

Child Soldiers: Implications for U.S. Forces



Seminar Report

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The Center for Emerging Threats and Opportunities, or CETO, is a think tank dedicated to developing new ideas for the U.S. Marine Corps. It was established in November 2000 at the direction of the Senate Armed Service's Subcommittee on Emerging Threats and Capabilities out of a growing concern for the wide range of security challenges the U.S. will face in the 21st century.

CETO's mission is to:

Prevent operational and tactical surprise to senior warfighting commanders by assessing the future security environment in light of emerging threats and potential conceptual and technical opportunities.

The center aims to serve as a catalyst to stimulate thought and debate on issues of importance to the Marine Corps. CETO also responds to requests for support from the senior warfighting commanders.

Through its Cultural Intelligence Seminars, CETO helps prepare Marine forces for deployment in countries where they have limited experience or familiarity. The seminars provide timely and tailored training focused on cultural aspects of specific countries and regions and on functional issues such as terrorism or child soldiers.

CETO operates as a division of the Marine Corps Warfighting Laboratory in Quantico, Va. The Warfighting Lab's mission is to improve current and future naval expeditionary warfare capabilities across the spectrum of conflict for current and future operating forces by conducting concept-based experimentation and wargames to identify, develop, and integrate operational concepts with tactics, techniques, procedures, and technologies.

Center for Emerging Threats and Opportunities
Cultural Intelligence Seminar Series
Seminar Report

Child Soldiers: Implications for U.S. Forces

Report on the Cultural Intelligence Seminar
Child Soldiers: Implications for U.S. Forces
held on June 11, 2002

This Seminar Report was prepared by Charles Borchini, Stephanie Lanz, and Erin O'Connell of the Center for Emerging Threats and Opportunities, Marine Corps Warfighting Laboratory.

For an electronic copy of this report along with full text of panelist presentations where available, videos on child soldiers, and other materials, see www.ceto.quantico.usmc.mil. Comments and questions are welcome and may be directed to (703) 784-0452.

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Child Soldiers: Implications for U.S. Forces

Table of Contents

Foreword	1
Executive Summary	3
Setting the Scene	7
Seminar Panelists and Issues Addressed	11
Main Points from the Presentation and Discussion . . .	14
Why Children Are Recruited	14
How Children Are Recruited	15
Facilitators for the Recruitment of Child Soldiers . .	16
Implications on The Battlefield	18
What Can Be Done – International Initiatives	20
What Can Be Done – Local Initiatives	22
What Can Be Done – Military Initiatives	22
More Challenges	27
Recommendations on Future Efforts	29
Appendix A: Panelist Biographies	A-1

Foreword

On Tuesday, June 11, 2002, the Center for Emerging Threats and Opportunities, or CETO, conducted a day-long seminar on *Child Soldiers: Implications for U.S. Forces* at Liversedge Hall, Marine Corps Base, Quantico, Va.

The purpose of the seminar was to help raise awareness of the Child Soldier Phenomenon throughout the Marine Corps to better prepare Marines for when they encounter child soldiers in the future. This report is intended to enhance professional development, facilitate thought and discussion, and impact doctrine, training, and operations as appropriate throughout the Marine Corps.

The timing of this seminar was not coincidental. As the seminar was being conducted, U.S. forces were fighting in Afghanistan. And as was discussed during the seminar, the first U.S. serviceman killed by hostile fire in Afghanistan may have been killed by a 14-year-old boy. While this report was being finalized, plans for a possible war against Iraq were being developed and debated. In President George W. Bush's September 12, 2002 speech before the United Nations, he mentioned that among Iraq's violations of United Nations Security Council Resolutions and international law, Iraq employs children as young as 15 to fight as soldiers.

There is little question that U.S. servicemen will encounter child soldiers in the future. Indeed, this topic is one of increasing importance not only for policy-makers, but most

importantly, for U.S. service members. This underscores the importance of getting the right information about this phenomenon to our troops before they deploy.

As CETO's name implies, it is involved in examining emerging threats and opportunities, to thwart the threats and find ways to exploit the opportunities. The child soldier issue is clearly an emerging threat – and one that the military needs to address.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Frank Panter". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

F. Panter
Brigadier General (Select)
Commander
Marine Corps Warfighting Laboratory
Quantico, Va.

Executive Summary

The Child Soldier Phenomenon has become a post-Cold War epidemic that has proliferated to every continent with the exception of Antarctica and Australia. The United Nations estimates that at least 300,000 boys and girls under the age of 18 are under arms fighting as soldiers and also serving as spies, informants, couriers, and sex-slaves in the 30-plus conflicts around the globe.

Not only have U.S. forces faced child soldiers in the past, it is nearly inevitable that they will face them again in the future. If a 14-year-old points a weapon at a U.S. serviceman, what should he do? No Marine, no soldier, sailor, or airman wants to kill a 14-year-old. But a 14-year-old with an AK-47 is just as deadly as a 40-year-old with an AK-47. If one hesitates, he and his buddies might be killed; if he shoots, then he might have to deal with the potential psychological consequences of killing a child. This presents a terrible dilemma in terms of balancing the Rules of Engagement and self-protection with traditional American cultural and social values concerning children. The question is, **“How will U.S. forces deal with it?”**

This report provides information on the Child Soldier Phenomenon, including:

- o Background to set the scene around the globe.
- o Discussion of why and how child soldiers are recruited.
- o Facilitators for the recruitment of child soldiers,

such as failed states, advances in technology, and the small arms trade.

- o Implications of child soldiers on the battlefield, such as increased lethality, the laws of war, and effects fighting child soldiers have on others.

This report also suggests potential initiatives for stopping the use of child soldiers, and thoughts for engaging them and exploiting their weaknesses:

- o International initiatives include implementation of the *Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict*, support for the International Criminal Court, and enforcement of sanctions and embargoes.
- o Local initiatives include gaining rebel army cooperation and working with local governments to register children at birth.
- o Military initiatives include:
 - Removing the adult leadership of child soldier units.
 - Holding the child soldier threat at a distance and firing for its shock effect.
 - Securing the most likely locations where child soldiers are recruited.
 - Exploring options for using non-lethal weapons.
 - Use of psychological operations.
 - Protecting child soldiers, once demobilized, from the local population and protecting demobilization centers from rebel groups and armies.
 - Preparing U.S. forces for the environ-

ment they will face before they deploy and preparing them to cope with trauma they may experience when they redeploy.

Finally, this report highlights doctrine and training efforts the Marine Corps and the other Services should consider concerning child soldiers.

Child Soldiers: Implications for U.S. Forces

Setting the Scene

In January 2002, Special Forces Sergeant Nathan Chapman was the first U.S. serviceman killed by hostile fire in Afghanistan. This incident was noteworthy because, as reported widely in the media but not confirmed by the Defense Department, he was killed by a 14-year-old Afghan boy.

In September 2000, an elite British strike force rescued a six-man patrol of the Royal Irish Regiment. The patrol had been on a training mission in Sierra Leone when it was captured by a rogue militia group. What was significant about this operation was that the enemy was made up of mostly children. In fact, the patrol had been captured when its commander was unwilling to fire on “children armed with AKs.”¹

The Child Soldier Phenomenon has become a post-Cold War epidemic that has proliferated to every continent with the exception of Antarctica and Australia. The United Nations estimates that at least 300,000 boys and girls under the age of 18 are under arms fighting as soldiers and also serving as spies, informants, couriers, and sex-slaves in the 30-plus conflicts around the globe.

The U.N. estimates that at least 300,000 boys and girls under the age of 18 are child soldiers in the 30-plus conflicts around the globe.

According to Human Rights Watch, the biggest culprit

The Global Spread of Child Soldiers



Countries where child soldiers were active combatants, 1998-2001, are shown in black. Epicenters (cross border spillover) are circles.²

today in recruiting child soldiers is the Burmese Army which includes approximately 70,000 child soldiers in its ranks (one out of every four child soldiers worldwide), of which 10-15 percent are under the age of 15.

Another government that uses child soldiers extensively, second only to Burma, is the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). During the 1996-97 war between the DRC and its neighbors, the DRC under Laurent Kabila had around 30,000 child soldiers in its military, with 15-30 percent of all new recruits being under the age of 18. Kabila's son Josef has made some efforts to move away from using child soldiers. However, rebels opposing the DRC still widely recruit from the ranks of the country's children. Neighboring countries such as Uganda and Rwanda have facilitated the practice of recruiting child soldiers by allowing training camps to be set up within their borders, offering up trainers for rebel groups, and turning a blind eye to the age of the soldiers trained.

The most brutal recruitment and brainwashing of child soldiers had been carried out by the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) in Sierra Leone and the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), a rebel Ugandan militia operating in Sudan and Uganda. Both the RUF and the LRA threatened and carried out mutilations and murders against the children they recruited as punishment for disobedience. They also forced child soldiers to maim and kill others as a means to brainwash them and to ensure their loyalty. The RUF has since been put out of business, but the LRA is still operating and reportedly is using several thousand Ugandan children inside of Southern Sudan.

Counting Children

76% of ongoing or recently ended conflicts (37 of the 55) have children beneath the age of 18 serving as combatants	80% of these conflicts where children are present include fighters under the age of 15
40% of the total armed organizations around the world (157 of 366) use child soldiers	60% of non-state armed forces in the world (77 of 129) use child soldiers
23% of the armed organizations in the world (84 total) use children aged 15 and under in combat roles	18% of them (64) use children 12 and under

More than 300,000 children currently are serving as combatants. Roughly 10% of all active combatants in the world are underage.³

Child soldiers were active in every part of Colombia's armed conflict before December 1999 – as part of the national armed forces, government-linked paramilitaries, and guerrilla forces. The guerrillas refer to child soldiers as “little bees” for the ability and power to sting. The paramilitaries call them “little bells” because they are deployed in front to draw fire, detect traps, and serve as an early warning system. In the cities, child members of militaries are called “little carts” because they ferry drugs and weapons without raising suspicion. In 1999, partly

as a result of heightened international awareness about the child soldier issue, the government raised its recruitment age to 18 and began demobilizing children in its ranks. Nonetheless, children still make up a significant portion of guerrilla forces and paramilitaries, and there are probably 6,000-10,000 children currently fighting.

Not only have U.S. forces faced child soldiers in the past (Germany, Vietnam, Somalia, and Afghanistan), it is nearly inevitable that they will face them again in the future. If a 14-year-old points a weapon at a U.S. serviceman, what should he do? No Marine, no soldier, sailor, or airman wants to kill a 14-year-old. But a 14-year-old with an AK-47 is just as deadly as a 40-year-old with an AK-47. If one hesitates, he and his buddies might be killed; if he shoots, then he might have to deal with the potential psychological consequences of killing a child. This presents a terrible dilemma in terms of balancing the Rules of Engagement and self-protection with traditional American cultural and social values concerning children. The question is, **“How will U.S. forces deal with it?”** This issue is clearly an emerging threat – and one the U.S. military needs to address.

Seminar Panelists and Issues Addressed

On Tuesday, June 11, 2002, six panelists from the United Nations, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), Human Rights Watch, The Brookings Institution, and the British Embassy, along with a former child soldier participated in the CETO seminar on *Child Soldiers: Implications for U.S. Forces*. Over 80 people from across the Marine Corps, other Services, Department of State, Office of the Secretary of Defense, The Joint Staff, U.S. Special Operations Command, the British Army, academic institutions, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and the media attended.

The morning panel addressed the overall issue of child soldiers, focusing on humanitarian and legal aspects. The afternoon panel focused on security aspects and potential ways for U.S. military forces to deal with child soldiers when confronted by them on the battlefield and during peacekeeping operations.

Each of the panelists provided important and interesting perspectives and insights. The first-hand accounts presented by each of the panelists, especially the former child soldier and the Royal Marine had a great impact on the audience. They highlighted their own experiences, described situations our Nation's military forces must be prepared to face, made recommendations on ways to effectively deal with child soldiers, and identified psychological issues that may affect them long after they have returned home.

Ms. Kati Marton, former Chief Advocate for Children in Armed Conflict, United Nations, set the scene for the seminar by describing how the first United States serviceman killed in Operation Enduring Freedom by hostile fire reportedly was killed by a 14-year-old Afghan boy. She went on to

explain the magnitude and dynamics of the problem of child soldiers and posed several international initiatives for dealing with it.

Mr. Ishmael Beah, a former child soldier in Sierra Leone, shared his personal experiences and insights into what it was like to be a child soldier. He highlighted how children become soldiers and explained how they think, feel, and fight while they are soldiers, as well as the challenges they face during their rehabilitation and reintegration back into society.

Mr. Iain Levine, Chief of Humanitarian Policy Development and Advocacy, UNICEF Office of Emergency Programs, highlighted the challenges related to the rehabilitation and reintegration of former child soldiers back into society, and clarified international law prohibiting children under the age of 18 from fighting as soldiers and difficulties with its implementation.

Ms. Jo Becker, Advocacy Director, Children's Rights Division, Human Rights Watch, reviewed her recent research into child soldiers in Burma, as well as other Human Rights Watch investigations in Colombia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. She highlighted the global implications of the problem and the differences between the motivations and attitudes of child soldiers in various countries around the world.

Dr. Peter Singer, John M. Olin Post-Doctoral Fellow, Foreign Policy Studies, The Brookings Institution, discussed security-related aspects and provided an important perspective on the challenges U.S. and Western forces will face if and when they encounter child soldiers in the future. He presented several innovative proposals concerning ways to deal with child soldiers that may save lives and reduce injuries and destruction. He also highlighted the need to develop doctrine and conduct

training related to this issue.

Major Jim Gray, a Royal Marine Staff Officer on the British Naval Staff, provided an invaluable perspective into the mindset of child soldiers as well as a description of the way they are organized and how they fight. He described the personal trauma he experienced upon his return home from serving with the United Nations in Sierra Leone. He attributed this to having observed first-hand a society consumed by civil war in which violence had become routine and where child soldiers played an enormous military role.

Main Points from the Presentations and Discussion

Why Children Are Recruited

Children are vulnerable and easy targets for recruitment and offer a quick, easy, low-cost way of generating forces. Groups that otherwise would have no real military power can pose a significant threat by augmenting their ranks with child soldiers.

According to Ms. Becker of Human Rights Watch, rebel groups and some national militaries offer incentives to soldiers for bringing in new recruits, such as promotions, money or even early discharges from service, exacerbating the forced recruitment of children.

In many cases, children are expendable, can be replaced easily, and are used as decoys or cannon fodder so that the more seasoned fighting force can exploit their efforts.

Children's small size gives them certain advantages, for example, by allowing them to hide more easily when laying an ambush.

Ms. Becker also explained that on the battlefield, children more readily follow orders, are less inhibited, and are more vicious than their grown-up counterparts. They seemingly have no fear, acclimatize quickly, and often do not play by the rules.

How Children Are Recruited

Children frequently are recruited forcibly from schools, churches, and refugee camps. Ms. Becker commented that in Burma, children often are told to either join the army or go to jail. Once forced into service, they are sent to recruitment centers and training camps. Regardless of their age – whether they are seven or 14-years-old – the children receive the same training, which is peppered with frequent beatings. When they complete their rudimentary training, they are forced to fight. The former child soldier who spoke at the seminar, Mr. Beah, described the training:

“As most people know, usually it takes a year to train before you can go to the front to fight. With us it was a week. All you have to know is to point the gun away from you and know the commands to crawl and know when to attack in ambushes. That was it. After a week, we were on the front. There were kids eight and nine who drug their weapons all the way to the front.”

Not all children, however, are recruited by force. There are some who join of their own volition, though not necessarily because they had much of a choice. They often are driven to join the army or rebel group out of desperation – they may lack food or shelter, may be orphans, or may be politically indoctrinated. Once they become soldiers, some do not want to go home because as soldiers, they are well fed, clothed, housed, and become “hooked” on the power of being a soldier and belonging to something.

Mr. Beah was one such recruit. He described “a circle of revenge” which was used to manipulate children into joining the army or rebel groups. He explained that in his case,

after his family was killed, he ran for several days to avoid the fighting, ending up in a town controlled by the army. The soldiers provided him food, shelter, and protection. They explained how the rebels were committing murders and atrocities, and how the army was protecting the people. Over time, he saw more and more soldiers being killed by the rebels and felt compelled to join the army to help them out and survive. The rebels used the same tactics to convince children to join their ranks by blaming the army for all the problems.

As part of their training and conditioning, child soldiers are forced to kill much of what they know and love, from family and friends to teachers and students. Ms. Marton of the United Nations emphasized that they often are forced participate in attacks against their own villages after which they are told that they can never go home. Along the way, they lose their sense of self. They are kept “high” on drugs and alcohol, weakening their inhibitions and facilitating the entire indoctrination effort. They also are given amulets, which they are told will make them impervious to bullets. Mr. Beah explained, “You were always drugged and you pretty much fought constantly. And when you were not fighting, you were using drugs.”

Facilitators For The Recruitment Of Child Soldiers

Failed States. In countries with strong economies, democratic institutions, and tolerant societies, the army has an obligation to protect and serve the population and the government. However, several of the panelists commented that many of the countries and regions where children are soldiers have

suffered years of social strife and civil war. Their governments have collapsed, their economies are ruined, they are unable to enforce law and order or provide basic services, and they are beset by poverty, disease, and broken families. There are no rules of engagement in these situations. Often, the army or rebel groups are the only entities that can provide the children, many of whom are orphans, even the barest necessities for everyday life, such as food and shelter, and some sort of organized structure.

Mr. Beah described the situation in Sierra Leone:

“Civil wars are very tough things, even for a well-trained U.S. military. It’s very difficult because these guys, they have the most dangerous fighting tricks in the world you can imagine. In civil wars, especially in Sierra Leone where everything is sort of broken down, it is a very difficult war because there are no moral obligations, nothing is applicable that’s of a humanitarian concern because the wars get to a certain point where it is either kill or be killed. It becomes a war of survival instead of a war to free people.”

Advances In Technology. Among the greatest enablers that facilitate the use of child soldiers are advances in modern technologies. Light arms are indeed light, making it possible for young children to carry them. Furthermore, they are relatively easy to use and are extremely powerful. There is no extensive or complicated training necessary to teach children how to fire an AK-47. In some cases, children as young as eight and nine years old have been seen dragging their weapons to the front.

Small Arms Trade. Mr. Levine of UNICEF pointed out that another major problem is the uncontrolled flow of

arms into countries with ethnic tensions and civil war. The proliferation of inexpensive weapons on the black and open markets exacerbates social disparities and fuels discontent. This holds especially true in countries where the illegal mining of natural resources such as diamonds or timber allows combatants to sell those resources in exchange for money and arms.

Implications On The Battlefield

Increased Lethality. According to The Brookings Institution's Dr. Singer, children on the battlefield add confusion and ultimately drive up the death toll. He emphasized not

Do not underestimate child soldiers. They have years of experience, are battle-hardened, and have grown up fighting.

to underestimate child soldiers; in many cases, they have years of combat experience and are more battle hardened than their older adversaries. Professional military forces are reluctant to fire upon children, which gives the children a greater advantage, especially if they are trained to shoot first and accurately. As evidenced by the Royal Irish Regiment incident in Sierra Leone, adult, professional militaries initially tend to see child soldiers as they see children in their own cultures – harmless and innocent. They feel sorry for the children, and this presents the adults with difficult choices.

Major Gray, the Royal British Marine on the panel, explained that child soldiers have a disjointed way of fighting and an undeveloped understanding of morality:

“They don't in any way whatsoever conduct a maneuver approach to operations. They fight in a very disjointed way. The egocentric nature of children, the fact that when a child is a child, they don't have

the ability to think about other people. They have a simple one-step requirement that they fulfill. As you get older you understand about morality. They kind of fight like this. On a playground, they are harsh to each other, they fulfill their own needs all the time. You give them an AK-47 and it's a whole different story. You combine the fact that they are on drugs, you give them a weapon, and they behave as if they were on a playground, and it is terrifying.”

In addition, Mr. Beah described how children, being naturally small, can hide in places from which they can shoot and kill others without easily being detected.

Laws Of War. Mr. Beah explained that child soldiers do not respect the laws of war or follow any specific rules of engagement, emphasizing that children do not even know what these things are. Other panelists made the point that units containing child soldiers carry out a much higher number of human rights violations on and off the battlefield, making such conflicts much harder to resolve. Child soldiers normally do not take prisoners of war, and if they do, it is usually to kill them as a training or motivation example for new recruits. Also, their styles of fighting are different from that of conventionally trained soldiers, which often places child soldiers at a much greater risk in combat.

Child soldiers do not respect the laws of war or follow any specific rules of engagement.

According to Ms. Becker:

“Some of the same qualities that make children desirable soldiers pose particular threats to opposing soldiers in the field. With their immature judgment and often lack of experience, the behavior of child soldiers may not conform to what is normally ex-

pected of soldiers. They may be on drugs. They almost certainly don't know the rules of international humanitarian law.”

Demoralizing Effects. Battles that involve killing children often have a very demoralizing effect on professional combat forces from countries where children are protected and their rights are valued. Near the end of the Second World War, when U.S. forces were engaged in combat with units from the Hitler Youth, their morale was at its lowest when it should have been at its highest. If this level of loss of morale can occur in battles where right from wrong and dictatorship versus democracy is so clearly present, what level of demoralization can arise where good versus evil and right from wrong is much less clear? In Sri Lanka, for example, Indian troops fighting the insurgent group the Tamil Tigers (LTTE) experienced serious losses of morale because they frequently found themselves engaged in battles against children, particularly girls, who populated the ranks of the LTTE.

What Can Be Done – International Initiatives

Most participants agreed that the child soldier issue must be solved at the strategic level by the international community. However, until that happens, the military must be prepared to deal with it on a tactical level. Some of the international initiatives include:

United Nations. Both Ms. Marton and Ms. Becker discussed the *Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict* that would make it illegal to forcefully recruit children under the age of 18. Countries such as the U.S. and the United Kingdom that allow recruits to sign up for military

service at the age of 16 or 17 can still do so as long as there is parental consent and other measures are in place to assure that the signing up is voluntary. In addition, the *Optional Protocol* states that children under the age of 18 cannot be sent into combat. Ms. Marton also discussed UN Resolution 1379, which is an effort to identify the most egregious people and parties in violation of the proposed international protocol. This document will be presented to the General Assembly in Fall 2002 and hopefully will pave the way for concrete action.

International Criminal Court. Ms. Marton explained that the International Criminal Court (ICC), which was set up on July 1, 2002, would treat the forceful recruitment children under the age of 15 as a war crime. Since recruiting, training, and employing child soldiers under the age of 15 are considered crimes against humanity, child soldier demobilization must begin immediately even if the parties involved are still engaged in combat. A positive example, which may be a direct result of the creation of the ICC and other related efforts, is the South Sudanese Rebel Army, the SPLA. Although the SPLA is still fighting a civil war against the Government of Sudan, it has demobilized 4,500 child soldiers in an attempt to foster international goodwill.

International Sanctions And Embargoes. Another option discussed during the seminar calls for the international community to impose arms embargoes and trade sanctions against countries or groups with child soldiers in their militaries. However, as seen on numerous occasions, it is difficult to enforce sanctions, especially over a long period of time. This holds especially true for countries where neighboring states are actively supporting one or more of the groups engaged in combat.

What Can Be Done – Local Initiatives

Gaining Rebel Army Cooperation. Since rebel groups have not signed up to international law, they cannot be held legally accountable, as can governments. They also have no political accountability to worry about. Mr. Levine suggested that in order to stop the use of child soldiers, it might be more effective to work within the framework of traditional value systems and appeal to “a warrior’s sense of honor.” He made the point that in no society or culture are young children traditionally sent into wars to fight, and added that in traditional societies, only men are warriors, not boys and girls. There were several comments from the audience that countered this view and highlighted how in some societies, boys and young men are encouraged to prove their manhood by becoming soldiers.

Birth Records. Mr. Levine also suggested that in order to enforce international standards and sanctions, there needs to be a means with which to prove violations. Many times in countries where children are recruited forcefully, there are only poor records, if any at all, recording their births. This makes it very hard for any international agency to prove that the children in the army are indeed underage. Thus, there needs to be a way to register children at birth so that there is official proof of their ages.

What Can Be Done – Military Initiatives⁴

Military commanders must think strategically and consider non-traditional ways to best engage forces with child soldiers. These include:

Adult Leadership. Removing the adult leadership of child soldier units can be an effective tool. However, in many

cases the top leadership is not anywhere near the battlefield, and sometimes it is even out of the country. Nonetheless, dedicated efforts should be used to target the adult leadership whenever possible. The center of gravity is the hold leaders have over the children; the key is to break that link. If the adult leaders are captured or killed, the children often disappear.

The center of gravity is the hold the leaders have over the children; the key is to break that link.

Fighting at a Distance and Firing for its Shock Effect. In an attempt to break up the child units, planners should consider the option of holding the child soldier threat at a distance and firing for shock, at least initially. Demonstrative artillery fires and helicopter gunship passes and fires were effective in Sierra Leone to help shock and break up child soldier forces. The unpredictability of child soldiers may be an asset at times for the armies employing them, but it may also be a vulnerability if exploited properly.

Elimination of Recruitment Zones. In order to prevent rebel groups from continuing to fight by swelling their ranks with child soldiers, every attempt should be made to secure the most likely locations where child soldiers are recruited. This includes schools, refugee camps, churches, demobilization sites, etc. These locations should be viewed as strategic locales in this type of a war. Limiting access to these types of facilities may be an effective way of defeating the adversary indirectly.

Non-Lethal Weapons. U.S. military commanders and policy-makers should explore options for using non-lethal weapons in situations that involve child soldiers. Non-lethal weapons may be more effective and humane for dealing with child soldiers than other, more traditional, lethal means. Their use may also help solidify political and public support for ongoing

operations and long-term efforts. Much work already has been done in the area of non-lethal technologies both by the research and development community and the policy community. The issue of limiting child soldier casualties may lend itself well to arguments that recommend their expanded use.

Psychological Operations. Psychological operations (PSYOP) should be integrated with other efforts to convince child soldiers to stop fighting, leave their units, and begin the process of rehabilitation and reintegration back into society. PSYOP can be an effective tool in saving the lives of child soldiers and U.S. forces.

Public Affairs. Public affairs implications of killing child soldiers, even in self-defense, can become a real problem. Dr. Singer suggested that it is best to sensitize the public ahead of time to the potential deaths of child soldiers. The public should be informed that everything possible is being done (use of non-lethal weapons, psychological operations, firing for shock effect, etc.) to avoid and limit child soldiers from becoming casualties. At the same time, the public should be made aware that child soldiers, although they are children, are just as lethal behind an AK-47 as adults, and often are more ruthless. Additionally, the public should be made aware that because child soldiers are such formidable adversaries, lethal force might be the only option available. Finally, every effort should be made to turn the blame onto those who recruited, abducted, trained, led, and forced the children to fight.

Prisoners and Escapees. U.S. forces should welcome child soldier prisoners and escapees, as this could promote more desertions. Many times, children who are recruited forcefully look for ways out of their predicaments. This holds especially true for new recruits. If it becomes known that children who managed to escape were treated well and given the hope at a

better future, this may entice more child soldiers to abandon the ranks of rebel and government forces alike. Indeed, this should be a major goal of any PSYOP campaign.

Intelligence. Intelligence collection and assessment should consider fully the threats posed by child soldiers. Efforts should be made to understand everything possible about the child soldiers that U.S. forces may face, such as how they were recruited and trained, how they are organized, how they fight, their amount of combat experience, who the leaders are, and where they are located.

It is important for the planning of any future operations that involve child soldiers to understand the type of threats child soldiers can pose. For example, it may be necessary to protect against possible attacks from child soldiers posing as innocent children who are attempting to cross into controlled or secured areas while armed with grenades or other weapons hidden on them. Good intelligence on this issue can help protect U.S. forces from an adversary that looks benign.

Demobilization. Both Dr. Singer and Mr. Levine recommended that U.S. forces assist in demobilization and be very attuned to security aspects concerning this effort. It may be necessary to protect child soldiers, once demobilized, from the local population who may wish to seek revenge for the atrocities they suffered at the hands of the child soldiers. It also is important to protect demobilization centers from being overrun by rebel groups and armies seeking child soldier augmentees, who already are trained and experienced, to serve as soldiers within their ranks.

Communicate Agreements. Mr. Levine suggested that U.S. forces take the message about signed agreements directly to front line troops. In many countries, detailed informa-

tion concerning the agreement and subsequent steps to be taken is not passed down the chain of command in a timely fashion; often what is passed down is a very different agreement. This is a task toward which public affairs efforts and sometimes PSYOP should be directed.

Leaders must prepare the forces for the kind of environment they will face before they deploy.

Post-Conflict Treatment. Major Gray explained that upon returning home from operations in which U.S. forces encounter child soldiers, they may experience a period of post-traumatic stress disorder. Leaders must prepare the forces for the kind of environment they will face before

Suggested Guidelines When Engaging
Child Soldiers⁵

- ◆ Intelligence: Be attuned to the specific make-up of the opposition force
- ◆ Force Protection: All children are not threats but may require the same scrutiny as adults
- ◆ Engagement: Operate with awareness of the situation's dynamics
 - Fire for its shock effect when possible
 - Shape the opposition by creating avenues for escape
 - Leader's control is the center of gravity, so target adult targets first if possible
- ◆ Aftermath: Units may require special post-conflict treatment (akin to what police receive after shooting incidents)
- ◆ Break the cycle: Deployed units should support rehabilitation efforts

they deploy. They also must encourage their forces to discuss and better understand what they were exposed to upon redeployment. Similar efforts will be needed with the family members of returning service members.

More Challenges

Reintegration. Mr. Levine described how difficult it is to reintegrate child soldiers into society because of all the violence to which they have been exposed and the fact that many children only know how to kill. He stressed that there is a bigger likelihood of success in rehabilitation if the child can be rescued before he or she has been a soldier for more than a year. After a year or more of fighting as a soldier, it becomes much more difficult to reintegrate children back into society. Obviously, cases vary according to the individual child. After disarmament, there is no set time frame in which children recover, although the psychosocial demobilization process usually takes many months. Some children recover within as few as eight months, but most take much longer.

Mr. Levine made the point that it is important not to put a specific time frame on this process, emphasizing that it only takes a few weeks to turn a child into a soldier, but many months to turn him or her back into a child. During the demobilization and rehabilitation process, the entire moral universe of the child has to be reversed 180 degrees; this is a huge undertaking. He also stated that it is important to work with the families in addition to the children.

HIV/AIDS. Many of the conflict countries with child soldiers are afflicted by high rates of HIV/AIDS. The atrocities of war, breakdown of civil society, displacement, family separation, rape, and other sexual violence have helped spread

HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases. Girls who are abducted or “recruited” often succumb to these diseases through multiple partners and bear children who also are infected, further perpetuating the global AIDS epidemic. Those who are infected also may have a “nothing-to-lose” attitude that encourages them to infect others and commit violent acts.

Recommendations on Future Efforts

Doctrine. Doctrine should describe the Child Soldier Phenomenon as it exists around the world and highlight the probability that Marines will encounter child soldiers during future operations. More importantly, it should address ways to deal with child soldiers, such as those listed above.

Training. The topic of child soldiers should be included in training for officers and non-commissioned officers, especially those in the training base, but also during professional development training. This training should familiarize Marines with the issue as it exists; examine countries, regions, and conflicts where Marines may encounter child soldiers; identify tactics, techniques, and procedures that will best help them deal with child soldiers; inform Marines of relevant international law, including obligations under international laws; and prepare them for the dilemmas they will face both on the battlefield and afterwards.

The topic of child soldiers should be included in training for officers and non-commissioned officers.

For units that are in training and preparing to deploy to a specific country or region where they may encounter child soldiers, exercise scenarios should include situations involving child soldiers to ensure Marines are aware of the issue prior to deployment. These units also should receive Cultural Intelligence Seminars on this issue with experts such as those who participated in this seminar. Additionally, they should be given points of contact for UNICEF or NGO-run demobilization and/or rehabilitation programs within these countries. This will facilitate coordination with these organizations and devel-

opment of procedures to follow in instances where child soldiers are apprehended, to insure that they are promptly delivered to appropriate demobilization and rehabilitation programs.

Child soldier related issues should be inserted into wargame scenarios to help leaders and decision-makers determine how best to respond to the challenges child soldiers will pose to Marines.

Finally, in situations where the Marine Corps is involved in conducting foreign military training for other nations, the issue of child soldiers should be included in such training, including for example, relevant international law and the importance of proper recruitment procedures and verifying proof of age to ensure that children are not enlisted.

ENDNOTES

¹ P.W. Singer, "Caution: Children At War," *Parameters*, Vol. XXXI, No. 4, Winter 2001-2002, pp. 40-56, <http://carlisle-www.army.mil/usawc/Parameters/01winter/singer.htm>.

² Map courtesy of Dr. Peter Singer.

³ Chart courtesy of Dr. Peter Singer.

⁴ Many of the ideas and suggestions in this section were raised during Dr. Singer's presentation and discussed with the other panelists and the audience.

⁵ Chart courtesy of Dr. Peter Singer.

Appendix A

Biographies

Kati Marton

Ms. Kati Marton was the Chief Advocate in the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary General For Children and Armed Conflict at the U.N. She is an author and journalist, is a director of the Committee to Protect Journalists, is a member of the Freedom Forum's Media Studies Center Advisory Committee, serves on the board of directors of the International Rescue Committee and the Human Rights Watch, and is a member of the Council on Foreign Relations. She has a bachelor's degree in romance languages and a master's degree in international relations from the George Washington University.

Ishmael Beah

Mr. Ishmael Beah was a former child soldier in Sierra Leone. He is currently in his junior year at a university in the U.S.

Iain Levine

Mr. Iain Levine is the Chief of Humanitarian Policy and Advocacy in the Office of Emergency Programmes for UNICEF. He has worked on humanitarian and human rights issues for nearly 20 years. He spent over ten years in Africa working in a variety of health and humanitarian programs. His interest in the protection of children's rights led him to Amnesty International where he served as the United Nations Representative from 1997-2000.

Jo Becker

Ms. Jo Becker is the Children's Rights Advocacy Director for Human Rights Watch. She represents Human Rights Watch and works with other non-governmental and international organizations to stop abuses against children. She has an International Baccalaureate from the Lester B. Pearson United World College of the Pacific, a bachelor's degree from Goshen College (Ind.), and a master's degree in political science from the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs at Syracuse University.

Peter Singer

Dr. Peter Warren Singer is the John M. Olin Post-Doctoral Fellow in the Foreign Policy Studies Program at The Brookings Institution. His research is on new actors in warfare, including transnational groups, child soldiers, and the privatized military industry. He received his doctorate in security studies from Harvard University and served in the Office of the Secretary of Defense, Balkans Task Force.

Major Jim Gray

Major Jim Gray is the Royal Marine Staff Officer on the British Naval Staff at the British Embassy in Washington. He is responsible for the conduct and administration of Royal Marine matters in the U.S. and is the liaison officer with the USMC. He studied for a bachelor's degree with the Royal Navy and is a graduate in Maritime Defence, Strategic Studies and Military Technology. During early 1999 he deployed to Sierra Leone with the UN. What followed was a series of life changing encounters and experiences in one of the most savage and brutal parts of the world.

Acknowledgments

CETO would like to thank all six of the panelists for taking the time from their schedules to participate in the seminar. Not only did they inform and educate the audience about the Child Soldier Phenomenon, but they shared their personal experiences and professional insights which greatly helped the audience understand the overall dynamics and challenges of the problem, particularly as it impacts the U.S. military.



Iain Levine, UNICEF



Kati Marton, UN

Dr. Peter Singer from the Brookings Institution was the impetus for the seminar; it was his interview on National Public Radio in April 2002 that first brought the Child Soldier Phenomenon to the forefront as an emerging threat and opportunity for the Marine Corps to examine.

Ms. Kati Marton was particularly helpful in providing the motivation and support from her United Nations office to conduct the seminar and in helping to find other panelists.

Mr. Iain Levine from UNICEF and Ms. Jo Becker from Human Rights Watch provided well-rounded, comprehensive analyses of the problem based on their years of dedicated work in countries around the world.

CETO greatly appreciated the candor and courage of both Mr. Ishmael Beah and Major Jim Gray for sharing their very moving and critically important personal experiences about what they lived and saw first-hand.

Finally, CETO would like to thank Brigadier General William Catto for his support and leadership within the Marine Corps on this important issue.



Ishmael Beah,
former child soldier

Child Soldiers: Implications for U.S. Forces

“Kids on every continent are being taught to use AK-47s, which are light enough to be carried and maintained by eight-year-olds. They are forced to mutilate and murder their friends and relatives to prove their loyalty to their new “parent” figures... These new “parents” will often give their kids drugs or amulets that, the children are told, will make them impervious to bullets. These children are thus among the world’s most fearless and brutal fighters.”

- Kati Marton, United Nations

“The question is how can the U.S. train its military to know whether or not to kill child soldiers. It’s very difficult to be put in a position where there is a kid who is 14, or even nine, who has a gun pointed at you. You know he is going to shoot it because he has been brainwashed so much — he has been so traumatized — there is nothing that is going to stop him from not shooting at you.”

- Ishmael Beah, former child soldier

“We see the recruitment of children, the abuse and misuse of children in conflict, as a robbing of childhood. We need to prevent recruitment where we can, and get kids out of the militaries in instances where we could not prevent them from being recruited.”

- Iain Levine , UNICEF

“There may be no moral excuse, but the dark reality is that this terrible practice continues. It is only by understanding the causes and dynamics of this appalling phenomenon that we can develop appropriate responses to them.”

- Dr. Peter Singer , The Brookings Institution

“A big challenge for militaries is what to do when they face child soldiers on the battlefield. A bigger challenge for all of us is to ensure that children are not recruited in the first place.”

- Jo Becker, Human Rights Watch

“On a playground, children are harsh to each other, and they fulfill their own needs all the time. You give them an AK-47 and it’s a whole different story. You combine the fact that they are on drugs, they behave as if they are on a playground and it’s terrifying.”

- Major Jim Gray , Royal British Marines