

Child Soldiers—An Integral Element in New, Irregular Wars?

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Child Soldiers Today ¹

At present, 300,000 child soldiers are involved in armed conflicts around the world, and their numbers are growing. They are employed in more than thirty countries, most often in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. But they are also brought into action in Europe (in the Balkans) and in the successor states of the former Soviet Union (e.g., in Chechnya).

At the same time, unknown numbers of children participate in military training or are called upon for tasks like guard and patrol duty, as laborers or kitchen helpers, or are abused as “sex slaves” and human minesweepers. It is indeed true that in some Western European countries it is possible for adolescents under the age of eighteen to join their countries’ armies; these young recruits can therefore be formally called “child soldiers.” The phenomenon that I wish to call attention to, however, is an entirely different one: it is the systematic and mostly violent utilization of children and adolescents as a cheap and flexible recruiting pool for so-called “small wars” and irregular armed conflicts. These wars are typically being fought as irregular conflicts with massive participation of civilians. Their aims are often the persecution, expulsion, and even extermination of particular ethnic groups within the population. These kinds of conflicts have considerably increased in number since the end of the Cold War.

Why are so many children and adolescents involved in these conflicts? Why is their number still increasing? What is the rationale behind the employment of child soldiers? Moreover, how can this phenomenon be evaluated in the light of peacekeeping and peace enforcement missions, and how are the troops that are to be deployed to such combat zones to deal with it? This essay aims to provide a brief overview of the current situation. To classify the phenomenon, I will first explore some key elements of the settings in which the use of child soldiers is organized today; these elements can be attributed to the changing patterns of warfare as well as the predominant forms of weapons proliferation. Secondly, I will give an outline of the legal and social conditions of child soldiers. And third, a final estimation aims to offer a political consideration of the phenomenon, as well as to shed some light on the involvement of multinational peacekeeping forces in conflict regions.

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¹ For a more comprehensive discussion of this issue, please see my chapter on child soldiers, which will be published in *Soziale Arbeit und kriegerische Konflikte*, ed. R. Seifert (Forthcoming in 2004).

Changing Patterns of Warfare

From a historical perspective, the active participation of children in armed conflicts is not a new phenomenon. In medieval times, starting from the age of fourteen, boys could become squires, who assisted the knights by, for example, conducting night watches and cleaning weapons. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, boys called “powder monkeys”— who frequently were not older than eight—were assigned the dangerous job of reloading cannons on ships; on land, boys had to relay messages between infantry regiments on the battlefield.² At the end of World War II, the Nazi regime pressed fourteen- to fifteen-year-old children into duty in the *Volkssturm* regiments.³ In the past as well as today, the deployment of child soldiers was considered when small body size and fleet-footed maneuverability were seen as advantages, or when children could be obligated to perform personal services. However, the dramatic increase in the numbers of child soldiers has only been observed since the end of World War II; this must be viewed in connection with changing patterns of warfare.

Since 1945, and accelerating in particular after the end of the Cold War, new forms of collective violence have emerged which have been characterized as “small wars,”⁴ “low intensity conflict,”⁵ “asymmetric conflict,”⁶ or “new wars.”⁷ What all these terms have in common is the fact that they describe a kind of war that differs systematically from the traditional model of war between sovereign nations, or an “inter-state war.”⁸ In 2001, AKUF, a German watch group focused on contemporary war and conflict, stated that on the basis of all ongoing wars and conflicts, they considered that only 6 percent still belonged to the category of “inter-state wars,” whereas 46 percent were in the category of “anti-regime war,” 42 percent were called “autonomy and secession wars,” and the remaining 6 percent were combined forms of internal wars.⁹ These forms of war are not confined to a limited world region or continent, but can be witnessed in regions as diverse as Bosnia-Herzegovina, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Chechnya, Kurdistan, El Salvador, and Colombia.

² Rachel Brett and Margaret McCallin, *Kinder – die unsichtbaren Soldaten. Research Project on behalf of ‘Save the Children Sweden.’* (Geneva: Office of the Quaker at the United Nations; German edition, from Books on Demand GmbH. O. Ort., 2001).

³ Margrit Schmid and Alice Schmid, *I killed people. Wenn Kinder in den Krieg ziehen* (Göttingen: Lamuv Verlag, 2001).

⁴ Christopher Daase, *Kleine Kriege – Große Wirkung. Wie unkonventionelle Kriegführung die internationale Politik verändert* (Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlag, 1999).

⁵ Martin van Creveld, *The Transformation of War* (New York: The Free Press, 1991).

⁶ Herfried Münkler, *Die neuen Kriege* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 2002).

⁷ Mary Kaldor, *Neue und alte Kriege. Organisierte Gewalt im Zeitalter der Globalisierung* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 2002; originally published in English as *New and Old Wars. Organized Violence in a Global Era*).

⁸ For an overview of the traditional concept of interstate war, see: van Creveld, Martin: *The Rise and Fall of the State*. Cambridge, 1999.

⁹ AKUF, “Das Kriegsgeschehen 2001 im Überblick” (2001), available online at: www.sozialwiss.uni-hamburg.de/publish/lpw/Akuf/kriege_aktuell.htm.

Wars in countries like these have been marked by a new dynamics of organized violence, the involvement of a variety of non-state-actors as warriors, and complex internal and external factors that led to these wars.¹⁰ It is, however, no coincidence that these wars mainly take place in developing countries, since the ultimate reasons behind the violence are often found in structural poverty as well as economic and social inequalities.¹¹ Furthermore, the breakdown and ultimate “evaporation” of the Soviet Union caused not only a power vacuum but also a highly explosive “identity vacuum,” which had to be filled by something other than nation-state-affiliated belief systems. This process of the rearrangement of collective identities sometimes led to violent forms of conflict resolution along ethnic lines, especially in the post-communist states. Finally, it has been argued that economic and cultural globalization, when they are experienced as a process of collective exclusion, can tend to result in organized violence.¹²

A central feature of these new irregular wars is the asymmetric structure of conflict because, in these cases, the regular armies, as well as the paramilitary and law enforcement forces of a state, are typically confronted with sub- or transnational actors. Because of their hopeless conventional military inferiority, these sub-national actors cannot pursue a direct confrontation with the regulars. Instead, these weak actors use a variety of techniques, such as hit-and-run actions borrowed from guerilla warfare. Unclear front lines and the occurrence of terrorist acts and insurgencies also typify this model of warfare. Combatants of the non-state actor are likely to draw back into extra-territorial sanctuaries to regroup and reconstitute their forces,¹³ this is why these kinds of armed conflicts can linger for a very long time. An empirical analysis of the wars that occurred in the last two hundred years found that the number of conflicts that pitted weak actors against strong actors has significantly increased in the period between 1800 and 1998, from 11.8 percent to 55 percent!¹⁴ These non-state groups are composed of “hybrid” mixtures of fighters, such as paramilitary groups, local militiamen, self-defense-units, and mercenaries.¹⁵ An additional distinguishing mark seems to be that these fighters do not have a clear status as combatants, as was the rule in traditional warfare.¹⁶ A central figure in these wars is the so-called warlord—a war entrepreneur who combines economic, political, and military calculations in one person. His ultimate goal is to make sure that the use of violence will pay off financially

¹⁰ For an overview, see Sabine Collmer, “New War? Vom Staatenkrieg zu den irregulären Kriegen des 21. Jahrhunderts,” in *Krieg, Konflikt und Gesellschaft. Aktuelle interdisziplinäre Perspektiven*, ed. Sabine Collmer (Hamburg: Kovac Verlag, 2003).

¹¹ See Brett and McCallin, *Kinder – die unsichtbaren Soldaten*.

¹² Kaldor, *Neue und Alte Kriege*.

¹³ For a comprehensive overview of the implications of this kind of war fighting, see: Daase, Christopher, 1999.

¹⁴ Ivan Arreguín-Toft, “How the Weak Win Wars: A Theory of Asymmetric Conflict,” *International Security* 26:1 (Summer 2001): 93–128.

¹⁵ Kaldor, *Neue und Alte Kriege*.

¹⁶ Münkler, *Die neuen Kriege*.

for him. He succeeds in doing so by taking measures like recruiting cheap fighters, using primarily small arms, as well as trading and trafficking in illegal goods, such as drugs, weapons, and humans.¹⁷ What we see here is that, from a financial perspective, the specific economics of these new wars tends to create a demand for cheap fighters and thus offers one underlying reason for the demand for growing numbers of child soldiers on the battlefields of the world.

But there are further reasons. The specific pattern of violence in war regions causes civilians to be forced into constant participation in defending their lives, and thus in warfare. Often they thereby become the victims of violent encroachments by the belligerent parties, for example in acts of ethnic cleansing. Acts of brutality against civilians are endemic in these wars. Furthermore, it has been widely argued that asymmetric conflict structures bear a specific risk of tumbling into a normative vacuum where international law does not apply.¹⁸ Because of the fact that the fighters cannot easily be distinguished from non-combatants, the entire civilian population in the conflict region comes under suspicion of being the “enemy.” In this way, massacres of civilians carried out by regulars may be vindicated with reference to the hidden, omnipresent enemy. Thus a conspicuous element in irregular wars is the occurrence of extreme cruelty and massive violations of human rights, a “predacious behavior among humans,”¹⁹ which corresponds with the prevailing violent social relations. Here we find an additional motive for the increasing use of child soldiers—ironically, in a society where warlike violence is used on a daily basis, becoming a child soldier can be a rational choice for a young individual because of the protection a group of fighters can offer.²⁰

Weapons Proliferation

The specific forms of weapons proliferation need to be discussed explicitly in the context of the question of child soldiers. One further explanation of why children in today’s conflict zones are not only victimized, but are also seen more and more as participants, lies in the fact that these conflicts are rarely characterized by the use of large-scale military weaponry. Instead, the opponents mostly use small arms. “Small arms are the weapons of mass destruction of the new wars and thus one of the most pressing security problems,” said German politician Antje Vollmer in a keynote speech at the opening of an exposition against small arms organized by UNICEF in 2003.²¹

¹⁷ Münkler, *Die neuen Kriege*, 161.

¹⁸ See Daase, *Kleine Kriege*.

¹⁹ Kaldor, *Neue und alte Kriege*, 169.

²⁰ This is especially the case with children who have lost their parents and other relatives during the war, who are left unguarded and displaced and who have nobody to help them survive.

²¹ Alexander Dorner, “Ein Leben lang traumatisiert. Ausstellung gegen Kleinwaffen,” from the online version of *Das Parlament* (1 August 2003), available online at: www.bundestag.de/cgi-bin/druck.pl?N=parlament.

The term small arms refers not only to the well-known Kalashnikov rifle, but also includes a wide range of weapons ranging from simple handguns to armor-piercing bazookas.²² Typically, these arms do not require substantial logistical arrangements or massive mending cycles, and they can be brought into the intended area of their final destination practically unnoticed. They are lightweight, robust, and can be used without comprehensive training. These are the qualities that make the use of these weapons by children possible. In contrast to high-tech weapons, they are also cheap to procure, a fact that has become even more the case since the global market became swamped with these weapons after the end of the Cold War. Only small numbers of these weapons are newly produced today; larger amounts are sold second-hand and are circulated through the conflict regions of the world. Observers reported, for example, that weapons stemming from the Lebanese civil war had been transferred to Croatia.²³ As these forms of arms trafficking are illegal, they depend mostly on the networks of international organized crime. In destination countries, corruption and cronyism among civil servants often runs in parallel with state disintegration.²⁴ Thus the very officials who were originally charged with exercising control over the import of weapons fail to do so, and in fact profit from it; such acts of corruption become “an endemic self-perpetuating process, that accelerates the disintegration of the state, especially in Africa,” according to Peter Lock, a developmental expert for UNICEF.²⁵ Thus these irregular wars and new forms of weapons proliferation can contribute directly to the diminishing capability of states to exercise their monopoly on power, which finally can lead to a complete breakdown of civil society and thus give way to failed states.

Child Soldiers: Legal Aspects and Latest Developments

A range of international humanitarian laws and regulations regulates the legal status of child soldiers. These are, firstly, the GC-API, or Protocol (I), Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and Relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflict; and GC-APII, or Protocol (II), Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and Relating to the Protection of Victims of Non-International Armed Conflict. Both were adopted in June 1977. Since that time, under international law, children under the age of fifteen are not allowed to take part in hostilities.

Since the 1980s, intensified diplomatic efforts have been undertaken to raise this minimum age to eighteen. As governments often deny that an armed conflict is happening in their country, many countries have easily undermined international law in the

²² Peter Lock, “Vom Wandel bewaffneter Konflikte. Kinder und Gewehre” (2004), 5; available online at: <http://www.tdh.de/?page=Themen/Kindersoldaten>

²³ Lock, “Vom Wandel,” 9.

²⁴ Georg Sorensen, “A State is not a State: Types of Statehood and Patterns of Conflict after the Cold War,” in *International Security Management and the United Nations*, eds. Muthiah Alagappa and Takashi Inoguchi (New York: United Nations University Press, 1999), 24–42.

²⁵ Lock, “Vom Wandel,” 11.

past.²⁶ Therefore, in 1989, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child was adopted. This Convention, which is almost universally ratified today, does not permit a narrow definition of an “armed conflict.” It defines a child as “every human being below the age of eighteen years unless, under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier” (Article 1). However it set the lower age of fifteen in relation to military recruitment and participation in armed conflict, while calling on states that recruit soldiers under the age of eighteen to give priority to the eldest (Article 38).²⁷ As this Convention places only soft pressure on governments to end the employment of children in armed conflicts, further attempts were undertaken in the 1990s to ban the use of child soldiers globally. These efforts gained momentum when in 1995 the UN Secretary-General, together with a diverse array of other governmental and non-governmental institutions, called for “the prohibition of all forms of military recruitment and participation of children under the age of 18 years,” which became known as the “Straight-18” position.²⁸ In 2000, the *ILO 182*, or International Labor Organization Convention 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labor, came into force. Herein, the ratifying countries agreed to take “immediate and efficient measures to ban the worst forms of child labor.” The Convention includes in this definition not only slavery and practices similar to slavery, such as the sale of and trafficking in children, debt bondage, and indentured servitude, but also “forced and compulsory recruitment of children for use in armed conflict.”²⁹

Since 1998, an NGO called the “Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers”³⁰ has been undertaking joint efforts to help the “Straight-18” position achieve an international break-through. After years of negotiations, their lobbying work finally led to a success when the United Nations General Assembly adopted by consensus the “Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child” in May 2000. In 2002, the document was ratified, after ten states had signed the treaty.

This UN document not only represents the latest, but also the most comprehensive international law on child soldiers, and addresses most of the weaknesses of earlier legislative initiatives.³¹ Here, for the first time, the signatory nations agreed to raise the minimum recruitment and participation age from fifteen to eighteen. While the minimum age for participation in hostilities was raised to eighteen, states still may accept volunteers from the age of sixteen;³² however, they must maintain safeguards to ensure

²⁶ Brett and McCallin, *Kinder – die unsichtbaren Soldaten*.

²⁷ *Global Report on Child Soldiers*, ed. The Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers (London, 2001), 39.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Brett and McCallin, *Kinder – die unsichtbaren Soldaten*, 165.

³⁰ Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, International Federation Terre des Hommes, International Save the Children Alliance, Jesuit Refugee Service, and the Quaker United Nations Office Geneva founded the Coalition in 1998.

³¹ As of March 2004, the status of ratification of the Optional Protocol was that 115 signatories and 70 ratifying parties had been gathered (see www.Childsoldiers.org).

³² *Global Report*, 422.

that the recruitment is genuinely voluntary (for example, a legal guardian has to consent to the voluntary engagement of the recruit.)

The Social Situation of Child Soldiers

The existence of child soldiers has been reported in more than thirty-six countries, including countries like Colombia, Mexico, Peru, Turkey, India, Lebanon, Israel, and the former Yugoslavia. In practice, one can find them everywhere where armed conflicts are fought and opposition (or guerilla) groups are involved. There are by no means only male children employed; in many regions, female child soldiers are also directly involved in combat. Reports of female units come from Ethiopia, Uganda, Chechnya, Liberia, and Burma/Myanmar. Even in Kurdistan, or within the Tamil ethnic group in Sri Lanka—areas where women traditionally play a subordinate role in the wider society—girl fighters are called upon to undertake combat missions.³³

A case study on the current situation of child soldiers in twenty-six different countries concludes that the key factor to comprehending this entire phenomenon of child soldiers is understanding the way children are recruited. The longer the duration of the armed conflict, the more likely it is that children will be employed as soldiers, and the higher the number of children who will be killed. Besides voluntary recruitment, compulsory recruitment is very common.³⁴ In these cases, coercive measures to compel recruitment play the most prominent role:

The army or group assaults the village or the small town, kills the inhabitants, carries off children, plunders and sets the houses on fire. At night, children are abducted from their houses or at daytime from school or from fieldwork. In nearly all country examples, there were reports, that the abduction was accompanied by violence, threats or intimidations towards the children.³⁵

Sometimes, children are supplied with drugs and alcohol to make them obedient.³⁶

The treatment of child soldiers does not take into consideration the fact that they are physically, mentally, and emotionally less capable than adults; on the contrary, a multitude of reports cites incidents of harsh training, severe punishment, and brutal or even sadistic treatment, as well of routine liquidations of those children who cannot equal their fellow combatants or who try to desert.³⁷ Drill, malnutrition, and unhealthy environments are especially hard for children to bear because they are less capable of caring for themselves and defending their rights. Therefore, they are more commonly malnourished than adult soldiers, and run a higher risk of illnesses that stem from un-

³³ Brett and McCallin, *Kinder – die unsichtbaren Soldaten*, 76.

³⁴ This typically happens when children have lost their relatives in the course of an armed conflict. This way, children are recruited from second countries, among refugee communities, or ethnic diasporic groups, and trafficked across borders; *Global Report*, 22.

³⁵ Brett and McCallin, *Kinder – die unsichtbaren Soldaten*, 45.

³⁶ Schmid and Schmid, *I Killed People*.

³⁷ Brett and McCallin, *Kinder – die unsichtbaren Soldaten*, 84.

sound conditions. Girls are particularly subject to harassment and abuse. Thus, unwanted pregnancies are common, and HIV/AIDS-infections are widespread.³⁸

There is a broad range of tasks fulfilled by child soldiers: assistance in cooking and housing, as servants or for sexual services, as well as serving as porters or as fighters on combat missions. Furthermore, they are commonly used for reconnaissance and infiltration as well as for laying mines and clearing minefields. The reason why children are used for reconnaissance and setting up ambushes is obviously because they are not typically perceived as a threat: “They are simply less conspicuous than adults. Because of their short height, they can hide more easily and they appear to be innocent.”³⁹ In some regions where the use of child soldiers is endemic, government soldiers have begun to deliberately target children for murder in order to “exterminate” the potential enemy. The blurring of traditional boundaries between combatants and non-combatants therefore works as a decisive disadvantage for all children in combat zones because, in the eyes of regular troops, every child becomes a potential aggressor.⁴⁰

If children are employed in combat, they face a high risk of being wounded or crippled because they are inexperienced and insufficiently trained. Their immaturity is taken advantage of; children are seen to be “cheap, expendable, and easier to condition into fearless killing and unthinking obedience.”⁴¹ In addition, “children are good fighters, because they are young and want to show off. They believe that it’s all some sort of game; this is why they are so fearless,” said one commander of an armed group in the Democratic Republic of Congo.⁴² The medical care provided for fighters in combat zones is seldom sufficient; injured child soldiers sometimes are brought to the outskirts of towns, where civilians are supposed to pick them up and care for them.⁴³ Besides the physical wounds, child soldiers suffer mentally. Psychological studies on child soldiers have come to the conclusion that those who ultimately survive combat are without ex-

³⁸ *Child Soldiers Newsletter* 10 (February 2004); available online at: www.child-soldiers.org/cs/child-soldiers.nsf.

³⁹ Case study from Burma/Myanmar, quoted in Brett and McCallin, *Kinder—die unsichtbaren Soldaten*, 90.

⁴⁰ Information stemming from Colombia confirms these assessments: In August 2000, an army unit near Pueblo Rico, Antioquia, mistook a party of school children for a guerilla unit and opened fire, killing six children between the ages of six and ten and wounding six others; *Global Report*, 27.

⁴¹ *Global Report*, 22.

⁴² “Kindersoldaten: Ein Überblick” (2004); available online at: www.oneworldweb.de/tdh/themen/ks_bericht.html.

⁴³ Brett and McCallin, *Kinder – die unsichtbaren Soldaten*.

ception traumatized; they suffer tremendous psychological and emotional stress during war.⁴⁴

Political Evaluation and the Case of Peacekeeping Soldiers

On the one hand, children are clearly victimized by war and armed conflict. On the other hand, they not infrequently actually participate in ruthless and excessive violence and sadistic acts and therefore take on the role of actors in war, contributing to unimaginable suffering. A fourteen-year-old girl who was abducted by the rebel movement RUF in Sierra Leone remembered her ordeal: "I've seen people get their hands cut off, a ten-year-old girl raped and then die, and so many men and women burned alive." A report from Algeria cites boys who appeared to be around the age of twelve decapitating a fifteen-year-old girl and then playing "catch" with her head.⁴⁵ There is an endless stream of similar reports of atrocities committed by child soldiers in war zones all over the world.⁴⁶

Obviously, children often lack sufficient ability to constructively reflect upon what they are doing in war zones; children and adolescents who serve as soldiers generally have underdeveloped moral socialization and are often misused to evoke horror among the population. As one case study of the conflict in Liberia states, "In some cases the boys—and especially the illiterate among them—believed that by being a member of an armed underground group they could achieve prestige, power, and respect, incomparable to what children can obtain otherwise ... many of them got drunk on power and abused it."⁴⁷ The political journalist Peter Scholl-Latour writes of child soldiers as "the most horrible plague of Africa." He became an eyewitness of the situation in Sierra Leone, where in the capital Freetown an estimated 8000 people had been arbitrarily mutilated by the so-called West Side Boys, a notorious gang of child soldiers, who during drug use enjoyed playing a sort of lottery game, in which they determined which part of their victims' bodies they would cut off next.⁴⁸ The lack of any personal morality, as well as the absence of any kind of societal corrective in war-stricken societies, leads to the fact that these brutalized children can use violence virtually without re-

⁴⁴ The story of a young woman in Liberia, who had been forced to fight from the age of twelve to nineteen, underscores these findings: "I hardly sleep. Because I think too much and worry too much. Why did I have to do this? Although it wasn't my concern. Really, I hardly find sleep, I feel tortured day and night." (Josephine, 21, quoted in Schmid and Schmid, *I Killed People*, 118).

⁴⁵ *Global Report*, 27.

⁴⁶ See, for instance, Michael Ignatieff, *The Warrior's Honor. Ethnic War and the Modern Conscience* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1997); Peter Scholl-Latour, *Afrikanische Totenklinge. Der Ausverkauf des Schwarzen Kontinents* (Munich: Bertelsmann Verlag, 2001); Erhard Eppler, *Vom Gewaltmonopol zum Gewaltmarkt? Die Privatisierung und Kommerzialisierung der Gewalt* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 2002).

⁴⁷ Brett and McCallin, *Kinder – die unsichtbaren Soldaten*, 53.

⁴⁸ Scholl-Latour, *Afrikanische Totenklinge*, 425.

straint, especially against those who are defenseless. This “makes them the most feared participants of the new wars.”⁴⁹

These formations of juvenile soldiers obviously represent an almost ideal arena for teenagers to act out macho and “Rambo-like” attitudes; these teenagers try to compensate for their built-up reserves of hatred and sexual frustration in a kind of “Kalashnikov culture.”⁵⁰ As a multitude of reports from war zones prove, these feelings of omnipotence can also lead to mass rape and brutal mutilations of victims. An eyewitness report from former Yugoslavia underscores these estimations:

These adolescents supply armies with a different type of soldier—a type, for whom his weapon is not something to respect and to be dealt with through ritualized correctness, but something which has an explicit phallic signification. To cross a check point in Bosnia, where teenagers with dark sunglasses and tight camouflage outfits are swinging AK-47 rifles, means to enter a zone of toxic testosterone. War always had a sexual dimension—to wear a uniform does not guarantee flawless behavior—but when war is conducted by adolescent irregulars, then sexual barbarism becomes a normal weapon.⁵¹

This finally brings up the point of how peacekeeping troops are affected by the situation, and by the potential that they will encounter child soldiers. In many regions where internal conflicts or civil wars occur, UN peace troops are installed to pacify the combatants and to assist with the reconstruction of civil society in the region. Their mission normally is not a combat mission; therefore, they are not heavily armed, and the use of weapons is strictly restricted. In many cases, weapons may only be used in self-defense. But even when the specific Rules of Engagement allow for a more robust style of peacekeeping, these regular soldiers face specific risks. Lessons-learned reports from Somalia, for example, stress the point that regular soldiers, especially those from the West, tend to view children generally more as charges requiring protection during conflict than as dangerous and cold-blooded killers;⁵² this certainly has to do with their cultural as well as their professional training background. When UN peacekeepers find themselves in an ambiguous encounter with child soldiers, they are suddenly on very thin ice. On the one hand, they probably do not want to over-react, and they will surely try to avoid an accusation of mistakenly attacking children in a region where they are assigned to bring peace. On the other hand, if they do not take seriously the risk posed by child soldiers, they endanger their lives and risk being taken as hostages who can be exchanged very profitably for ransom. In this way, the mechanisms of irregular wars could easily lead to a situation where peacekeeping soldiers unwill-

⁴⁹ Münkler, *Die neuen Kriege*, 141

⁵⁰ Münkler, *Die neuen Kriege*.

⁵¹ Ignatieff, *Warrior's Honor*, 161.

⁵² Georg-Maria Meyer, ed., *Friedensengel im Kampfanzug? Zu Theorie und Praxis militärischer UN-Einsätze* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1996).

ingly contribute to the prolongation of a bloody armed conflict. Already, extortion of ransom money is a very lucrative and commonly used variant of financing new wars.⁵³

Finally, Schmid and Schmid point out that even members of humanitarian aid organizations can become the target of savage violence when they try to extricate children from combat groups. This demonstrates that, in dealing with this problem, primary importance should be placed upon solutions that foster the prevention of children being forced to become soldiers in the first place. This again stresses the importance of the new UN Protocol from 2002, which tries to get rid of the often-lamented “culture of lawlessness,” in which all too often serious crimes go unpunished, and which includes the abuse of children as soldiers up to this day.

⁵³ Eppler, *Vom Gewaltmonopol zum Gewaltmarkt?*