Guide), 13.

of variables in order to understand the issue of child soldiering in any conflict or post-conflict zone. The guide refers to this process as developing situational awareness (SA), and defines it as “the process of assessing a complex situation within its wider context.” In developing SA, information is systematically gathered in order to identify the principle problems and needs, and the resources found within the population. Armed with that information, an analysis can be conducted which can facilitate the planning process in a coordinated, strategic manner.¹²³

This recommendation is particularly useful in the military context and could be brought into practice throughout a military operation with relative ease. First, it is particularly relevant to the human terrain analysis component of the Joint Intelligence Preparation of the Battle space (JIPB). Human terrain analysis seeks to uncover details about the country of deployment from the cultural, political and demographic perspectives.¹²⁴ Once analyzed, this information is used to inform the commander of an enemy’s capabilities and possible courses of action. The inclusion of child soldiers on a human terrain “checklist” would serve to ensure that the knowledge of their presence and the possibility of confronting them are raised to the level of the Mission Commander. Although the mandate for the mission is set at the political level, the Mission Commander is at least informed of the issue so that rules of engagement may be developed accordingly. Further, considering that the follow on effects of the planning process include training and preparation of the deployed force, it is important to recognize early if child soldiers may be confronted in conflict situations. As will be demonstrated in the

¹²³*Ibid.*, 17.

¹²⁴Canadian Forces College Guide to CF Operational Planning Process, Toronto, II-4/17.

following sections, SA can facilitate a number of other positive effects over the course of a mission.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Education and training are the primary means of ensuring that units and individuals are adequately prepared to undertake their work in a professional, competent, legal and ethical manner. It is, indeed, the institution's responsibility to ensure that operational capabilities are well developed; education and training are two such ways of fostering that development. As highlighted by the CF Leadership Model, it is an institutional leadership responsibility to "mentor, educate and develop subordinates" and to train them in ". . . demanding and realistic conditions" in order to ensure they are prepared to do their jobs.¹²⁵ Somalia stands as an example of the results of troops who were ill prepared to fulfill their roles as peacekeepers. Along with that which has been recommended by the draft field guide, there are a number of other steps that can be taken to prepare members to confront children on the battlefield. Possible courses of action range from very broad recommendations that have multiple applications to more specific, mission oriented suggestions. The following section will provide discussion on a number of options that fall under the umbrella of education and training.

Cultural Intelligence

Cultural intelligence (CQ) is a topic that has grown in importance over the past decade, primarily as a result of the CF's engagement in Afghanistan. CQ is defined as "the ability to recognize the shared beliefs, values and attitudes and behaviours of a group of people and, most importantly, to effectively apply this knowledge toward a specific

¹²⁵ Canada, Department of National Defence, A-PA-005-000/AP-004 *Leadership in the Canadian Forces*. Ottawa: DND Canada, 2005.

goal or range of activities.”¹²⁶ The possibility of the CF deploying to culturally complex areas like the Congo or Sudan will bring increased interaction with indigenous populations whose cultures are almost diametrically opposed to North American culture. As a result, enabling CQ is becoming more and more important. While theatre specific cultural awareness training is provided to CF members during the pre-deployment phase of an operation, the training is limited to the knowledge of social practices such as which hand to eat with or the modesty with which women should dress. Broader than cultural awareness, CQ extends beyond a culture’s physical manifestations; it also seeks to facilitate an understanding of one’s own biases and perceptions which, in turn, can help make sense of another culture. To most CF members, the laws protecting innocent and defenceless children from the dangers of war make sense. It is difficult for most members of western societies to conceive of the notion that the protection of innocent children is not a fundamental value in all societies. It goes without saying that this type of western construction will inform a CF member’s response to a child soldier. Understanding that not all cultures are shaped by the same values we hold dear as Canadians will help facilitate the split second response required if confronted with a child. Without such cultural understanding, reactions will be a product of personal experiences and beliefs which are often incongruent with the experiences and beliefs of groups who employ children in their ranks. As such, the development of cultural competence can be seen as a force multiplier. Developing CQ will help enable the individual CF member to make sense of unfamiliar situations and respond in an appropriate manner. When transmitted

¹²⁶ Karen D. Davis and Justin C. Wright, “Culture Intelligence and Leadership: An Introduction for Canadian Forces Leaders”, *Culture and Cultural Intelligence*, 2009, Canadian Defence Academy Press, Kingston, ON, 9.

back to the living rooms of the nation, these appropriate responses can aid in the maintenance of public support for the mission, the institution and the individual member.

Increased Resilience

Military operations, whether domestic or deployed, expose members to a variety of both chronic and acute stressors. How individuals respond to the often disorienting events that are extant in military operations depends to a large degree on their mental hardiness and problem-solving skills. Although these stressors manifest themselves differently in everyone, they have the potential to lead to negative health consequences, both mental and physical. Research has shown that confrontation with child soldiers can be a psychologically damaging experience for troops. For example, a number of British forces members who confronted child soldiers in West Africa from 2000-2002 reported clinical depression and post-traumatic stress disorder.¹²⁷ Even for a CF member who responds to a child soldier in a legal, moral and professional manner, the mental health after effects of such a morally complex situation can be severe. Developing resilience can help carry the burden of the difficult moral dilemma that child soldiers present. Practicing skills to the point that they become habitual is one way to increase resilience and, in turn, counter the psychologically disorienting effects that child soldiers may cause. Developing training scenarios that incorporate the conditions CF members will be exposed to will further aid in inoculating them against the shock of such asymmetric threats as armed children.¹²⁸ What's more, the benefits of increased resilience are not limited to the single issue of child soldiers. It has practical applications in a host of

¹²⁷Peter W. Singer, "Western Militaries confront child soldiers threat," *Jane's Intelligence Review*, 1 January 2005.

¹²⁸Department of National Defence, A-PA-005-000/AP-004 Leadership in the Canadian Forces. (Kingston, ON: CF Leadership Institute, 2005), 80-81.

scenarios ranging from coping with the extended absences from loved ones during long deployments to developing the mental toughness required for conduct after capture.

War Gaming

As a general rule, Theatre and Mission Specific Training (TMST) occurs for all members of the CF during the pre-deployment stages of an operation. Threats specific to the theatre of operations are collected during what is termed a training reconnaissance mission. This information is brought back to the Canadian Maneuver Training Center in Wainwright, AB where war gaming, simulations and training scenarios are prepared for deploying troops. In preparation for deployments to Afghanistan, Afghan Canadians are hired to participate in training scenarios that seek to emulate on-the-ground experience.¹²⁹ If child soldiers are identified as a potential threat during the training reconnaissance mission, members must be trained to respond appropriately. One way of enabling an appropriate response is to build children into the war games, simulations and training scenarios designed to prepare CF members for their deployment. Just as Afghan Canadians are hired to participate, the presence of children in training scenarios would provide for more realistic training scenarios. It is worth noting that Child Labour Laws may prevent this from occurring, but it is an option worth considering nevertheless. As an alternative to child actors, child silhouettes could be built in to simulator training exercises. Research has shown practicing skills under stressful training situations have great value. It has also proven that the more realistic training is, the greater the possibility

¹²⁹Colonel Lowell Thomas, former Director Army Training, personal correspondence with author, 14 April 2010.

that the required skill will be developed.¹³⁰ The inclusion of children in training scenarios is therefore an appropriate means of preparing CF members to react quickly and appropriately to what can only be described as the shock of confronting a child in combat.

Rules of Engagement

Rules of engagement (ROE) are “the way in which military commanders control the use of force by their subordinates” and are equivalent to orders.¹³¹ Mission specific ROE are crafted by the highest levels of command and are informed by political, diplomatic and legal considerations. They are developed to provide a military member with a set of standard operating procedures that can be used with as little deliberation as possible.

The aim of peacekeeping missions is to pacify hostilities and help restore civil order. As a result, peacekeepers are not heavily armed and their freedom of action and ability to use force is severely restrained. A lack of clarity for the mission can lead to ROE that do not anticipate the range of situations that might require the use of force. Supported by the intelligence assessments made during the JIPB, unambiguous theatre specific ROE must be developed that take into account the possibility of engaging a child soldiers. ROE training must be conducted in a manner that will enable a split second decision a CF member may be required to make. Failure to do so could yield dire consequences ranging from the strategic to tactical levels. Robust ROE do not remove the moral imperatives placed upon members of the military but they go a long way in ensuring members respond in accordance with the objectives of the mission.

¹³⁰Dave Grossman, “On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society,” (Boston, Little, Brown and Company, 1996), xxix.

¹³¹ Department of National Defence, B-GJ-005-501/FP-001 *Use of Force in CF Operations* (Ottawa: DND Canada, 2008), 1-3.

Non-lethal Weapons

Non-lethal weapons are another potential alternative that has been suggested for confronting child soldiers, as they only incapacitate temporarily and do not normally inflict significant injury or result in death. The Center for Emerging Threats and Opportunities views the use of non-lethal weapons as a more “humane way of dealing with child soldiers.” Their use can, in turn, preserve public support.¹³² While on the surface the use of non-lethal weapons such as rubber bullets appears to be a viable means of neutralizing a child soldier, there are second and third order effects that must be considered. First is the fact that, according to the Law of Armed Conflict, any persons wounded, sick or shipwrecked, whether they have taken part in conflict or not are entitled to medical care to the fullest extent possible and with the least possible delay.¹³³ What this suggests, then, is that by neutralizing a child soldier, the CF member runs the risk of injuring that child. They are then placed in a situation whereby they have to ensure the provision of medical attention as soon as the situation permits. The situation then results in a custody issue where the CF becomes responsible for the detention and eventual transfer or release of the child. The transfer or release of detainees has proven to be a challenge for the CF in the recent past. Contributing to the problem is the fact that many of the countries that employ child soldiers either have no centrally functioning government or if they do, they are severely lacking capacity. As a result, the theatre commander is left to deal with the problem of release. This begs the question, “who are

¹³² Charles Borchini, Stephanie Lanz and Erin O’Connell, *Child Soldiers: Implications for U.S. Forces*, Cultural Intelligence Seminar Report prepared for the Centre for Emerging Threats and Opportunities, Marine Corps Warfighting Laboratory (Quantico: Centre for Emerging Threats and Opportunities, 2002), 23-24, with permission.

¹³³ Collection of Documents on the Law of Armed Conflict, Geneva Additional Protocol II, Part III, Article 7(1) and (2), 168.

they released to?” If they are simply released back to the community, the problem becomes two fold: on the one hand, a child soldier will not fear capture because they know they will be released. On the other hand, with the knowledge that they will be released back to the community, those who do wish to escape an armed group will think they really have nowhere to turn. It is clear to see why child soldiers might be considered a wicked problem.

SUMMARY

Future deployments will likely take place in parts of the world that could put CF members in the difficult position of having to fire on a child for their own protection or the protection of their fellow troops. The consequences of a life or death decision can have far reaching implications. Increased cultural intelligence can prevent cultural misunderstandings that may lead to errors in judgment. A number of practical recommendations have been made to develop a set of skills that will enable military members to respond in a manner that is consistent with the law, the values of Canadian society and the objectives of the mission.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

The child soldiering phenomenon is a sad reality of our time. It is also a problem that is gaining increased attention in humanitarian circles around the world.

Unfortunately, much of what has been written on the topic considers the problem from the perspective of ensuring the safety and security of the child. While this is a noble and necessary endeavour, it does not address the specific needs of preparing military members for the possibility of confronting children on the modern battlefield.

This paper provided a broad examination of the child soldiering problem, commencing with the various laws and conventions aimed at ensuring their protection. The past 60 years have seen the international community make significant strides to ensure that children are prevented from recruitment and employment in armed conflict. Although the language of many of these laws is somewhat ambiguous, their underlying message is clear: children's unique status in society demand that they be protected from the horrors of war. In addition to the various laws aimed at protecting children is the Law of Armed Conflict, which serves to regulate the conduct of armed conflict. The presence of children on the battlefield is at odds with the spirit of the LOAC; its basic principles are challenged as a result. The theory of *jus in bello* holds that when a child picks up arms in a conflict scenario they become an unlawful combatant and, by extension, a legitimate target. However, a soldier's instinctive reaction to meet gunfire with gunfire may be blunted when the opposing force is a mere child.

Despite the laws, treaties and conventions designed to expressly proscribe the employment of children in armed conflict, the practice is on the rise. With an estimated 300,000 children involved in conflict in countries the world over, it can be inferred that

these laws are not meeting their intended goals. While Africa is home to the largest concentration of child soldiers, they are employed in government and non-government groups on almost every continent on the planet. Their roles in armed groups extend beyond combat; they also serve as porters, spies and sexual slaves.

In many parts of the world, children are pressed into service by ruthless warlords who seek to exploit their vulnerabilities to advance the causes of their rebel groups. In other cases, the despair and desperation that defines their lives often drives children to volunteer to take up arms. Lightweight, easily operated weapons, abject poverty and the protracted nature of civil wars contribute to the problem of children on the battlefield. Once inside armed groups, children are forced to use drugs and to commit unimaginable atrocities that aim to create a dependency situation.

Set against the backdrop of a changing geo-political landscape, the importance of the issue for Canada, the Canadian Forces and the individual Canadian Forces member was raised. To be sure, the Government of Canada will continue to honour its international obligations in the pursuit of global security and stability. Although the future cannot be predicted, it can be assumed that in honouring its commitments, the Government will choose to send Canadian Forces members on missions to those parts of the world that contribute most to global instability. They are the same parts of the world where children are armed, drugged and sent into battle. After a review of Canadian Forces policy, doctrine, training and education it can be concluded that the CF is not positioned to adequately prepare its members to face the unique threat of child soldiers. This shortfall could very possibly have both strategic and tactical implications. Canada's reputation on the international scene, the Canadian Forces' reputation both at home and abroad and the combat effectiveness and mental health of military members may

eventually stand to be tested if proper attention is not paid to the matter. A bullet in a child soldier could cost the electorate's support for the mission and the institution at large. Worse, a microsecond's hesitation could cost a CF member's life.

A number of recommendations were suggested that have applications broader than the single issue of child soldiers. As recommended by the draft field guide, incorporating the element of child soldiers into the development of the intelligence picture could raise the level of awareness of threat. It could also result in training programs designed with the threat in mind. Increasing cultural intelligence and resilience can foster appropriate responses to the myriad of unfamiliar and challenging situations CF members are often placed. Training to robust rules of engagement would enable rapid responses to the morally confusion situation of children in combat. Finally, building children into war games and simulations would allow troops to be trained in realistic conditions and result in better preparation.

Whichever solutions the CF chooses to implement should be done with this in mind: facing children in battle will place CF members in a position that is remote from their experience. Preparing them for the possibility is not only an institutional responsibility; it is also owed to the men and women of the CF.

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