

The Enablers of War: Casual Factors behind the Child Soldier Phenomenon

P.W. Singer
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In today's increasingly globalized world, there has been a shift from traditional threats focused on the territorial integrity of nations to global threats that center on the safety of individuals. The Ford Institute for Human Security at the University of Pittsburgh recognizes the critical importance of these emergent problems in human security.

Executive Summary:

The recruitment and employment of child soldiers is one of the most flagrant violations of the norms of international human rights. Besides being contrary to the general practices of the last four millennia of warfare, there are a number of treaties that attempt to prohibit it today. Yet, this practice has become a new, globalized doctrine of war, a new mode of mobilizing and utilizing force, occurring in 75% of the world's conflicts. What factors explain this change in the historic practices of war? The following article will focus on the vicious synergy of three broad, and often interrelated, dynamics that led to both the emergence and the rapid growth of the child soldier phenomenon. Socio-economic changes, technological developments, and the changing contexts of war have created the circumstances, the opportunity, and the motivation for children to be turned into soldiers.

A particular focus will be made on the dimensions that act as enablers to this new doctrine of war. Where once children and battlefield weapons were incompatible, now they combine to create a completely new pool of military labor. Stemming from the combined trends of socio-economic disconnection and technological efficiency gains in small arms, children now represent an easy and low cost way to mobilize armed force. The only remaining ingredients required are groups or leaders without scruples. They must only be willing to connect these trends and pull children into war. As the payoffs can be huge, many now take this immoral plunge.

Introduction:

When we think of warfare, children rarely come to mind. But while warfare has long been the domain of adults, juveniles have been present in armies in a number of instances in the past. For example, young pages armed the knights of the Middle Ages and drummer boys marched before Napoleonic armies. Child soldiers even fought in our own civil war, most notably when a unit of 247 Virginia Military Institute cadets fought with the Confederate Army in the battle of New Market (1864). More recently, U.S. forces fought against small numbers of underage Hitler Jugend (Hitler Youth) in the closing weeks of World War II.

However, these were the exceptions to what the rule used to be, that children had no place in war. Throughout the last four thousand years of war as we know it, children were never an integral, essential part of any military force in history. But the rules of war have changed. The participation of children is now not a rarity, but instead a growing feature of war.

The practice of child soldiers is far more widespread, and more important, than most realize. There are as many as 300,000 children under the age of 18 presently serving as combatants around the globe. The average age of child soldiers in two separate surveys was just over twelve years old. The youngest ever was an armed five year old in Uganda. The youngest ever terrorist bomber a seven year old in Colombia. Another historic change in the pool of military labor is the presence of young girl combatants. Roughly 30% of the armed forces

that employ child soldiers also include girl soldiers. Underage girls have been present in armed groups in 55 countries.²

As Achvarina and Reich point out in their chapter explaining the rise of child soldiers, the practice of recruiting children is not just a problem associated with rebel forces. States are equally culpable of using child soldiers, in some cases even more so. Jo Becker's chapter in this book points out that as many as 90% of all child soldiers in Burma are members of the Burmese national army. While child soldiers are most prominent on the African continent, the case studies presented in this book illustrate that children are used as soldiers in all corners of the world. Indeed, children now are present in 40% of the world's armed forces, rebel groups, and terrorist organizations and fight in almost 75% of the world's conflicts. An additional half million children serve in armed forces not presently at war.

With the global deployment of U.S. force after 9-11, from Afghanistan to the Philippines, child soldiers are present in every conflict zone U.S. forces now operate in. In fact, the very first U.S. soldier killed in the war on terrorism was a Green Beret killed by a fourteen year old sniper in Afghanistan. At least six young boys between the ages of 13 and 16 have been captured by U.S. forces in Afghanistan in the initial fighting and were taken to the detainee facility at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. They were housed in a special wing entitled "Camp Iguana." As the Pentagon took more than a year to figure out whether to prosecute or rehabilitate them, the kids spent their days in a house on the beach converted into a makeshift prison, watching DVDs (Ironically, their favorite movies were *Castaway* and *Call of the Wild*) and learning English and math. In Iraq, the problem has grown to great concern. U.S. forces have fought children in at least seven Iraqi cities, including during house to house fighting in Falluja, in which Marines talked about the difficulty of "fighting kids armed with assault rifles." More than 200 kids were held at the notorious Abu Ghraib prison.

The result is that war in the 21st century is not only more prevalent, but more tragic. With children's involvement, warlords, terrorists, and rebel leaders alike are finding that conflicts are easier to start. In turn, with such leaders being able to tap a new source of military labor, wars are harder to end. Rather than coming to a conclusion, they drag on, consuming not only societies in general but also the childhood of literally hundreds of thousands of children. A particularly troubling aspect then is not only what happens during the fighting, but the legacy it leaves for children after the fighting is done. That is, recovery from the traumas of war is hard enough; it's all the more difficult when the soldier in question is a child.

The rules against:

The recruitment and employment of child soldiers is one of the most flagrant violations of international human rights norms. Besides being contrary to the general practices of the last four millennia of warfare, there are a number of treaties that attempt to prohibit it today.

At the international level, these treaties include: the 1945 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Geneva Conventions of 1949, the 1977 Additional Protocols to the Geneva Conventions, and the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child. Additionally, the UN Security Council, the UN General Assembly, the UN Commission on Human Rights, and the International Labor Organization are among the international bodies that have

condemned the practice. There has also been a global grassroots efforts against it, embodied in the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, an umbrella group of NGOs based in over 40 countries. At the regional level, the Organisation for African Unity, the Economic Community of West African States, the Organisation of American States, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe, and the European Parliament have also denounced the use of child soldiers.

In May 2000, the UN General Assembly adopted a new “optional protocol” to the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child, further illustrating the growing global sentiment against the use of child soldiers. This measure specifically targeted the phenomenon by formally raising the minimum age of recruitment and use to eighteen years old (the old convention limit was fifteen, which most armed groups would still be in violation of anyway). It has since been signed by over 100 states.

Unfortunately, the growing and global practice of child soldiers illustrates just how extensively this long list of conventions and laws is ignored. Despite all the treaties (and prior obviousness of the crime), the recruitment and use of child soldiers is a deliberate and systematic choice currently being made the world over. Simply put, children fighting on the battlefield has become normal practice in current warfare. Thus, rather than being complied with, these prohibitive norms have been turned inside out. That is, going by actual behavior, child soldiering is the new standard, rather than its ban.

In this book, Achvarina and Reich rightly point out that single factor explanations such as orphanage rates and poverty levels cannot account for the emergence and increased use of child soldiers. Indeed, the underlying causes behind the deliberate violations of international standards are much more complex. They involve the confluence of three critical factors that form a causal chain: 1) social disruptions and failures of development caused by globalization, war, and disease not only have led to greater global conflict and instability, but they have also led to generational disconnections that create a new pool of potential recruits; 2) technological improvements in small arms now permit these child recruits to be effective participants in warfare; and 3) the recent rise in a new type of warfare, particularly in failed state zones, that is far more brutal and criminalized.

The simultaneous occurrence of these three forces has resulted in the viability of a new doctrine of warfare centered around the employment of children as soldiers. Decisions by conflict leaders and particular events, such as a low draft turnout, often referred to as proximate causes, may explain variations from one case to another, but underlying all instances of child soldiering is the convergence of social disruption, technological improvements, and the changing context of war. Conflict group leaders now see the recruitment and use of children to be a low cost and efficient way for their organizations to mobilize and generate armed forces. The rules against child soldiers be damned.

The Lost Generation

The desperate position in which many children around the world find themselves is almost unimaginable, especially for those in prosperous societies. To give a sense of the disconnect, Americans live in a society where between 40% and 50% of the food ready for harvest is not

consumed but tossed away instead.³ The average family of four in the United States throws away \$590 per year in meat, fruits, vegetables and grain products.⁴ Nationally, the \$43 billion in household food waste in the U.S. is equivalent to Sudan's Gross Domestic Product (GDP).⁵ Such a world seems like fiction to children in the developing world. Its opposite is their reality.

While positive in some terms, the developments of globalization that dominated the last quarter century have left many behind, as well as rending traditional societies and mores apart. The developed world saw great prosperity from the opening of economies, but this certainly did not produce a homogenous world economy or culture with affluence for all. A scenario of the Arlington Institute illustrates the inequalities in every aspect of socioeconomic life: If the world were reduced to a village of 100 people, only 1 person would have a college degree; 85 people would live in huts and would be hungry most of the time; 67 individuals would not have access to clean drinking water; 6 people would be in control of half the wealth; and of the 67 adults 37 would be illiterate.⁶

In the aggregate, three billion people, roughly half the world's population, presently subsist on two Dollars or less a day, over 1 billion live in countries in civil war, 800 million have insufficient food, and 1.3 billion lack access to clean water.⁷

The brunt of these socioeconomic problems has fallen on the youngest segments of the population, indeed, as we are now in the midst of the largest generation of youth in human history. In 2005, almost 50% of the population in developing countries was under fifteen years old, representing 90% of the world's youth under that age.⁸ Unprecedented numbers of children around the world are undereducated, malnourished, marginalized, and disaffected. Almost a quarter of all the world's youth survives on less than a dollar a day. As many as 250 million children live on the street. 211 million children must work to feed themselves and their families. 115 million children have never been to school.⁹

These desperate and excluded children constitute a huge pool of labor for the illegal economy, organized crime, and armed conflicts. In describing the concurrent risks, Juan Somavi, Secretary General of the World Social Summit, notes, "We've replaced the threat of the nuclear bomb with the threat of a social bomb."¹⁰

Demographics compound this problem at an exponential rate that is astounding when one steps back. During the last 50 years, the world population has grown more than in the preceding four million years of human history.¹¹ As the world population continues to swell from the present 6.5 billion to 8 billion by 2025, these pressures will worsen.¹² With the depletion of non-renewable energy stocks, high quality agricultural land, water resources, and fisheries, resource scarcities are growing at the same time demand is rising by greater amounts. For example, estimates are that, by 2025, two thirds of the world's population will face severe shortages of water.¹³ As these social, economic, environmental, and political problems come together, some analysts worry that the problems will feed off of each other. They fret about a cascading breakdown of our increasingly complex ecological, political and economic systems, and have even come up with a new term for it, "synchronous failure."¹⁴

While this may be the ultimate nightmare scenario, it is clear that the disconnect between growing population needs and supplies sharply increases the general demands on state and

society, while simultaneously decreasing their ability to meet them. Research indicates that the result is invariably socio-economic fragmentation, a weakening of the state's legitimacy, and ensuing violent conflict.¹⁵ Conflict groups are well aware of these gaps and sometimes seek to exploit them. They can widen the gap by intentionally undermining social stability or even seek to gain strength and support by serving as surrogates for the social services that healthy societies and capable governments would normally be able to deliver. For instance, in war ravaged Lebanon, the Hizbollah group has taken over the entire realm of social services, from running hospitals to schools, creating a reliance on the armed group.

Other catastrophes, such as famine and disease outbreaks, underscore this broad trend of disconnection and distress among growing numbers of youth around the world. Of particular worry is the enduring nature of the AIDS epidemic in the developing world, particularly sub-Saharan Africa. It is notable that this is where the epicenter of the child soldier phenomenon lies.¹⁶ The disease is altering the very demographics of the region, with terrifying consequences for both stability and security.

AIDS does not strike with equal weight across age groups. In a "unique phenomenon in biology," the disease actually reverses death rates to strike hardest at mature, but not yet elderly, adults.¹⁷ The consequence is that population curves shift (eliminating the typical middle aged hump), almost in a direct opposite to the manner of previous epidemics. Such a shift in demographics is fairly worrisome. Recent research has found a strong correlation between violent outbreaks, ranging from wars to terrorism, and the portion of young males to the overall population.¹⁸ Once the ratio of young males grows too far out of balance, violent conflict tends to ensue. AIDS will likely cause this trend in several states already close to this dangerous threshold.

This process is known as "coalitional aggression."¹⁹ Young men, who are considered psychologically more aggressive, naturally compete for social and material resources in all societies. When outnumbering other generations, however, there are inevitably more losers than winners among the youth in this process. Moreover, the typical stabilizing influences of elders are lessened by the overall mass of youth. These lost youths are more easily harnessed into more pernicious activities that can lead to conflict. For example, demagogues, warlords, criminals, etc. all find it easier to recruit when a large population of angry, listless young men fill the street. Riots and other social crises are also more likely. In a sense, it is conflict caused from the bottom up, rather than top-down. While such a correlation is certainly a simplistic explanation of violence, the disturbing fact is that the pattern has held true across history. Outbreaks of violence from ancient Greek wars to recent societal breakdowns in Rwanda, Yugoslavia, and the Congo were all presaged by similar demographic patterns.

At the same time, the factors that disconnect the children from the structure of society also debilitate the very institutions needed to solidify the state and prevent conflict. For example, estimates of HIV infection rates among regional armies in Africa include 50% in Congo and Angola, 66% in Uganda, 75% in Malawi, and 80% in Zimbabwe.²⁰ This devastates their ability to maintain the peace or resist new rebel and warlord groups. Similar hollowing-out is occurring in many other government agencies and parts of the economy in AIDS-hit regions.

Adding to these socioeconomic trends is the continuing prevalence of global conflict; the result is an often-dangerous mix. While many hoped for a “new world order” after the end of the Cold War in 1989, the real order that came about was that of “peace in the West, war for the rest.” About half the ongoing wars in the world are entering their second generation of prospective fighters. In such extended conflicts, children have grown up surrounded by violence, and often see it as a permanent way of life. These children are also valued as a potential source of new recruits. For example, the head of a Karen rebel training camp in Burma describes how he brought his own twelve year old son into the fight. “I took him out of school in the third grade to turn him into a military man. I thought that if he studies now, he’ll just have to fight later. Better to fight now, and learn later when there is time for it.”²¹

In addition to witnessing fighting and bloodshed, children who grow up in the midst of war usually lack basic necessities (schools, health care, adequate shelter, water and food), face disrupted family relationships, and even experience increased patterns of family violence.²² The totality of this environment makes it difficult for communities to foster healthy cognitive and social development. A weakened social structure is then generally unable to steer their children away from war. In contrast, such environments provide an ideal background for the indoctrination of ideologies in children. The picture of the military man that the Karen rebel instills in his son is only one of many examples. Jo Becker points out in this book that indoctrination in the cases of the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka and the Maoists in Nepal starts as early as 6th grade in schools.

As a result, children are easy to recruit not only because they may seek a source of income, protection, food or shelter; they may also want to join the armed forces because of a moral and social obligation to their society.

Children are typically forced from homes and stable environments during fighting. UNHCR estimates that there are some 25 million uprooted children in the world, having become either cross-border refugees or internally displaced persons (IDPs). Each day, 5,000 more children become refugees.²³ Children tend to remain in this situation an average of 6-7 years, making them highly vulnerable to recruitment.²⁴ Achvarina and Reich clearly illustrate the role of refugee camps in recruiting children: in camps that are easily accessible to government and opposition forces, children are much more vulnerable to recruitment.

It is estimated that 1 out of every 200 of the world’s children suffers from a war-related psychological malady.²⁵ The impact of this is only starting to be understood. War is thought to have an all-encompassing impact on child development. It envelops children’s attitudes, relationships, moral values, and the framework through which they understand society and life itself.²⁶ Having been exposed to horrible violence during key developmental stages of their life, many children come to accept it as a perfectly normal part of their existence. As one child in Northern Uganda describes, “If you are under twenty and living here, you have known virtually nothing else your whole life but what it is like to live in a community enduring armed conflict-conflict in which you are a prime target.”²⁷

All this gives a new meaning to the moniker of “The Lost Generation” (Gertrude Stein originally coined the term, lamenting what WWI had done to a generation of youth). The overwhelming majority of child soldiers are drawn from the poorest, least-educated, and

most-marginalized sections of society, who have been forced to grow up in what one writer called a “roving orphanage of blood and flame.”²⁸

Anthropologist Victor Turner once referred to children that are cut off from social structures through orphanage, flight or exposure to violence as being caught “betwixt and between” society.²⁹ They live at the threshold of belonging neither to the accepted social structure nor to an “alternative world of anti-structure centered around illegality and violence”.³⁰ Turner calls this form of existence *liminal* from the Latin word for “threshold”. Children who live a liminal existence exemplify the new lost generation and are at a higher risk of becoming child soldiers.

While pathways might differ, the liminal existence characterizes children’s road to conflict. Forcibly recruited children are usually from special risk groups: street children, the rural poor, refugees and others displaced. They are most vulnerable to efficient recruiting sweeps. In turn, those who choose to enlist on their own are often from the very same groups, driven to do so by poverty, propaganda, and alienation. The combination of unimaginable misery many children face and the normalization of violence in their lives can lead them to search for a sense of control over their chaotic and unpredictable situations. Research on child development indicates that they will then be more likely to seek out and join armed groups that provide protection or adhere to ideologies that provide this sense of order, regardless of the content.³¹ In fact, Gutierrez Sanin’s chapter on the recruitment practices and motivations of rebel organizations and governments suggests that each organization may target children with a specific psychological profile depending on their organizational strategy and goals. Children in turn may be more susceptible to be recruited by one or the other group as a result of their developmental and psychological needs.

For example, those who find themselves to be victims often construct their identity along such lines. Such “victim motivation” can also become a motivation to commit acts of violence of their own, in a bid for pre-emptive protection or revenge.³² The tragic result is that these coping strategies place children in further danger and feed further cycles of violence.

New Toys for Tots

Concurrent with this trend of socio-economic disconnection has been the proliferation and technological advancement of personal weaponry. This development is a key enabler; without it, the earlier trend would not matter for much in terms of creating a doctrine of war. Technological changes are what allow this broadened pool of potential recruits to be turned into able soldiers (for example, evidence provided by Achvarian and Reich in their chapter on of security in refugee camps rightly suggests that children are vulnerable to recruitment in camps that allow access to belligerents. Once recruited, however, it is the new weapons types and their possession that effectively turns them into soldiers).

When thinking about military operations, we typically focus on the most complex and expensive weapons systems, such as missiles, tanks, and aircraft carriers. For most conflicts around the globe, however, this picture is inaccurate. Instead, the weapons that shape contemporary warfare the most are the ones that are the simplest and least costly.

These “small arms” or “light weapons” include rifles, grenades, light machine guns, light mortars, land mines, and other weapons that are “man-portable”, a term often used by the military. Even though they represent less than 2% of the entire global arms trade in terms of cost, small arms are perhaps the most deadly of all weapons to society.³³ They are the weapons most often used both in battle and in attacks on civilians and have produced 60% - 90% of all casualties in recent wars.³⁴ In West Africa alone, more than 2 million people were killed by small arms in the last decade.³⁵ Indeed, modern small arms can rend the fabric of civil society like no other weapon; with them, a small, relatively weak group can easily turn a peaceful country into a man-made humanitarian disaster.

Technological and efficiency advances in these weapons now permit the transformation of children into fighters just as lethal as any adult. For most of human history, weapons relied on the brute strength of the operator. They also typically required years of training to master. This was obviously prohibitive to the effective use of children as soldiers. A child who was not physically matured could not bear the physical burdens of serving in the phalanx of the ancient Greek hoplites or carrying the weight of medieval knight’s armor, let alone serve as an effective combatant. Even until just a few generations ago, personal battlefield weapons such as the bolt action rifles of WWII were still heavy and bulky, limiting children’s participation and general effectiveness.³⁶

However, there have been many recent improvements in manufacturing, such as the incorporation of plastics. This now means that modern weapons, particularly automatic rifles, are so light that small children can use them as easily and effectively as adults. They are no longer just “man-portable” but are “child-portable” as well. Just as important, most of these weapons have been simplified in their use, to the extent that they can be stripped, reassembled, and fired by a child below the age of ten. The ubiquitous Russian-designed Kalashnikov AK-47, which weighs 10-1/2 pounds, is a prime example. Having only nine moving parts, it is brutally simple. Interviews reveal that it generally takes children around thirty minutes to learn their use. The weapon is also designed to be exceptionally hardy. It requires little maintenance and can even be buried in dirt for storage - something guerilla groups often do, as a sort of insurance policy, in case a cease-fire breaks down. Of the estimated 500 million firearms in circulation globally, 25% belong to the Kalashnikov family.³⁷

At the same time as these improvements in simplicity and ruggedness, vast strides have been made in the lethality of personal weapons. The weapons that children can now fire with ease are a far cry from the spears of the phalanx or the single bolt rifle of the GIs. Since World War II, there has been a steady and multiplicative increase in the destructive power of small arms. With just one pull of the trigger, a modern assault rifle in the hands of a child can release a burst of 30 bullets that are lethal more than 400 yards away. Or, they can shoot off a rocket propelled grenade (RPG), whose explosions can tear down buildings or maim tens at a time.

Thus, a handful of children now can have the equivalent firepower of an entire regiment of Napoleonic infantry. When targeting unarmed civilians, the results are doubly devastating. Hence, with only a few hours’ training, a youngster can be taught all he or she needs to know in order to kill or wound hundreds of people in a matter of minutes.

Not only have these weapons become easier to use and far more deadly, but they have also proliferated in number, to the extent that there is almost a glut on the market. There are an estimated 500 million small arms present on the global scene, one for every twelve persons on the planet.³⁸ The consequence is that the primary weapons of war have also steeply fallen in price over the last few decades. This has made it easier for any willing organization to obtain them and then turn children into soldiers at a minimal cost.

The irony is that this proliferation of small arms partially resulted from the Cold War's "peace dividend." After the fall of the Berlin Wall, millions of weapons were declared surplus. Instead of being destroyed however, it was cheaper to dump them on the world market. For example, when the two Germanys combined in 1990, the entire weapons stock of the East German Army was auctioned off, much of it to private bidders. The result was literally tons of light weapons, available at cut-rate prices. Light machine guns went for just \$60, land mines for \$19, and pistols for \$8.³⁹ These stocks were added to the masses of weapons that had already been given to superpower proxies during the Cold War. Moreover, many ended up in the hands of arms brokers and gunrunners who had no compunctions about their final destination or use. The result is that as much as 40-60% of the small arms around the world are now in the hands of illicit organizations.⁴⁰

Even with this dump of weaponry, however, manufacturing has continued apace for the last few decades, as weapons industries, particularly in the former Soviet bloc, have tried to stay afloat. The result is that there is no place around the globe where small arms are not startlingly cheap and easily accessible. More importantly, they tend to be concentrated in the most violence-prone areas. This phenomenon was so particularly evident with the Soviet AK-47 type assault rifle and its knock-offs, that one analyst even coined the phrase "Kalashnikov Age" to describe the decade of the 1990s and how AK-47s spread around the world, raising global conflict levels.⁴¹ For example, in just post-war Mozambique, there were around 6 million AK-47s for a population of roughly 16 million.⁴² For a period of time, they were even used as a form of currency.⁴³ In Uganda and Sudan, an AK-47 can be purchased for the cost of a chicken; in northern Kenya, it can be bought for the price of a goat (the equivalent is about \$5).⁴⁴ In South Africa, AK-47s are just slightly more expensive, valued on the market at \$12 each.

The trend in and effect of weapons pricing is analyzed in Phillip Killicoat's chapter in this book. He points out that, compared to the developed world, the average price of a Kalashnikov is significantly lower in Africa and conflict affected countries and has even declined over the past 6 years. The low price of conflict-specific capital, i.e. military equipment, reduces the opportunity costs of waging war, especially if the human capital can be augmented by the use of child soldiers that can use the cheap, easy to handle and effective weapons.⁴⁵

The outcome of this proliferation is that not only can any group readily obtain the arms necessary for war, but that the general presence of combat weapons is now a pervasive part of daily life in many parts of the world. The effect is a militarization of many societies, which further places children at risk of being pulled into the realm of war. As even one Afghan warlord lamented, "We have young boys that are more familiar with a gun than with school."⁴⁶

While the weapons themselves are not the direct cause of conflict, Killicoat finds that low weapon prices are associated with higher proneness to civil conflict. The proliferation and cheapening of weapons is an enabler and allows any local conflict to become a bloody slaughter. Moreover, an abundance of arms within society takes away certain barriers to civil war. The range of politically relevant actors literally multiplies and any sort of dissent within society can now easily find a violent expression.

This dynamic also reworks the leadership structures within many societies – to dangerous ends. Power and control over the tools of war once tended to accrue with age. In many cases where weaponry has become pervasive, though, they have begun to devolve to what are called “youth elders.” These are often impetuous, armed children, no longer constrained by the age groupings that limited who could participate in warfare and who gained the rewards that went with them. Instead, these youths now dictate the rules to the former heads of their tribes, by the sheer dint of their new weaponry. The youth elders have embraced their new authority without accepting the responsibilities that come with it and violence levels have risen. As one Kenyan analyst describes the alteration of tribal warfare in Africa, “Somehow, the seat of authority has moved from the elders to the youth, and that has some very, very bad consequences for managing conflict.”⁴⁷

Finally, this trend is representative of the general weakening of the state.⁴⁸ States’ control over the primary means of warfare was once pivotal in their formation.⁴⁹ With the proliferation of small arms and their centrality in much of warfare, this is lost. Small groups can now not merely mobilize disaffected children, but also turn them into a force that can quickly overwhelm the capacity of many states in the developing world. The easy availability of inexpensive small arms thus has the potential to rework the local balance of power and further the risks of failed states. Even after the fighting has ended, the very presence of these weapons also makes it harder for war-torn societies to recover and war easier to reinstate.⁵⁰

Post-Modern Warfare

The context in which these above developments have occurred matters as well. The decision whether to implement a doctrine that uses children now takes place within a period of transformation in warfare itself. In many of the ongoing wars around the globe, the traditional political and strategic rationales behind the initiation, maintenance, and continuation of war are under siege, with huge change of who can be warriors and how they act (what one writer has termed a breakdown in the “Warrior’s Honor”).⁵¹ While the large-scale military operations carried out by the Western powers have become more technological, this is not the only face of warfare. In the majority of conflicts carried out in the developing world, warfare has become non-state, decentralized, de-professionalized, and thus messier and criminalized. In many cases, the private profit motive has become a central motivator, equal or greater to that of political, ideological, or religious inspirations.⁵² Or, as one military analyst puts it, “With enough money anyone can equip a powerful military force. With a willingness to use crime, nearly anyone can generate enough money.”⁵³

Today, the fighting in a number of conflicts around the globe lacks any sort of link to a broader political or religious cause. Instead, it is driven by a simple logic of appropriation, from seizing mineral assets and protecting the drug trade to simple looting and pillaging. As

World Bank expert Paul Collier writes, “The key characteristics of a country at high risk of internal fighting are neither political nor social, but economic.”⁵⁴

With the end of Cold War sponsorships, the new rule of insurgency appears to be that if conflict groups want to survive, they have to find their own financial resources.⁵⁵ In many cases, there is a direct link between the fighting and ready commodities that groups can sell directly. These provide willing conflict entrepreneurs with the incentive to quickly seize what they could.⁵⁶ In Sierra Leone, the key point of contention in the ten-year war was not who was in place in the capitol, but who had control over the country’s diamond fields. Similarly, in the war in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), foes and allies alike have battled over coltan mines. Coltan is a little known mineral that is drawn from mud, but is now a key ingredient for the circuit boards used in almost all cell phones, laptops, and pagers. In short, as one local observer noted, “People are fighting for money. Everything that happens, it’s about money.”⁵⁷ This stands in sharp contrast to the traditional understanding of war. The classic military philosopher Clausewitz, writing in the early 1800s, thought that “Politics is the womb in which war develops.”⁵⁸ Today, for much of contemporary warfare, economics plays at least as much a part in nurturing and shaping conflict.

Whether the groups evolved from Cold War organizations or were new entrants into conflicts, income generation through pure plunder, the production of primary commodities, illegal trading, or other means thus has become an essential activity in many wars. A particularly lucrative area has been the international drug trade. For example, 70% of opposition groups’ funds in Tajikistan derive from drug income. The estimates are even higher in Colombia, where 90% of the cocaine in the U.S. originally comes from. The rebels and their paramilitary opponents are thought to pull as much as 80% of their funding from the cocaine trade. Of this estimated \$800 million a year, only 10% goes to the war effort, while the other 90% enriches the individual commanders.⁵⁹ Other activities are utilized as well. In the Philippines, Abu Sayyaf funds itself through kidnapping, while the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka run a worldwide shipping conglomerate. In Uzbekistan, Kosovo, and Afghanistan, militant groups profit by running protection rackets for opium traffickers.⁶⁰

Many of these bands continue violent activities long after the original rationale for their formation has lost meaning.⁶¹ While they may have started out with some ideological or popular goals, often related to the Cold War, that have fallen by the wayside as they struggle to survive. Far from being irrational or a breakdown in a system, war then becomes an end not a means. As such, war-making serves as an “alternative system of profit and power.”⁶² The combination of these criminal goals and increasingly less professional, ‘soldier-less’ forces also leads to a variation in strategies towards civilians. While it is traditional insurgency strategy to “swim among the people as a fish swims in the sea”, as elucidated by Mao Tse Tung, the Chinese communist leader and master of guerilla warfare,, these new or reconstructed groups aim at terrorizing and pillaging the population, rather than winning its hearts and minds.

In short, while economics has always played a role in conflict, the last two decades have seen a new type of warfare develop, centered around war itself as a profit-seeking enterprise. Conflicts around the globe are increasingly characterized not as temporary outbreaks of instability, but rather as protracted states of disorder. Within these wars, resource and population exploitation, rather than the mass production known from World Wars I and II,

drive the new “economy of war.”⁶³ The new conflicts may be organized mass violence, but they also involve the blurring of distinctions between traditional conceptions of war, organized crime, and large-scale violations of human rights.⁶⁴

The New Child Labor Problem

The trends of socio-economic dislocation of children, technologic simplification of weaponry, and the broader changes in the nature of contemporary warfare were necessary factors to the emergence of child soldiers as a global phenomenon. Combined, they not only created the mass availability of child recruits, but also the new possibility that they could serve as effective combatants. They also underscored the new utility of children in the changing context of warfare.

A doctrine is way of enacting violence that prescribes the methods and circumstances of troops’ training and employment in battle. What we are now seeing is the development and implementation of a new doctrine of war, one that prescribes the recruitment of children and their use on the battlefield. This is not something that just happened, but has repeatedly involved deliberate choices among the leaders of local armed organizations. Children would not be used as combatants if the organizations that recruited them did not see them as useful. Only given the underlying trends outlined in this chapter does the option of recruiting children become possible and desirable: government and opposition forces alike put children under arms now because they can and because they see it as advantageous to their ends.

The strategy of using children as an alternative source of fighters has proven appealing to many groups, not only because it is cheap and easy to implement, but also because the benefits so far outweigh the costs. Even the most weak and unpopular organizations are able to generate significant amounts of force without a major investment. On the other side of the equation, the costs of using children in this manner are considered quite low, especially because the weapons to arm them with are so cheap. Moral opprobrium is the only major risk to a group that uses child soldiers. However, any group that contemplates using children as fighters has already shown itself unwilling to be limited by prevailing moral codes. The lesson from this is that prohibitory norms are rather weak whenever they are not underscored by substantive penalties for violating them.

The result is that the perception of children and their role in warfare has begun to change. Children have shifted from being seen only as non-combatants, who could offer nothing to leaders, to potential combatants, who carry the benefit of being readily available and easy to transform. Children now represent a low-cost way to mobilize and generate force when the combatants do not generally care about public opinion.

This new doctrine is particularly well-suited to the context of weak or failed states, which have become ever more prevalent as a result of the trends described earlier. During the Cold War, state failure was not so much of a problem, as the two superpowers competed to prop up their weaker allies and undermine their opponents. However, this created the precursors to today’s problems. Fragile post-colonial structures never solidified and by the end of the Cold War period many Third World countries were states in name only. They lacked any semblance of good governance and were instead shells of what a functioning government

should be. In general, they were under-developed, financially fragile, patriarchally structured, and without proper systems of accountability and civil-military controls.⁶⁵ Despite military aid, most developing militaries remained notoriously weak and brittle, incapable of carrying out any sustained military operations. Their forces were also comparatively small in relation to their overall populations.⁶⁶

Thus, by the end of the Cold War, maintaining internal order became a near impossible task for many of these weak states. It is no coincidence that many of the client states, who had received massive amounts of small arms, were the very same states that then failed when their patron's support evaporated.⁶⁷ As these countries degenerated into violence, often ethnic scars reopened, and state assets went up for grabs. An opening was created for new conflict actors, who could hijack the chaos.

Many of the warlords and "conflict entrepreneurs" that emerged had no great political or military background, but were distinguished only by their willingness to break old norms and mobilize force to their own ends. Foday Sankhoh in Sierra Leone was a former cameraman; Charles Taylor in Liberia was an escaped convict; Joseph Kony in Uganda was just the young relative of a tribal shaman, who had never held a job; and, Laurent Kabila in Congo was a little known guerilla leader who had been irrelevant for the previous 30 years. However, these men, and many like them, realized that arming children presented a means to gaining military capacity. Their comprehension of this not only sucked children into war, but also led to the spate of civil wars and state failures that shaped much of global politics after the Cold War.

Highly personalized or purely predatory armed groups, such as warlords, which are focused on asset seizure, are particularly dependent on this new doctrine of using children. Small fringe groups that would have found it impossible to mobilize --and have thus been marginalized in the past-- now can vastly expand their power by using children. In short, they can turn children into soldiers and, as a result, transform an insignificant force into an army. As an illustration, the Lord's Resistance Army in Uganda has a central cabal that numbers as few as 200 men and enjoys no popular support among the civilian populace. However, through the abduction and transformation of 14,000 children into soldiers, the LRA has been able to engage the Ugandan army in a bloody civil war for almost two decades.⁶⁸ Harkening back to an earlier point, it is not mere coincidence that the Small Arms Survey estimates that there are between 630,000 and 950,000 small arms in Uganda.⁶⁹

Regardless of the ideology behind a conflict, in wartime situations there is always some motivation to assemble added military force. It may be for political or strategic reasons or simply because of the high attrition rates among soldiers fighting in tough situations, such as disease ridden-jungles. Children now provide a new alternative to adult recruiting pools. State regimes that are fighting unpopular wars, such as in El Salvador or Guatemala, or rebel as well as ethnic groups that are highly outnumbered or do not enjoy broad support, such as in Myanmar or Nepal. In both cases they find this new pool of recruits particularly useful. They often first seek to tap it when the adult pool runs dry. In Sudan, for example, it was after a recruiting drive for adult males fell flat on its face that the Khartoum regime began targeting children. For two years (1993-5), it tried to conscript all young men between the ages of 18 and 33. However, because of the unpopularity of the war the regime was fighting with the South, only 26,079 of the nearly 2.5 million men in that age bracket actually turned

up for training. As a result, the government began to recruit street children to fill out its forces.⁷⁰ Likewise, the LTTE in Sri Lanka began using children in the 9-12 age range, after it faced a manpower shortage in battles against the Indian peacekeeping force in the late 1980s and could not pull in enough adults because it had lost local support.⁷¹

An added incentive is that children are recruits that come on the cheap. While adults usually desire to be paid for their roles, even if they believe in the cause, children rarely receive any payment, once more adding to the appeal of this new doctrine to leaders. One survey of child soldiers in Burundi found that only 6% had ever received any sort of remuneration. In the Eastern Congo (DRC), only 10% had ever been paid.⁷² This can make children very attractive recruits, inducing a turn to child soldiering not just in emergencies, but as an alternative, low cost supply of man power. For example, in the 1990s, the Colombian FARC group faced the rise of competitive paramilitary groups, who paid their troops \$350 a month. Thus, the FARC, which paid no salary, had to find a means to keep pace in the recruiting wars. Its solution was to increase the role of children, who brought numbers but no costs; consequently, their numbers in the group doubled.⁷³

Conclusions

The overall significance of these developments is that children no longer enjoy any of the traditional protections stemming from their status as minors. Instead, children are increasingly recruited because of the very fact that they are young. Groups that use child soldiers view underage children simply as malleable and expendable assets, whose loss is bearable to the overall cause and quite easily replaced. Or, as one analyst notes, "They are cheaper than adults, and they can be drugged or conditioned more easily into violence and committing atrocities"⁷⁴

Thus, the synergy of the three broad, and often interrelated, dynamics discussed in this article led to both the emergence and rapid growth of the child soldier phenomenon. Socio-economic changes, technological developments, and base avarice within the changing contexts of war have created the circumstances, the opportunity, and the motivation for children to be turned into soldiers.

Where once children and battlefield weapons were incompatible, now they combine to create a completely new pool of military labor. Stemming from the combined trends of socio-economic disconnection and technological efficiency gains in small arms, children now represent an easy and low cost way to mobilize armed force. The only remaining ingredients required are groups or leaders without scruples. They must only be willing to connect these trends and decide to pull children into war. As the payoffs can be huge, many take this immoral plunge. It is only until we find a way to end this cycle, through amending the causes, and changing the cost vs. benefit analysis that leaders go through, that the child soldier doctrine will be put it where it belongs, into the dustbin of history.

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