

Children in Terrorism

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Abstract

Recently, the world watched in horror as an armed group of young children from Islamic terrorist organizations, dressed in combat gear, marched through the streets of Beirut, chanting their willingness to die for their leader or god². The role of children in various armed conflicts dates back a long way.

The children soldiers in the XXth century were known, as members of the Hitlerjugend organization. However, in addition to the Germans, the British, the Americans, also used minors for violent actions. Nowadays, the topicality of the topic, though, has been revived by the Islamic State terrorist organization. The highest child mortality rate was reported in Aleppo, where more than 2,000 children died as a result of the attack.

There are many examples in history of the involvement of child soldiers, but by 1990 this problem had been pushed into the background. The change is largely due to a study by Mozambican politician Graça Machel, who, at the request of the then UN Secretary-General, developed his work „Impact of armed conflict on children”³. He pointed out that children and women could be future targets for various extremist movements. Several EU Member States have confirmed that the number of their nationals, especially women and children, increased in various camps and prisons in March 2019 in north-eastern Syria⁴. There are currently 10 countries where it is common practice for children to participate in or join the struggle. These are Afghanistan, Central African Republic, Congo, Iraq, Somalia, Yemen, Myanmar, Nigeria, South Sudan and Syria⁵. In my study, I focus on the participation of children in violent groups.

Keywords: children, armed conflict, victim, terrorist organization.

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² M., Nagy, *Női terrorizmus*, PhD disszertáció, 2020, Pécs, p. 46.

³ C.E. Gal, *Elrabolt ártatlanság – az Iszlám Állam gyerekkatonái*, Magyar Rendészet 5/2018, p. 93.

⁴ European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend report (TE-SAT) 2020, European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation 2020, p. 48. Available at <https://www.europol.europa.eu/activities-services/main-reports/european-union-terrorism-situation-and-trend-report-te-sat-2020>, accessed on 30.08. 2020.

⁵ <https://theirworld.org/news/10-countries-where-child-soldiers-are-still-recruited-in-armed-conflicts>, accessed on 28.10.2020.

I. Introduction

In today's armed conflicts on civilians becoming victims shows much higher numbers, as in previous centuries events. In World War I, 20 civilian casualties affected 1 civilian casualties, while in the 1990s, 90% of civilian casualties were affected⁶. As a result, children are also increasingly victims of such conflicts. Even if they are not „directly” affected by the negative consequences of the clash, the effects of „indirect” factors occur.

Among other things, hunger, malnutrition, inadequate health care, epidemics⁷ and, consequently, vulnerability to extremist movements and thus the emergence and performance of child military missions.

War and children, for most of us, the combined use of these terms is unthinkable. Unfortunately, this is by no means a new phenomenon, with many historical antecedents, and continues to be used as a proven trend by various extremist movements⁸. This seems to be confirmed, as until then, groups that had not previously used children on the front had adopted this approach in new and never-before-seen ways⁹. Children's participation is very often coercive, but more and more voluntary. There are still extremely high numbers of young people in the armed conflicts that still take place today, according to a 2016 estimate, their number reaches 300,000, 40% of whom are girls¹⁰.

Research shows that the participation of minors is most prevalent where opposing parties wage war not according to internationally accepted norms of warfare but consistently ignoring *jus in bellum*¹¹. My main characters are children who fight in adult battles. Children who fight for the purposes of adults¹². Children who – as children soldiers were formulated – rob their childhood¹³.

II. Defining the concept of *child*

For many centuries, children were not allowed to participate in various legal transactions as legal entities, due to the fact that the minor was considered the

⁶ G. Machel, *Impact of Armed Conflict on Children. Report of the expert of the Secretary-General*, Ms. Grac'a Machel, submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 48/157, point 24, p. 9.

⁷ Z. Csapo, *Nemzetközi jogi védőháló a fegyveres konfliktusokban érintett gyermekek oltalmára*, PhD értekezés, Pécs, 2009, p. 5.

⁸ E. Cardeli, M. Bloom, S. Gillespie, T. Zayed, B. Ellis, *Exploring the Social-Ecological Factors that Mobilize Children into Violence, Terrorism and Political Violence*, 2019, p. 1.

⁹ G. Machel, *The Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Children: Impact of Armed Conflict on Children*, United Nations General Assembly 51st session, Item 108, August 26, 1996, p. 1.

¹⁰ <https://www.goldinstitute.org/grassroots-solutions/child-soldier-map>, accessed on 14.11.2020

¹¹ N. Pajter, *Gyermekekatonaság, Migráció és Társadalom*, 1/2018, p. 27.

¹² Z. Csapo, *Nemzetközi jogi védőháló a fegyveres konfliktusokban érintett gyermekek oltalmára*, PhD értekezés, Pécs, 2009, p. 3.

¹³ I. Beah, *A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier*, Nyitott Könyvműhely, Budapest, 2008, p. 5.

property of the father¹⁴. There was no sensitivity to the pup either, the number of child mortality was very high in the Middle Ages, so the parents showed a kind of distancing from them. The little ones were treated in the same way as adults after the age of 6 and 7, respectively¹⁵. Artistic representations also support the spirituality of the age, as they mostly present children as small adults.

In 1989, the UN General Assembly unanimously adopted the Convention on the Rights of the Child (Resolution 44/25), which states that a child is a person who has not reached the age of eighteen, unless he or she has reached the age of majority under national law¹⁶. Despite the creation of the concept, there is still no unity on this issue in all parts of the world. Indeed, even today there is a huge difference between a child living in Europe and a minor living in an African tribe. While in Western civilization, a young person under the age of 18 is uniformly considered a child, this is not so clear in other societies (e.g., Africa, Asia). Tribal customs are very strongly present in these countries, serving as a basis for inaugurating a 12-13 year-old offspring into an adult. Typically, at a young age, they become breadwinners, marry and start a family. Another reason for the discrepancy is the length of life expectancy in the world. An 18-year-old has a different status in a society where 40-50 is typical, while where it is 70-80¹⁷.

III. History of child soldiers

If we look back at the historical antecedents, we can already find records in the Bible and in Greek mythology about the armed service of children. These are considered to be the story of David, who is the king of Israel, Saul, it was the squire, and Hylas is who fulfilled faithful service to Heracles¹⁸.

Going further in history, Sparta deserves a highlight. It is a well-known fact about Spartans that the children born here were part of a very special upbringing. They lived together with their child peers in a so-called „flocks”. They gave them a gun in their hands and taught them the smallest details of their use. The principles of education were grouped around order, discipline, and rigor. Education is primarily focused on physical fitness, with a focus on theoretical training. The move to adulthood took place in the framework of a cruel pig. Whips were dropped on the initiated child at the age of 17, who had to endure the abuse without sound, if he did not, he was ashamed and struck by being returned to the minors. Sparta merit mention as yet, however, that only men have become *conscripts* after 18 years.

¹⁴ E. Vegh, *Gyermekkatónák – a Sierra Leone-i polgárháború igazi áldozatai*, [https:// btkepke.hu/uploads/articles/6414/file/veghezster.pdf](https://btkepke.hu/uploads/articles/6414/file/veghezster.pdf) accessed on 14.11.2020.

¹⁵ N. Faix, *A gyermeki jogok kialakulása a nemzetközi jogban és az igazságszolgáltatásban gyakorolt hatásuk*, *Eljárásjogi szemle*, 4/2016, p. 1.

¹⁶ Egyezmény a Gyermek Jogairól, <http://www.unicef.hu/gyermekjog-egyezmény.jsp>, accessed on 14.11.2020.

¹⁷ E. Vegh, *Gyermekkatónák – a Sierra Leone-i polgárháború igazi áldozatai*, <https://btkepke.hu/uploads/articles/6414/file/veghezster.pdf> accessed on 14.11.2020.

¹⁸ Z. Csapo, p. 13.

We can also find many sources about the details of the Middle Ages. The boys, who were meant to be knights or even the „king” of the battlefields, were torn from their parents' house at the age of 6-7 and fell into the hands of their master. They served here until they were 14 years old, where they learned all the tricks of weapon rotation. By the age of 14-15, the young people had become „war prods” by this time, they had also mastered the handling of heavier weapons and had regularly taken part in various campaigns from their lords. By the age of 18-21, the most distinguished had been able to be knighted in a solemn ceremony.

The prevailing practice in the Ottoman Empire is the *devsirme* system, which is a Turkish term and the means of it is collecting. In Europe, the word has become synonymous with „blood donation” and „child donation”. It was not intended to serve any purpose other than to gather Christian children to replace the Janissary army. Initially, 14-15. In the 16th century, boys aged 7-8 were collected in exchange for a „blood donor”, later this age limit was pushed much higher. The parents tried to get their children back with various tricks. They were sometimes bought out or circumcised to be considered Muslim. Early marriage was also common, as only unmarried women were recruited, but they were usually hidden in mountains and piles. The admitted boys were classified into different groups. According to the studies of Paul Fodor, those who were circumcised and the prettiest, smartest were taken to the Sultan's palace school and the strongest were given the necessary education in the palace garden. The remaining boys were placed with Turkish landlords, where they immersed themselves in the acquisition of religion. The members of the first group had an easy life, but this could no longer be said of the other two groups, as many of them did not even reach the age of 10¹⁹.

Child soldiers are also associated with Bonaparte Napoleon's troops. Initially, they did not perform combat tasks, but were present as drummers and assistants. Later, however, the number of infantry dropped so much that little boys were replaced²⁰. The various records of the age also support the reality of these cruel deeds. Metternich said to Bonaparte in June 1813 at the Imperial Headquarters: „I handed over his troops. It's just a baby”²¹.

Germany's Hitlerjugend (HJ) troops were a particularly famous organization under Hitler's leadership from 1926 to 1945. „The future is in the hands of those who have youth”²² – admitted the „Führer”. He also created his military team of Hitlerjunge. The children were „Aryans,” that is, „racially pure, they were German youths with blond or blond-brown hair and blue eyes and a proper head shape. His group leader was Baldur von Schirach, who later said in the Nuremberg trial: „*The sin I have to present to God and the German people is to... teach German children in honor of a man who committed murders in millions. That's all I can bring to my excuse*”²³.

¹⁹ F. Pál, K. Hegyi, M. Ivanics, *Török és tatár hódítók*, Kossuth Könyvkiadó, 1993, p. 19.

²⁰ Z. Csapo, cited, p. 22.

²¹ A. Castletot, *Napóleon. Európa Könyvkiadó*, Budapest, 1999, p. 535.

²² B.R. Lewis, *Hitlerjugend: a náci ifjúsági szervezete békében és háborúban, 1933-1945*, Hajja, Debrecen, 2001, p. 7.

²³ B.R. Lewis, cited, p. 143; Csapo, Z. cited, p. 27.

The organization operated on the basis of Nazi ideology and very soon grew into a militaristic movement. The conditions were characterized by strict subordination, they had their own badges, flags and uniforms. The number of members has increased year by year. HJ, which numbered 1,200 in 1923, had surpassed 3 million by 1933, and by 1939 had approached 8 million. This included the Bund Deutscher Mädel (German Girls' Association), the Jungvolk (Young People) and the Jungmädelgruppen (Young Girls Groups). The trainings started from an early age after the age of 6. From the age of 10, they joined the Jungvolk organization, which was practically a forerunner of HJ. They were members of the HJ from 14 to 18 years old, it was no secret that Adolf Hitler's soldiers were trained here. At several HJ units, voluntary entry declarations into the SS were filled out as a „birthday present”²⁴ Young people began to be indoctrinated at the age when they were most receptive. In many cases, re-education was so effective that children turned against their parents if they did not profess a Nazi ideology. Members were taught the basics of Nazi ideology, emphasizing, among other things, the range of „main enemies”: Jews, gypsies, communists, homosexuals. Many of the members lost their lives in World War II. The Allies called them the „baby division”. Many times he was completely shocked by the fact that teenage puppies were facing them in full military equipment. The boys' religion was Nazism and Hitler was their prophet. Alfons Heck recalled his childhood in the 1980s as follows: „*I belonged to Adolf Hitler in both body and soul*”²⁵. In the zone after the war, a large number of HJ soldiers were disappointed and realized how wrong he had been for many years²⁶.

Nor did the ideology of Italy and Mussolini despise the operation of youth organizations like Hitler. He considered the moral, physical and spiritual education of the young generation to be one of the tasks of fascism²⁷. He envisioned to achieve this educational trichotomic goal on three levels: 1. racial protection in the national mother and infant care association, 2. spiritual education in school, 3. physical, moral and military education in youth organizations²⁸. The youth organization became known as Balilla. His story is related to a little boy named Gian Battista Perasso whose nickname was named after his movement Balilla. The boy began throwing stones at the Austrian soldiers in the War of the Austrian Succession on December 5, 1746, thus starting the struggle that ended with the expulsion of the Austrians from Italy. A statue was also erected in honor of the boy. The Act of 3 April 1926 established the Opera Nazionale Balilla (O. N. B.), which operated as a legal entity. Similar subsidiaries were also grouped under Balilla and all other factions were disbanded²⁹. In 1930,

²⁴ L. Tilkovszky, *Anton Holzträger: A Hitler-Jugend harci bevetése az utolsó háborús hónapok zűrzavarában*, Századok, 6/1996, p. 1602.

²⁵ <https://mult-kor.hu/hitlerhez-tartoztam-testben-es-lelekben-hogyan-nevelt-a-hitlerjugend-fanatikusokat-egy-nemet-generaciobol-20171212>, accessed on 15.11.2020.

²⁶ Lewis, B.R., cited, p. 42.

²⁷ „*Uno dei compiti fondamentali del Fascismo é l'educazione spirituale, morale e fisica delle giovani generazioni*”. Marzolo, R., *Organizzazioni giovanili in Italia*, p. 7; Gauder, A., *Az olasz ifjúság szervezete*, Nevelésügyi szemle, 7-8/1945, p. 165.

²⁸ J. Mester, *Az olasz nevelés a XIX. és XX. században*, pp. 296-327.

²⁹ A. Gauder, cited., p. 165.

youth assault teams were formed with the aim, as a final step, to prepare young people between the ages of 18 and 21 to join the party. In 1937, the Balillas and the Assault Troops were unified and the G.I.L. (Gioventù Italiana del Littorio) Youth Section of the National Fascist Party. His tasks were published in:

1. Intellectual, sports and military training.
2. Primary and secondary school physical education.
3. Arranging courses.
4. Social care (camping, holidays, holidays, medical treatment etc.).
5. Travel (tourism, foreign, sea etc., trips, scholarships)³⁰.

An outside observer might have thought that there was only one physical education taking place in youth organizations, but after many years it was proven that the movement were self-conscious cultivators of Mussolini's triple slogan. „*Credere, obbedire, combattere, that is, to believe, to obey, to fight. Believing in the moral values created by the fascist state. Obey the knowledge of spiritual leaders; shaping and willing the future. Here the authoritative principle of the total view of the state emerges on the plane of youth. To fight, to fight for the realization of the Empire Romanum, is the teleological element. It all means physical discipline, the fight against comfort*³¹”.

IV. Child soldiers nowadays

The Islamic State recognized that potential male perpetrators could raise suspicions during the terrorist attacks, so new assassins had to be selected. This is why it turned primarily to women and juveniles. Their innocence and weakness easily divert the attention of law enforcement authorities, and thanks to this, the success of a terrorist act can be effectively ensured. ISIS has opened offices to recruit children, with two such offices operating in two Syrian cities; al-Mayadin and al-Bokamal, where ISIS is working to attract children living in the territory of the Islamic State³². According to some authors, „the role of children in the ‘caliphate’ is the culmination of the phenomenon of child soldiers³³”. A report for the period from 1 May to 31 October 2015 confirmed that the Islamic State had successfully recruited 1,227 adolescents, including adolescents aged 9 to 15, in various parts of Mosul³⁴. The formation of the youth wing of terrorists has become a feature, the young people of ISIS are referred to as „Fityan Al Islam” (Islamic boys)³⁵. Mia Bloom and John Horgan differentiate

³⁰ *Idem*, p. 168.

³¹ *Idem*, p. 170.

³² K. Anderson, „Cubs of the Caliphate” *The Systematic Recruitment, Training, and Use of Children in the Islamic State*, available at <https://www.ict.org.il/UserFiles/ICT-Cubs-of-the-Caliphate-Anderson.pdf> accessed on 28.10.2020.

³³ N. Benotman, N. Malik, *The Children of Islamic State*, The Roméo Dallaire Child Soldiers Initiative, Dalhousie University, 2016, p. 23.

³⁴ C.E. Gal, cited, p. 93. <https://theirworld.org/news/10-countries-where-child-soldiers-are-still-recruited-in-armed-conflicts>, accessed on 28.10. 2020.

³⁵ N. Benotman, N. Malik, cited, p. 22.

categories among joined minors: some are children of foreigners involved in the fight or children of supportive locals, but the organization also regularly increases the number of children found in the orphanages it controls, in addition to minors forcibly taken from parents and those also the stray children who volunteer for ISIS³⁶. Involving minors has many benefits for a terrorist organization. Among other things, providing less food, lower wages, their immaturity contribute to their quick engagement, making them quick to prove loyalty, and easy to shape because they have fewer pre-formed visions and beliefs that recruiters need to reverse or change³⁷. The moral judgment of young people is very easy to shape and influence. They do not need as much brainwashing as adults. Many reasonably behaving people cling to strange and cruel views simply because they have been firmly implanted in their brains early in their lives³⁸.

The young generation also represents the future of a radical group, which is why leaders consider early indoctrination and armed training to be extremely important, because the soldiers and leaders of the future will develop from them. In schools, the curriculum is almost nothing more than an accurate, precise mastery and understanding of Islamic doctrines. Classes are intertwined around religion and learn the process of prayer on a daily basis, but instead the curriculum also includes a description of Mohamed's life and monotheism. They start religious education for them as little children that most children don't even understand what it's all about. A boy named Mohammed recounted that although he understood the concept of fasting and the importance of prayer, he did not understand the word „unbelievers” and why they should be fought³⁹. Of course, this is to the detriment of learning other necessary information, as students cannot even study classical subjects such as mathematics, social sciences, history, geography.

The school week runs from Sunday to Thursday, where girls and boys go to separate classes. Primary school is 5 years old, high school lasts 4 years, compulsory schooling is strictly adhered to, as children who do not attend religious education will be harder to shape⁴⁰. Children are also present in physical education classes on a daily basis, but this does not take place in the traditional way either, as they learn to shoot, box and fight⁴¹. These factors threaten the healthy physical, moral, and emotional development of children and will later be unable to contribute constructively to society⁴².

³⁶ J. Horgan, M. Bloom, *This Is How the Islamic State Manufactures Child Militants*, VICE News RSS, July 8, 2015.

³⁷ *Child Soldiers*, War Child, <http://www.warchild.org.uk/issues/child-soldiers>; Machel, G., cited, p. 13.

³⁸ S.H. Cardoso, *Inside the mind of a suicide bomber*, in *Dying to kill: The mind of the terrorist*, available on <https://www.dana.org/article/dying-to-kill/> accessed on 27.01.2020.

³⁹ K. Anderson, cited.

⁴⁰ *Education in the Shade of the Caliphate*, Islamic State Wilayat Raqqa,, https://archive.org/details/ta_rq (2020.10.30.)

⁴¹ *Race Towards Good*, Islamic State al-Hayat Media Center, https://archive.org/details/fstbqo_alkeeraat. Accessed on 30.10. 2020.

⁴² N. Benotman, N. Malik, cited, p. 28.

Indoctrination beginning in schools is intensifying in training camps where children between the ages of 10 and 15 are taught Saria. Their training consists of several stages, almost identical to the training of adults. The location of the training usually takes place in abandoned training camps set up for them, far from their place of residence, which can also be found in Mosul, Aleppo and Rakka, for example. Young people need to undergo very intense physical training to increase their endurance. They are taught the most basic combat tactics as well as the use of weapons. Their practical applicability is practiced on various babies.

The third part of the training is psychology influence, as part of which they have to perform as spectators in public executions. The purpose of this is to break the resentment against violence, to reshape it, and to silence the conscience⁴³. Once all three steps have been successfully completed, they have the opportunity to complete the task assigned to them, which can be a suicide bombing or front-line armed service on the side of a veteran fighter. Once the children of the Islamic State have completed their training, a graduation ceremony will be held for them, where the new graduates will march in public, in full uniform and arms. Their trainers line up the graduates and start beating them with sticks, symbolizing the unity of strength and discipline. The goal of the ISIS trainings is strikingly similar to the goal of the infamous Hitler Youth program – to create perfect, loyal, and obedient soldiers for the future⁴⁴. One warrior said, *„It was a very difficult camp. We received very serious training. There were dense days: prayer, practice (use of firearms, religious teachings) followed by military studies, then further Sharía courses, then rest, prayer. Between the afternoon prayers, they were not allowed to sleep, they came into our tent and fired into the sky and were sent to guard a ditch. We often fell asleep in this ditch because we were so tired”*⁴⁵. *„These young people, in most cases, are literally cruel killing machines that execute literally all instructions”*⁴⁶.

V. Conclusion

In my study, I wanted to point out the role of child soldiers in different eras of history as well as in the Islamic State, which is playing an active role today. It can be seen that putting minors on the battlefield is not new, the change lies in the way of training.

Advances in technology have produced spectacular innovations in this area as well, perhaps making it even easier to spread extremist ideas. The goal remains ideological training and transformation to secure the future of the organization. It is

⁴³ C.E. Gal, cited., p. 106.

⁴⁴ C. Vinograd, B. Ghazi, A. Cheikh Omar, *ISIS Trains Child Soldiers at Camps for 'Cubs of the Islamic State*.

⁴⁵ K. Anderson: *„Cubs of the Caliphate” The Systematic Recruitment, Training, and Use of Children in the Islamic State*, <https://www.ict.org.il/UserFiles/ICT-Cubs-of-the-Caliphate-Anderson.pdf>, accessed on 28.10.2020.

⁴⁶ D. Szijj, Az „új” háborúk hozadéka: a gyerekkatonaság modernkori formái. *Nemzet és Biztonság*, 5/2010, p. 32.

perceptible that we have not been able to find a solution to this problem for centuries, all of which leads to innocent children continuing to play adult games.

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