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**NAVAL
POSTGRADUATE
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MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA

THESIS

**THE LION AND THE CAT: HOW DO CHILD SOLDIERS
SHAPE CONTEMPORARY PEACE OPERATIONS?**

by

Saidu Denieh Kargbo

December 2022

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**THE LION AND THE CAT: HOW DO CHILD SOLDIERS SHAPE
CONTEMPORARY PEACE OPERATIONS?**

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

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ABSTRACT

Armed conflicts and insurgencies today have adopted ruthless tactics of warfare by coercively recruiting child soldiers. Child soldiers play many roles during armed conflicts, creating security concerns for peace and stability in the international community. This study explores the social, physical, and psychological impact of child soldiers on peacekeepers and communities during and after conflict. It examines the three levels of risk (low, medium, and high) related to the use of force in interactions between child soldiers and members of the military and peacekeeping forces. Furthermore, the study assesses how lower-risk-level interactions can escalate to life-threatening situations. Drawing on relevant international law, literature by subject matter experts, and the author's personal experience in peacekeeping operations, the research discusses how child soldiers shape contemporary peace support operations using Sierra Leone's past civil war as a case that involved varieties of UN and non-UN peacekeeping efforts. Finally, the study makes recommendations to policymakers aimed to thwart efforts to recruit children and prevent further interactions between peacekeepers and children during all stages of conflict.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AFRC	Armed Forces Revolutionary Council
CRC	Convention on the Right of the Child
DDR	Disarmament Demobilization and Reintegration
DFS	Department of Field Support
DPKO	Department of Peacekeeping Operations
ECOMOG	Economic Community West Africa Monitoring Group
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West Africa States
EO	Executive Outcome
ICC	International Criminal Court
IHL	International Humanitarian Law
LOAC	Law of Armed Conflict
LTTE	Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NPFL	National Patriotic Front of Liberia
NPRC	National Provisional Ruling Council
POW	Prisoner of War
PTSD	Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
ROE	Rules of Engagement
RUF	Revolutionary United Front
SBU	Small Boys Units
SLA	Sierra Leone Army
SOP	Standard Operating Procedures
SRSG-CAA	Special Representatives of the Security-General for Children and Armed Conflict
TCC	Troops Contributing Countries
UNAMSIL	United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

USIC

United States Intelligence Community

WSB

West Side Boys

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I. INTRODUCTION

A. PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH

Peacekeeping operations and other military engagements have always been highly dynamic and have evolved in the face of new challenges as the nature of civil conflicts have changed over the years. The proliferation of conflicts involving the recruitment and use of child soldiers seems to be outpacing most peacekeeping or military operations efforts and often creates dilemmas among troops, especially when they interact with child soldiers. Because of this ongoing situation, this research explores the following questions:

- How should armed forces, including peacekeepers, cope with child soldiers?
- What are the social, physical, and psychological considerations that child soldiers present to armed forces, and peacekeepers, during and after civil conflicts?
- What will be the impact on societies seeking to end conflicts that feature child soldiers?

B. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH

The recruitment and use of child soldiers have been a recurring problem throughout history. During the Middle Ages, a 14-year-old boy might become a squire and begin military training with a knight.¹ A certain number of boys, as young as eight years old, were regularly recruited from the 14th to the 17th century.² In the modern era as well, child soldiers have been utilized. Child soldiers have been employed by both state armed forces and non-state armed groups. The recruitment and use of child soldiers present six grave violations of international law: killing and maiming of children; recruitment and use of

¹ John A. Burkhart, III, "Watch Out for the Children: Army Policy and Child Soldiers" (master's thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2016), 4, <http://hdl.handle.net/10945/49423>.

² Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper, *Empires in World History: Power and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010).

children as soldiers; sexual violence against children; attacks against schools or hospitals; denial of humanitarian aid for children; and abduction of children.³

Armed groups that recruit and use child soldiers have made it harder for peacekeepers and professional armies to deal with child soldiers in the civil populace during armed conflicts. It is difficult for peacekeepers to decide to fight children who are supposed to be given special protection during armed conflict, and this contradiction weighs on the conscience as well as the sense of duty. Humanitarian and retired Canadian Forces lieutenant-general General Romeo Dallaire spoke of a moral dilemma stating that “for soldiers with any sense of honour at all, fighting children offers a no-win situation. To be defeated by children would almost certainly bring death, derision, and disgrace, while to win would carry the taint of having killed mere children.”⁴

As a result, the adult soldier is faced with a difficult choice. Most armies in the world, including the United States, have had bitter experiences interacting with child soldiers in the past. Since the mid-20th century, the United States has confronted child combatants in Germany, Vietnam, Somalia, and Afghanistan.⁵ And, unfortunately, this will continue to happen because of the new tactics adopted by insurgent groups, even though the recruitment and use of child soldiers are against international law.⁶

The trend in conflicts involving child soldiers around the world continues to increase. According to UNICEF, over 93,000 children were verified as being recruited and utilized by parties to conflict between 2005 and 2020, while the true number of incidents is

³ Stephanie Tremblay, “The Six Grave Violations,” *Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict* (blog), accessed November 21, 2022, <https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/six-grave-violations/>.

⁴ Shelly Whitman, Tanya Zayed, and Carl Conradi, *Child Soldiers: A Handbook for Security Sector Actors* (Halifax, Canada: Dalhousie University, 2012), 1, <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/child-soldiers-handbook-security-sector-actors>.

⁵ Charles Borchini, Stephanie Lanz, and Erin O’Connell, *Child Soldiers: Implications for U.S. Forces*, CETO 005–02 (Quantico, VA: Center for Emerging Threats and Opportunities, Marine Corps Warfighting Lab, 2002), <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/citations/ADA433182>.

⁶ UN Security Council, “Resolution 1612, Children and Armed Conflict,” S/RES/1616, July 26, 2005, <https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/content/resolutions-adopted-security-council-2005>.

likely substantially greater.⁷ Furthermore, a 2020 report on children affected by armed conflict reveals that “approximately 160 million children lived in conflict zones in countries that experienced more than 1,000 battle deaths within 2019, and about 225 million children lived in conflict zones in countries experiencing medium intensity conflicts (between 25 and 999 battle deaths). The countries with the highest conflict intensity in 2019 were Afghanistan, Syria, and Somalia.”⁸

This research project investigates the experiences of peacekeeping troops, with a particular focus on front-line personnel who are more likely to encounter and engage with child soldiers. Given that peacekeeping can turn into a war if troop presence is insufficient to stop violations, it necessarily raises concerns about how peacekeeping missions should be carried out in the presence of child soldiers. As peacekeeping missions have expanded and children have been recruited as soldiers, the armed forces are struggling to deal with this problem. The United Nations has tried to address this issue by prohibiting its peacekeepers from using force against children and creating mechanisms to deal with the issue, but the problem persists.

International law is intended to mitigate or stop perpetrators from engaging in the crime of deploying child soldiers. These laws have been effectively observed only by recognized forces like UN peacekeepers or some state armies that have accepted them as norms in executing their duties while opposing forces or non-state actors consider the recruitment and use of child soldiers as a strategic advantage to increase their manpower and defeat their opponents.

This thesis adopts the perspective of the UN/Non-UN peacekeeping force which unfortunately must interact with child soldiers during peacekeeping missions and during contemporary military operations carried out by armed forces. Using a case study of Sierra Leone, the thesis aims to answer two questions: How do peacekeepers or national armed forces cope with child soldiers during military operations? What is the level of preparedness

⁷ “Children Recruited by Armed Forces or Armed Groups,” Child Protection, December 22, 2021, <https://www.unicef.org/protection/children-recruited-by-armed-forces>.

⁸ Gudrun Østby, Siri Aas Rustad, and Andreas Forø Tollefsen, “Children Affected by Armed Conflict, 1990–2019,” *Conflict Trends*, no. 6 (2020): 4, <https://www.prio.org/publications/12527>.

of security sector actors to deal with child soldiers? This thesis will contribute by synthesizing information on existing prevention mechanisms and previous experiences of ethically minded military personnel who uphold the law and recognize the complexity of professional soldiers in fighting against well-armed child soldiers without jeopardizing their lives or the military objective.

C. LITERATURE REVIEW

Peacekeeping operations have always been highly dynamic and have evolved in the face of new challenges because the nature of conflict changes over the years. One of the most persistent challenges in armed conflict and peacekeeping missions is the presence of child soldiers. Military peacekeepers face moral and ethical problems when they work with child soldiers. These problems can be solved with the appropriate military training and supervision exerted by the chain of command, especially when carrying out military tasks. Hence, a reasonable question that can be asked by any robust army is how basic military training can dictate the appropriate approach to interacting with child soldiers such that it does not jeopardize the military objective or dampen troop spirit.

The purpose of the literature review is to investigate the following questions: Who constitutes a child soldier? Why are children employed as child soldiers in armed forces and non-state armed groups? What are the existing options for preventing and/or eradicating the use of children as weapons? This review will further seek to understand how UN peacekeepers and other military operations personnel interact with child soldiers.

1. The Definitions of a Child Soldier

To begin discussing wartime violence and children, it is necessary to define “child.” The age at which a child is protected is one of the fundamental issues with child soldiers in international law. Specifically, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), defines a child as someone under the age of 18.⁹ Article 1 of UNCRC allows States Parties who designate a lower age for the end of childhood to keep that lower age

⁹ UN Secretary-General, *Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)*, 1990, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child>.

“unless the majority is achieved earlier.”¹⁰ The Convention permits socially and culturally different national age limitations by doing so. Furthermore, Article 38 of the UNCRC allows the recruitment of children as young as 15 years old.¹¹ On the other hand, even within the international legal system, there is inconsistency since one document may contain several “threshold” ages.¹² Many of the instruments meant to keep teenagers from becoming fighters specify a minimum age of 15, which many critics believe is too low. In contrast, in the United States, the age of maturity is 18, an age that would better safeguard those who are young and more vulnerable from participating. Nowadays, many parts of the world are struggling to accept the fact that a child is somebody below age 18.

Determining at what age a soldier is considered to be still a child has been the most challenging matter. Furthermore, the term child soldier implies a much broader role than that of one who directly engages in armed conflict. According to the definition of the 2007 Paris Principle, the term child soldier “refers to any person below 18 years of age who is or who has been recruited or used by an armed forces or armed group in any capacity, including but not limited to children, boys, and girls used as fighters, cooks, porters, messengers, spies, or for sexual purposes. It does not only refer to a child who is taking or has taken a direct part in hostilities.”¹³ Similarly, a Save the Children study also stresses that any sort of recruiting into military forces or non-state actor armed groups should not be below the international threshold of 18 years old.¹⁴ Equally, U.S. law defines a child soldier as any individual under 18 years old who actively participates in hostilities while serving in a government-sponsored armed force, or who has been compulsorily recruited into such

¹⁰ UN Secretary-General, Article 1.

¹¹ UN Secretary-General, Article 38.

¹² Noëlle Quénivet and Shilan Shah-Davis, *Youth and Violence: Drawing Parallels between Child Soldiers and Youth in Gangs* (Bristol, UK: University of the West of England, 2013).

¹³ UN International Children’s Emergency Fund, *The Paris Principles: Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups* (New York: UN General Assembly, 2007), 7, <https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/pdf/3384.pdf/>.

¹⁴ Mariam Kirolos et al., *War and Children: Time to End Grave Violations against Children in Conflict* (London: Save the Children International, 2018), <https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/document/war-children-time-end-grave-violations-against-children-conflict/>.

forces.¹⁵ Although UNCRC Article 38 permitted States Parties to recruit children beginning at the age of 15, the Optional Protocol raises the age of involvement in armed conflict from 15 to 18. Governments that have signed the Optional Protocol must take all reasonable steps to prohibit anybody under the age of 18 from serving in their armed forces in direct conflict. In accordance with Article 4(1), non-state actors shall not recruit minors under the age of 18. This provision is vital on the employment and use of child soldiers by armed groups, who usually violate the law regarding child soldiers. According to M. J. Fox, “Addressing non-state cases is [even] more problematic, however, and not simply because non-state entities exist and operate beyond legal reach.”¹⁶ In other words, Fox supports the idea that armed groups will not be honest enough to spare their soldiers below age 18 from engaging in combat or frontline roles.

Moreover, it is not unusual for child soldiers to be used on both sides of a battle if they are found on one side. Government armies, rebel troops, and paramilitary organizations all have child soldiers. Children are the perfect cover since they are little and are naturally thought to be innocent. Rachel Brett and Margaret McCallin found that the innocence associated with children means they are rarely suspected to be the adversary.¹⁷

What makes children susceptible to recruitment is not merely their perceived innocence. In an article on the teenage brain in *Scientific American*, Jay N. Giedd observed that “society should also realize that the teen years are a turning point for a life of peaceful citizenship, aggression, or, in rare cases radicalization. Across all cultures, adolescents are the most vulnerable to being recruited as soldiers and terrorists, as well as the most likely to be influenced to become teachers and engineers.”¹⁸ A mismatch in brain network development exposes teenagers to riskier conduct while simultaneously allowing for

¹⁵ Child Soldiers Prevention Act (CSPA), Pub. L. No. 110–457 122 Stat. 5087–5091 (2008).

¹⁶ “Child Soldiers Prevention Act (CSPA), Pub. L. No. 110–457 122 Stat. 5087–5091 (2008).,” n.d.

¹⁷ Rachel Brett and Margaret McCallin, *Children: The Invisible Soldiers*, 2nd ed. (Stockholm: Rädda Barnen, 1998); Roméo Dallaire Child Soldiers Initiative, *Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers: Basic Course* (Halifax, Nova Scotia: Dallaire Institute, 2015).

¹⁸ Jay N. Giedd, “The Amazing Teen Brain,” *Scientific American* 312, no. 6 (June 2015): 37, <https://doi.org/10.1038/scientificamericankids0616-92>.

cognitive and adaptive leaps.¹⁹ This argument supports that any person below the age of 18 years can be influenced in nearly any direction suggested by an adult.

2. Causes that Drive the Use of Child Soldiers by State and Non-state Actors

Why do adults employ child soldiers? Child soldiers are recruited and used on purpose. The American political scientist P. W. Singer contends that “it is no coincidence that 60 percent of the non-state armed forces in the world today deliberately make use of child soldiers. For rebel groups, using the child soldier doctrine is a way to overcome their weak starting point as far as recruiting, organization, and other state-centered systemic barriers to growth.”²⁰ Ishmael Beah, a former child soldier in the Sierra Leone Civil War, has reflected on his agonizing experiences and the apparent lack of investment that recruiters and their organizations make in their child soldiers. During his participation in the Disarmament Demobilization and Reintegration Program (DDR), a program that helps former child soldiers reintegrate into society, he shared his experiences: “It takes a year to train before you [professional soldiers] can go to the front to fight. With us, it was a week. All you must 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 lines.”²¹

After losing personnel or suffering significant fatalities in Sri Lanka, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) increased its employment of young teenage operatives.²² Sri Lankan researcher Dushy Ranatunge found that 60% of killed LTTE militants were under 18 and largely females and boys 10–16.²³ This was followed by heavy recruitment of child soldiers to offset the losses. While some terrorist groups recruit and train teenagers

¹⁹ Giedd, 33.

²⁰ P. W. Singer, *Children at War* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2006), 95.

²¹ Shelly Whitman, Tanya Zayed, and Carl Conradi, *Child Soldiers: A Handbook for Security Sector Actors* (Halifax, Canada: Dalhousie University, 2012), 38, <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/child-soldiers-handbook-security-sector-actors>.

²² Mia Bloom and John Horgan, *Small Arms: Children and Terrorism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2019).

²³ “Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) Terrorist Group, India,” Latest on SATP, accessed June 5, 2022, <https://www.satp.org/terrorist-profile/india/liberation-tigers-of-tamil-eelam-ltte>.

over time, others utilize trickery or children too young to understand their acts.²⁴ Such recruitment can be an act of desperation; for example, the Taliban exploits minors in Afghanistan and Pakistan without telling them they are signing up for a suicide mission.²⁵ In Sierra Leone's past conflict, non-state armed groups recruited anybody they could: old people, young people, females, and boys.²⁶ This form of recruitment was established to generate manpower or strength for their armed groups, with the priority to recruit boys and girls.

This willful breach of international rules is complicated, as are the factors driving the recruitment of children and teens. According to P.W. Singer this recruitment is driven by "(1) generational disconnections caused by globalization, war, and disease [that] create a pool of potential recruits; (2) efficiency improvements in small arms [that] permit these recruits to be effective participants in warfare; which (3) results in the propensity to use children as a low-cost way to mobilize and generate force, particularly for individual goals in the context of failed or weak states."²⁷ Armed groups including terrorist organizations utilize child soldiers because they are seasoned combatants without conscience or fear of death and are easy to radicalize. This situation has caused many children to become unwitting victims within conflict zones.

Armed groups also recruit child soldiers for tactical and organizational advantage. In particular, commanders of non-state actors usually take advantage of how easy it is to influence children and how they are seen as innocent and obedient. Furthermore, according to P.W. Singer, commanders want either a bigger fighting force or better territorial control.²⁸ Child soldiers are preferred by armed groups because of their agility, making

²⁴ Bloom and Horgan, *Small Arms*.

²⁵ "Taliban Tricked Me into Wearing Bomb, Boy Says," NBC News, June 25, 2007, <https://www.nbcnews.com/id/wbna19420772>.

²⁶ Macartan Humphreys and Jeremy M. Weinstein, "Who Fights? The Determinants of Participation in Civil War," *American Journal of Political Science* 52, no. 2 (April 2008): 436–55, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-5907.2008.00322.x>.

²⁷ P.W. Singer, "Caution: Children at War," *Parameters* 31, no. 4 (Winter 2001): 44, <https://doi.org/10.55540/0031-1723.2069>.

²⁸ Singer, "Caution."

them a useful resource in any armed battle. This quality is complemented by the fact that they only need a small amount of training. Once they know how to shoot, strip, and assemble the rifle, they are ready to go to war.²⁹

Nevertheless, child soldiers present liabilities. Numerous worldwide organizations have joined forces with the Romeo Dallaire Child Soldiers Initiative to prevent and halt the recruitment and use of child soldiers globally. The handbook of the Romeo Dallaire Initiative (whose goal is “to progressively eradicate the use and recruitment of child soldiers through a security sector approach”)³⁰ has opined on the tactical disadvantages of using child soldiers. The handbook affirms that child soldiers are not only a legal liability, but the specific qualities that armed groups and non-state actors seek to leverage in children can pose as liabilities. For instance, just as children are easily recruited, they are easy to manipulate by opposing forces; they can be difficult to control, irrational, trigger-happy; and they can ultimately undermine the credibility and capability of their armed group.³¹ Even though recruiting child soldiers increases armed groups’ strength in the fighting units, utilizing child soldiers can be compared to using unreliable weapons to fight your enemies.

3. Current Efforts by the International Community to Prevent the Use of Child Soldiers

Developments in human rights and humanitarian law impacting children occurred almost concurrently but in different ways. These two disciplines of international law are not the only ones that apply to children, but they are the ones that are now under study.³² The rights of children are protected in many ways under international law. As mentioned by M. J. Fox, Cohn and Goodwill-Gill said that these laws must be found in specific and general treaties, in the wide area of human conflict at both the global and regional levels, in the standards of international humanitarian law, in customary international law, and be ratified

²⁹ Whitman, Zayed, and Conradi, *Child Soldiers*, 2012.

³⁰ Roméo Dallaire Child Soldiers Initiative, *Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers*.

³¹ Roméo Dallaire Child Soldiers Initiative.

³² Mary-Jane Fox, “Child Soldiers and International Law: Patchwork Gains and Conceptual Debates,” *Human Rights Review* 7, no. 1 (2005): 27–48, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12142-005-1001-4>.

and adopted by the states.³³ Although the idea of a child and the distinction between a combatant and a soldier have both evolved alongside international law, no such law has a clear definition or category for someone who is both. Apart from measures created for captured, armed juveniles, the idea of a child soldier or a child combatant does not exist in law.³⁴ Furthermore, it provides a workable definition and advocates for a “straight-18” policy, which prohibits anybody under the age of 18 from participating in any armed conflict.³⁵

There have been 185 peace agreements struck between warring parties since the introduction of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989; only nine of them have arrangements for underage soldiers.³⁶ Despite the paucity of documented consensus or legal instruments on the prohibition of the use of underage soldiers, some organizations are not waiting to address the problem. Shelly Whitman, Executive Director of the Romeo Dallaire Child Soldiers Initiative, states, “Since 2008, we have trained more than 500 soldiers, police, and peacekeepers from over 50 countries.”³⁷ There have been numerous efforts made to prevent the recruitment and use of child soldiers by the international community and other world organizations around the globe.

4. UN Peacekeepers and Other Military Operation Personnel Interacting with Child Soldiers

The recruitment and employment of child soldiers is a clear breach of international rules. However, these standards are frequently disregarded, and the use of young soldiers on battlefields has been commonplace since the turn of the century. As a result, understanding the mechanics of this occurrence is critical for professional armed forces that will encounter them now and in the future.³⁸ Col. Charles Borchini (Ret’d), U.S. Army,

³³ Fox.

³⁴ Fox.

³⁵ Fox, 30.

³⁶ Whitman, Zayed, and Conradi, *Child Soldiers*, 2012.

³⁷ Julie Breau et al., *Charting the Course: A Strategic Plan for The Roméo Dallaire Child Soldiers Initiative 2012–2015* (Halifax, Canada: Centre for Foreign Policy Studies, 2012), 8.

³⁸ Singer, “Caution.”

states, “Child soldiers are a problem all over the world, but it is something we in the West are not accustomed to. We raise our own children and bring them up and having to fight children is not something we are ready for.”³⁹ His remarks point to another tactical advantage for armed groups using children as fighters, which is to create serious mental anguish for professional soldiers when they encounter child soldiers.⁴⁰

Similarly, Dallaire posed these questions:

Do you kill children who kill? Do you kill children who are there under duress, who have been stolen from their families, their schools, churches, or villages, lined up with a few of their friends, and killed to establish discipline? Do you kill a child who is enticed, not for a desire to kill, but because of drugs; children who do not realize the full impact of what they are facing or the consequences of their actions?⁴¹

The emergence of the child soldier phenomenon has had a devastating and very challenging impact on UN and non-UN peacekeeping operations. Peacekeepers are cautioned to comply with the use of force guidelines against children involved in armed conflict situations.⁴² Yet the problem of child soldiers is still widely ignored in U.S. security studies, regrettably.⁴³ The Romeo Dallaire Child Soldiers Initiative handbook’s description of the levels of risk related to the use of force in interactions with child soldiers demonstrates the changing phases of the risk when interacting with child soldiers. Since children are always perceived to be innocent and many adults have reasonably assumed this also, it can be particularly challenging for UN and non-UN peacekeeping personnel to interact with children without knowing of their potentially malicious intentions. These levels of interaction will be explained more in the subsequent chapters.

³⁹ Whitman, Zayed, and Conradi, *Child Soldiers*, 2012, 47.

⁴⁰ Megan M. Thompson, *Moral Injury in Military Operations: A Review of the Literature and Key Considerations for the Canadian Armed Forces* (Toronto: Defence Research and Development Canada, 2015), <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/citations/AD1004227>.

⁴¹ Whitman, Zayed, and Conradi, *Child Soldiers*, 2012, 42.

⁴² UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations, *United Nations Peacekeeping Operations: Principles and Guidelines* (New York: United Nations Secretariat, 2008), https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/capstone_eng_0.pdf.

⁴³ Singer, “Caution.”

Singer contends that the statistical analysis of medical reports and the prevention strategies by activists have enlightened the world about the child soldier phenomenon.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, he cautions that the problem remains “Most worrisome, [because] no doctrine has been developed for dealing with the specific challenges and dilemmas that child soldiers present to mission planners or deployed units.”⁴⁵ The research will identify and analyze these challenges in more detail in the body of the thesis.

D. METHODS AND SOURCES

Using a case study approach, this research explores the use of child soldiers in Sierra Leone’s past civil wars from 1991 to 2002. It examines and analyzes how both rebels and state armed forces in armed conflict recruited and used child soldiers, and what made children vulnerable to the recruitment. This research draws upon a wide range of scholarly publications and books, as well as various think tank reports and news sources. It also refers to literature from the UN Convention on the Rights of a Child and the Vancouver Principles document.

E. OVERVIEW OF THE THESIS

This thesis is divided into four chapters. Chapter I has presented background on international law and the legal challenges related to prohibiting the recruitment and employment of child soldiers and provided a brief overview of the international community’s efforts to prevent the use of child soldiers. Chapter II examines the current military and peacekeeping challenges related to child soldiers with reference to the case of Sierra Leone. Chapter III looks at how UN peacekeepers and their interactions with child soldiers have socially, physically, and psychologically impacted troops and the community. It also draws on the case of Sierra Leone. The concluding chapter considers what is required to assist peacekeeping troops who must interact with child soldiers during and after conflicts.

⁴⁴ Singer.

⁴⁵ Singer, 40.

II. INTERNATIONAL NORMS AND EFFORTS TO PREVENT THE RECRUITMENT AND USE OF CHILD SOLDIERS

Child soldiers have the challenge of thriving in a hostile environment that operates mostly outside of international and national rules. Several inter-agency and integrated initiatives are required to successfully prevent the recruitment of child soldiers. According to the UN Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict (SRSG-CAA), the Europe office affirmed that more than 115,000 children have been freed from armed forces and organizations since 2000.⁴⁶ Together, the United Nations and its member nations have restored hope to people who had given up on a brighter tomorrow.

In the previous chapter, it was mentioned that security sector actors including UN peacekeepers and non-state actors may often be perpetrating this crime unknowingly or, in some cases, deliberately. They recruit and use children in those capacities described in Chapter I to pursue their political goals or objectives. This potential for involvement between the UN peacekeepers and child soldiers is what makes it more challenging for the international community to thwart the child soldier phenomenon. Moreover, the magnitude and intensity of modern conflicts are testing the boundaries of the international community's ability to safeguard children. This chapter examines the international laws aimed to prevent the recruitment and use of children as soldiers and identifies how such laws have been effective against perpetrators. The chapter further traces how the law has evolved over time and what types of measures have been adopted for security sector actors, especially UN peacekeepers, who are always at the front line in armed conflict regions to secure and maintain peace, and other resolution methods to sustain peace.

⁴⁶ Stephanie Tremblay, "Ending the Use of Child Soldiers," Office of the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, February 12, 2017, <https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/2017/02/ending-the-use-of-child-soldiers/>.

A. INTERNATIONAL LAW PROHIBITING THE RECRUITMENT AND USE OF CHILD SOLDIERS

The international community has expressed opposition to the recruitment of child soldiers by passing resolutions and treaties at the United Nations regarding human rights, basic freedoms, and international security, as well as resolutions regarding the rights of children and education. Actively recruiting children to fight in or support non-state groups is a worrying and challenging global issue, as Fox affirmed.⁴⁷ This increasing problem is largely caused by non-state actors who violate humanitarian and human rights conventions. Nonetheless, it is also well-known that many state militaries continue to recruit children, and the state-level solutions to this issue are typically more traditional, direct, and institutional in nature.⁴⁸ And this author can corroborate Fox's assertion that most developed and developing states maintaining military academies with lengthy training programs enlist their officers/recruits who are below the age of 18 years. Consequently, such states are cautioned by the signed Optional Protocol and must take all reasonable steps to prohibit anybody under the age of 18 from serving in their armed forces in direct conflict.

Another challenge faced by the international community is how to address the non-state actors' chains of command, which are beyond legal reach. Even if human rights and humanitarian practices apply to children in armed conflict, the law contains flaws and disparities. Since both branches of the legal system historically "were unprepared" for this phenomenon, according to Fox, the spread of the recruitment and use of child soldiers happened haphazardly, which led to some disparities, contestations, legal loopholes, and an absence of understanding that still affects the issue today.⁴⁹

Although the legal guidance reflects conflicting theoretical approaches, human rights, and humanitarian law have been the nexus to start addressing the issue of child soldiers. Several accepted regional and international regulations and UN Security Council decisions make it illegal to enlist or employ children under the age of 18 in armed conflict.

⁴⁷ Fox, "Child Soldiers and International Law."

⁴⁸ Fox, 27.

⁴⁹ Fox, 27.

Here are some of the important treaties and recommendations established by the international community for the protection of children in armed conflict environments.

1. Optional Protocol on the Participation of Children in Armed Conflict to The Convention on The Rights of the Child

This Optional Protocol was enacted by the General Assembly in 2000 to prevent the recruitment and use of children in armed conflicts. It states that,

States will not recruit children under the age of 18 to send them to the battlefield. States will not conscript soldiers below the age of 18. States should take all possible measures to prevent such recruitment—including legislation to prohibit and criminalize the recruitment of children under 18 and involve them in hostilities. States will demobilize anyone under 18 conscripted or used in hostilities and will provide physical and psychological recovery services and help their social reintegration. Armed groups distinct from the armed forces of a country should not, under any circumstances, recruit or use in hostilities anyone under 18.⁵⁰

It established 18 as the government-mandated minimum age for forced recruitment, enlistment into armed groups, and direct engagement in hostilities. States may accept volunteers as young as 16, but they must deposit a legally binding declaration stating their minimum age for voluntary recruitment and laying out certain protections for such recruitment at the time of ratification or accession.

2. International Criminal Court of Rome Statute

A permanent court was formed under this law to try people accused of war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide. Article 8(2)(b)(xxvi) of the statute defines war crimes as “conscripting or enlisting children under the age of fifteen in national armed forces or using them to participate actively in hostilities,” and Article 8(2)(e)(vii) of the statute defines war crimes as “conscripting or enlisting children under the age of fifteen into armed

⁵⁰ “Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict,” Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, accessed November 1, 2022, <https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/tools-for-action/opac/>.

forces or groups or using them to participate actively in hostilities” in internal armed conflicts.⁵¹

3. Protocols to the 1949 Geneva Conventions (1977)

The age requirement for enlistment or usage of youth in armed conflict is 15 according to the protocols. Both governmental and non-governmental parties to armed conflicts on the international and domestic levels must adhere to this minimum requirement.

4. The Roméo Dallaire Child Soldiers Initiative

The Roméo Dallaire Child Soldiers Initiative is a global alliance devoted to stopping child soldier recruitment and use. “The Dallaire Initiative undertakes its work through interconnected programmatic pillars: research, training, advocacy, and education. These programmatic pillars ensure [the establishment of] robust and holistic solutions to preventing the recruitment and use of child soldiers.”⁵² As the founder and general overseer of the Child Soldier’s Initiative, Romeo Dallaire and his team have made an indubitable effort to thwart the recruitment and use of child soldiers. In his words,

I will continue working towards this important goal until it is accomplished—but I need your help. I firmly believe that with your cooperation and leadership, we can make a substantial contribution toward ending this crime against humanity. If we can end the use of child soldiers globally, we may go a long way in preventing conflict from erupting in the first place.⁵³

5. The Economic Community of West African States

A declaration by member West African states was made in Abidjan, Cote d’Ivoire, on December 16, 2002 denouncing the use of child soldiers, as reported by IRIN humanitarian news service: “Members of the armed forces of 13 West African countries and

⁵¹ International Criminal Court, *Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court* (The Hague: International Criminal Court, 2002), 6–7, <https://www.icc-cpi.int/sites/default/files/RS-Eng.pdf>.

⁵² Roméo Dallaire Child Soldiers Initiative, *Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers*.

⁵³ Shelly Whitman, Tanya Zayed, and Carl Conradi, *Child Soldiers: A Handbook for Security Sector Actors*, 2nd ed. (Halifax, Canada: Dalhousie University, 2014), i, https://dallaireinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Dallaire_Initiative_Handbook_Preview.pdf.

of non-governmental organizations ended a five-day meeting in Dakar, Senegal, on Saturday with a call for the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to request member states to reaffirm their commitment to international legal standards that protect children affected by armed conflict.”⁵⁴ Similarly, this declaration was followed by the “ECOWAS’ Accra Declaration on War Affected Children of April 2000, in which regional states agreed to incorporate children’s rights and the protection of children in armed conflicts into training programs for the military and other security forces.”⁵⁵ This declaration, for further clarity, is a result of two countries, Sierra Leone and Liberia, and their past civil wars that involved more participation of child soldiers. Moreover, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and Optional Protocol to the CRC on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict (2002) also affirmed that children’s rights are on the military agenda.⁵⁶

6. The Africa Union Charter on The Rights and Welfare of the Child

The Africa Union Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (1990), Article 22 states the following:

Parties to this Charter shall undertake to respect and ensure respect for rules of international humanitarian law applicable in armed conflict that affect the child.⁵⁷

Parties to the present Charter shall take all necessary measures to ensure that no child shall take a direct part in hostilities and refrain from recruiting any child.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ “West Africa: Putting Children’s Rights on the Military Agenda,” ReliefWeb News and Press Releases, December 16, 2002, <https://reliefweb.int/report/guinea/west-africa-putting-childrens-rights-military-agenda>.

⁵⁵ UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

⁵⁶ UN Secretary General, *Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)*; “Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict,” General Assembly resolution A/RES/54/263, May 25, 2000, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/optional-protocol-convention-rights-child-involvement-children>.

⁵⁷ African Union, *African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child* (Addis Ababa, Ethiopia: African Union, 1999), Article 22, section 1, <https://au.int/en/treaties/african-charter-rights-and-welfare-child>.

⁵⁸ African Union, Article 22, section 2.

Parties to the present Charter shall, in accordance with their obligations under international humanitarian law, protect the civilian population in armed conflicts and shall take all feasible measures to ensure the protection and care of children who are affected by armed conflict. Such rules shall also apply to children in situations of internal armed conflicts, tension, and strife.⁵⁹

This chapter was a commitment made by states to maintain their obligations of preventing children from the atrocities of armed conflicts.

7. Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and The Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers

These principles vehemently advocate for the inclusion of suitable child protection clauses, such as the prohibition of using and recruiting children as troops, in all UN peacekeeping mandates, including those for regional peacekeeping operations.⁶⁰

Also, they include several resolutions condemning the enlistment and use of children in conflicts, which have also been passed by the UN Security Council. Resolutions 1261 (1999), 1314 (2000), 1379 (2001), 1460 (2003), 1539 (2004), and 1612 (2005).

The issue of child soldiers continues to be a problem around the world, despite the passage of many declarations and laws over the years; most conflicts involving the recruitment and deployment of child soldiers are on the rise because this is a new sort of tactic for armed groups. And because of this, it has become challenging for most international agencies and non-governmental organization (NGO) like the Romeo Dallaire Child Soldiers Initiative to address the root causes of child soldiering or stop the recruiting loop. That notwithstanding, the laws just mentioned have had some effect on the protection of children involved in armed conflict by establishing international courts. Following the International Criminal Court's (ICC) 2012 conviction of the leader of a Congolese armed

⁵⁹ African Union, Article 22. section 3.

⁶⁰ Global Affairs Canada, *Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers* (Ottawa, Canada: Global Affairs Canada, 2019), https://www.international.gc.ca/world-monde/issues_developpement-enjeux_developpement/human_rights-droits_homme/principles-vancouver-principes-pledge-engageons.aspx?lang=eng.

group for using children in armed conflict, the Director of Amnesty International’s Law and Policy Program, Michael Bochenek, has observed, “Today’s verdict will give pause to those around the world who commit the horrific crime of using and abusing children both on and off the battlefield.”⁶¹ This statement acknowledged a key success and sign of hope in the international community’s efforts to end the impunity that these individuals have experienced for crimes involving the recruitment and use of child soldiers, which national authorities have repeatedly neglected to pursue and prosecute. The ICC and other courts can intervene to prosecute them, as seen by this guilty verdict as well as the recent trials of Thomas Lubanga (14 years, ICC) and Charles Taylor (50 years, Special Court for Sierra Leone).⁶²

These cases were showcased to prove the effectiveness of international law, but how does this help UN peacekeepers or other military operations to interact with child soldiers on ethical or fair grounds? In addition to international declarations and laws, the international community and NGOs have made some efforts to provide training UN peacekeepers and some militaries to improve their interactions with child soldiers.

B. MEASURES ADOPTED BY THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY FOR SECURITY SECTOR ACTORS INCLUDING PEACEKEEPERS TO MINIMIZE THE RISK

Over the past few years, numerous measures have been adopted by the international community based on security sector considerations. Among many international organizations and advocacy agencies addressing the child soldier phenomenon is the previously mentioned Romeo Dallaire Child Soldier’s Initiative. This organization is certain that addressing the problem of child soldiers must be viewed as a matter of security and that security sector actors must be included in the solution. To better safeguard children from recruitment around the world, the organization has adopted training as one of its tools as a preventive-oriented approach. Some armies, including the army of Sierra Leone, in which this author serves, have benefited from this training because Sierra Leone has experienced

⁶¹ “Landmark ICC Verdict over Use of Child Soldiers,” Amnesty International, March 14, 2012, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/press-release/2012/03/landmark-icc-verdict-over-use-child-soldiers/>.

⁶² Amnesty International.

armed conflict. One of the main reasons for this research is to determine whether this same training is sufficient to prepare UN and non-UN peacekeepers for and help them adjust their tactics in dealing with well-armed, often drugged child soldiers; when the child soldier kills you it brings scorn and disgrace, but if you kill the child soldier it is a no-win situation. Though the introduction of the training has created changes by preparing the minds of peacekeeping troops, the challenges for peacekeepers interacting with child soldiers are still there.

The training has only concentrated on post-war environments, but what of those armies who have not experienced this new form of warfare tactic used by armed groups? Although this study focuses on UN peacekeepers and other military operations, it should be noted here that the author views this training as orienting UN peacekeepers emerging from different armies. There is a need for armies around the world to compose another doctrine that will be incorporated into their basic training programs to address this phenomenon.

Additionally, the provision in the Vancouver Principles for UN peacekeepers to be trained before deployment was another preventive strategy implemented by the international community to orient peacekeepers' minds. The Vancouver Principles are a collection of political commitments focused on child protection in peacekeeping in all stages of a conflict cycle. They consist of 17 guiding principles to prevent armed forces and armed groups from enlisting and employing children as soldiers.⁶³ The provision is to affirm that, when peacekeepers are better prepared for such a scenario, armed groups are less likely to see tactical advantages in recruiting children. This approach reduces the pressure on armed groups to recruit child soldiers.⁶⁴ Another support would be for some professional and developed armies to prepare policies that outline considerations related to our military operations that will involve child soldiers, but the "integral" part would rely on military intelligence gathering.⁶⁵ But considering the experiences of British troops, UN peacekeepers, and armies who have encountered child soldiers during conflicts like Sierra

⁶³ Global Affairs Canada, *Vancouver Principles*.

⁶⁴ Global Affairs Canada.

⁶⁵ N.E. Mang, *Child Soldiers: Re-Framing the Canadian Armed Forces Approach* (Toronto: Canadian Forces College, 2017), <https://www.cfc.forces.gc.ca/259/290/402/305/mang.pdf>.

Leone's civil war (studied in the next chapter) is this enough for peacekeepers or foreign militaries to interact safely and effectively with child soldiers? As Dallaire has assessed: "But our peacekeepers, facing child soldiers in the field, are told that they just need to do their jobs, trust their training, keep their focus on the mission, and apply the rules of engagement. That does not seem to me to be all that we need to tell them."⁶⁶ In this author's opinion, it will be difficult for peacekeepers (mature soldiers) to yield during high-risk interactions where firearms are present, and nobody would like to be a victim of circumstance as happened with the British patrol team in Sierra Leone who were taken hostage by child soldiers at their checkpoint when the troops failed to fight back because their opponents were children. This led to a conundrum for the British patrol team who became victims in their interactions with child soldiers: did they get accurate information or intelligence about the child soldiers' activities, or did they ignore and underestimate the capability of the child soldiers they faced?

These questions point to the importance of intelligence and situational awareness in preparing for such encounters. With that in mind, intelligence collection is another effort emphasized by the UN to guide and provide situational awareness for peace support operations that will enable troops to know about their adversary's activities. A preventative tool, intelligence products are essential to all military operations, including UN peace support activities because intelligence applies primarily to matters of national security, including defense and foreign policy as well as specific elements of internal and domestic security.⁶⁷ The three mutually reinforcing essential principles of consent, neutrality, and non-use of force make the UN's peacekeeping operation a tool for international peace and security. In essence, only in cases of self-defense do peacekeeping operations consider pursuing opponents. On the other hand, UN peace support operations only maintain defensive actions and not offensive actions.

⁶⁶ Roméo Dallaire, *They Fight like Soldiers, They Die like Children: The Global Quest to Eradicate the Use of Child Soldiers* (New York: Walker & Company, 2011), 185.

⁶⁷ Mark M. Lowenthal, *Intelligence from Secrets to Policy*, 8th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: CQ Press, 2020), 5.

Conversely, in accordance with the peacekeeping operations guidelines of the United Nations, peacekeeping operations may also employ force at the tactical level, with the authority of the Security Council, to defend themselves and their mandate, especially in cases when the state is unable to provide security and maintain public order.⁶⁸ So, UN intelligence collection is needed to support its operations; however, in 2017 the Department of Field Support (DFS) and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) released a doctrine on the uses of intelligence in peace operations for the first time.

The doctrine outlines three goals: “support a common operational picture, provide early warning of impending threats, and identify risks and opportunities.”⁶⁹ It also stipulates that all activities pertaining to intelligence must be conducted in accordance with the mandate of the Security Council, the Charter of the United Nations, and the legal principles that govern the operations of peacekeeping organizations. The collection of intelligence within UN operations is different from conventional state-centered intelligence, however, which is based on secrecy and covert methods of information collecting. The UN “[p]eacekeeping intelligence is the non-clandestine acquisition and processing of information by a mission within a directed mission intelligence cycle to meet requirements for decision-making and to inform operations related to the safe and effective implementation of the Security Council mandate.”⁷⁰ This is the dilemma within the UN intelligence collection, which is meant to guide peace support operations and at the same time maintain its neutrality and absolutely decline the traditional form of intelligence gathering. Nonetheless, UN intelligence follows the traditional intelligence cycle and steps and is further structured to direct and oversee the peacekeeping intelligence cycle within the mission.⁷¹ Despite the fact that the United Nations provides intelligence assistance for peacekeeping operations, it may be difficult for peacekeepers to function at the tactical level,

⁶⁸ UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations, *United Nations Peacekeeping Operations*, 19.

⁶⁹ UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations, *Policy: Peacekeeping Intelligence*, Ref. 2017.07 (New York: UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations, 2017), 2, <https://www.confluxcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/2017.07-Peacekeeping-Intelligence-Policy.pdf>.

⁷⁰ UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations, 1.

⁷¹ UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations, 9.

especially when confronting child soldiers. The peacekeeping intelligence process must be guided by overarching principles, oversight, other complex methods of obtaining intelligence, and the lack of analyst capability for leaders in the field. These factors, however, often result in the loss of reliable intelligence for peacekeepers.

Preventing and resolving conflict and maintaining peace are the most effective means of child protection. The international community must develop more effective strategies for exerting pressure on the parties to the conflict and for highlighting the devastating effects of war on children's futures and the well-being of communities.

C. SUMMARY

This chapter highlighted the efforts undertaken by the international community to ensure the prevention of the recruitment and use of child soldiers by armed groups. The recruitment and use of child soldiers are not limited to non-state actors but include national armies that recruit individuals younger than 18 years. However, state armies are bound by international treaties and laws not to put any person younger than 18 on the battlefield while non-state actors are not similarly constrained because their command structure is beyond the treaties. Other statutes of the international community that were mentioned to assert the level of effectiveness of the law are the penal codes instituted by the international courts.

Another effort to guide UN peacekeepers and state armies was the training package established by the Vancouver Principles, which was designed for all peacekeepers to undergo before UN peacekeeping operations. Furthermore, a commitment was made by various states to ensure their troops' contributing countries are given the training by the Child Soldiers Initiative on the preventive-oriented approach to facing a situation involving child soldiers. This chapter also looked at the international community's most effective strategy for ensuring child protection, which is to prevent armed conflict. One of the preventive mechanisms and efforts made by the international community is the provision of UN intelligence activities to support peace operations, although providing such support requires improvement by making field commanders capable of analyzing the intelligence. The next chapter examines current military and peacekeeping challenges related to child soldiers and presents a case study of Sierra Leone.

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III. CURRENT MILITARY AND PEACEKEEPING CHALLENGES RELATED TO CHILD SOLDIERS

The increase of child soldiers worldwide has been one of the more shocking trends in civil conflicts. It would have been unlikely just a few decades ago for so many children to participate in an armed conflict in their nation. Despite worldwide attempts to prevent the use of child soldiers, girls and boys are being coerced into battle in at least 14 countries today, including Iraq and Syria, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, South Sudan, and Somalia.

According to estimates from the UN, more than 30 countries primarily use child soldiers during times of armed conflict. Armed groups in particular use child soldiers to perpetrate suffering against people, and many of those who do so are committing crimes against humanity. Thus, this phenomenon poses a challenge for UN and non-UN peacekeeping troops.

Peacekeeping operations are typically the last resort that the military can take in the conflict zone. Peacekeeping operation troops are often inadequately provided with or restricted from some combat supplies based on UN mandates, rules of engagement, and specialized military training to interact with child soldiers, which are factors that exacerbate violence when a dispute breaks out. Furthermore, peacekeeping can turn into war if troop presence is insufficient to stop violations. This has raised issues regarding how peacekeeping missions should be carried out in the presence of child soldiers.

As peacekeeping missions have expanded and children have been recruited as soldiers, the armed forces are struggling to deal with this problem. The United Nations has tried to address this issue by prohibiting its peacekeepers from using force against children and by creating mechanisms to deal with the issue, but the problem persists.

This chapter discusses the pattern of recruitment and use of child soldiers by armed groups. It also examines how UN and non-UN peacekeepers cope with the interactions with child soldiers, especially in Sierra Leone, where a UN and non- UN peacekeeping mission

was held. In this thesis the term interactions refer to how peacekeeping troops face combat and non-combat situations where child soldiers are involved in conflict environments.

A. PEACEKEEPING CHALLENGES INVOLVING CHILD SOLDIERS

As described in the following subsections, there are three levels of risk involved when interacting with child soldiers: low, medium, and high.⁷²

1. Low-Risk Interactions

Low-risk interactions involve unarmed child soldiers, and the use of force is not likely. However, if poorly managed, low risk can escalate into mid or high-risk levels. Low-risk interactions include encountering children loitering, children employed within armed forces or armed groups (which the author had gone through during armed conflict for survivability), and child delinquency, such as throwing rocks at security forces or other outrages.

Children actively seeking to engage the military in violence is a common theme throughout the accounts of troops and armed peacekeepers, regardless of the location of the conflict. Even though stone-throwing is mentioned in numerous battles, it should be seen as a different act of violence with its own meanings and effects on the soldier or peacekeeper. A child's activities must have involved the hostile use of a military weapon or a physical assault on a soldier to be covered by this provision.

2. Mid-Risk Interactions

Mid-risk interactions involve unarmed child soldiers, but the use of force may be required. For example, instances in which children must be protected from prostitution may require the use of force. Similarly, engaging with other organizations to facilitate the extraction or detaining of a child soldier for the conduct of interrogation may result in the use of force.⁷³ These are some sets of interactions normally faced by peacekeepers or

⁷² Whitman, Zayed, and Conradi, *Child Soldiers*, 2012, 52.

⁷³ Whitman, Zayed, and Conradi, *Child Soldiers*, 2012.

military operations within combat theatres that can escalate to a high-risk level that will cost lives.

3. High-Risk Interactions

High-risk interactions occur when armed child soldiers are manning checkpoints and roadblocks, requiring the use of force by opposing forces. Also, child soldiers willingly disengaging from their armed groups, confronting child soldiers in a situation of firefight, or being used for any other purpose that is life threatening, may require the use of force.⁷⁴

These are serious situations usually faced by peacekeeping troops, especially those operating under the mandate of peace enforcement, and place peacekeepers in their dilemma decision cycle. The right to self-defense and military necessity can be applied with the right judgment to achieve mission objectives and the protection of one's life. Dallaire's previously mentioned comment about a moral dilemma applies here. This was a live situation he encountered together with colleague peacekeepers in the Rwanda crisis when interacting with child soldiers in the context of a high-risk level.

What makes war ethical? And how can international law be used as a suitable tool to relieve people, especially peacekeeping troops, from this long-term mental trauma after the conflict? The following case study explores these questions.

B. SIERRA LEONE CIVIL WAR: A CASE STUDY IN THE USE OF CHILD SOLDIERS

There are current rules that govern child soldiers in the laws of armed conflicts (LOAC). According to the "Child Soldiers Initiative Basic Course Handbook," a professional security sector actor must know the rule of law, know the law, teach the law, talk, and act in accordance with the law, assure compliance with the law, and enforce the law.⁷⁵ These are the experiences and contexts where troops often find themselves in a dilemma, by asking if the law is a suitable tool. This can be in defensive and offensive operations, and this is where the LOAC International Humanitarian Law (IHL) applies some

⁷⁴ Whitman, Zayed, and Conradi.

⁷⁵ Whitman, Zayed, and Conradi.

restrictions and is required to be observed by peacekeepers in any of their mandated operations.

The Sierra Leone situation, which provides evidence of how UN/non-UN peacekeepers experienced strained interactions with child soldiers, contributed to the nexus of this research. This crisis in Sierra Leone attracted the attention of many scholars to the child soldier's phenomenon. One renowned incident like the hostage crisis (discussed later in this chapter) demonstrated what can happen when peacekeepers like the ECOMOG (the ECOWAS Monitoring Group), consisting of Indian and British military peacekeepers, runs into child soldiers. In the background on Sierra Leone, the civil war era is used as a case study wherein these peacekeepers interacted with or faced child soldiers during the armed conflict.

1. Background to the Sierra Leone Conflict

The Sierra Leone Civil War (1991–2002) began when the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) and Charles Taylor's National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) intervened to remove the Joseph Momoh administration. The ensuing civil war consumed the nation for 11 years, claimed 50,000 lives, and left the populace behind.⁷⁶

The RUF seized control of sizable areas in eastern and southern Sierra Leone, which were rich in extracted resources like diamonds, in the embryonic stage of the conflict, according to Arthur Abraham.⁷⁷ He further argues that the civil war precipitated the National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC) to stage a military coup d'état in April 1992 because of the government's poor reaction to the RUF and the disruption of government diamond production.⁷⁸ The Sierra Leone Army (SLA) had succeeded in driving the RUF rebels back to the Liberian border by the end of 1993, but the RUF bounced back and fighting persisted. To defeat the RUF, a South African-based private military firm named

⁷⁶ Lansana Gberie, *A Dirty War in West Africa: The RUF and the Destruction of Sierra Leone* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2005), 6.

⁷⁷ Arthur Abraham, "State Complicity as a Factor in Perpetuating the Sierra Leone Civil War," in *Between Democracy and Terror: The Sierra Leone Civil War*, ed. Ibrahim Abdullah (Dakar, Senegal: Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa, 2004), 104–20.

⁷⁸ Abraham.

Executive Outcomes (EO) was engaged in March 1995. In March 1996, Sierra Leone ushered in an elected civilian administration, and the retreating RUF ratified the Abidjan Peace Accord. Before the agreement could be put into effect, the government canceled its contract with EO under pressure from the UN, and hostilities resumed.⁷⁹

Disgruntled army officers attempted a coup in May 1997 and created the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) as Sierra Leone's new government. With little opposition, the AFRC and the RUF combined to take Freetown. The war was deemed over by the new administration, headed by Johnny Paul Koroma. Following the news, there was a flurry of theft, rape, and killing. Meanwhile, ECOMOG forces intervened and retook Freetown on behalf of the government in response to the shock that the civilian government had been overthrown, but they encountered more difficulty in pacifying the outlying districts.

World leaders moved diplomatically to support RUF-government talks in January 1999. The outcome was the Lomé Peace Accord, which was signed on March 27, 1999. In exchange for an end to hostilities and the deployment of a UN peacekeeping force to oversee the disarmament process, Lomé granted RUF commander Foday Sankoh the vice presidency and put him in charge over Sierra Leone's diamond mines. As a result of the RUF's patchy and slow participation in the disarmament process, the rebels were once more moving on to Freetown by May 2000.⁸⁰

To help President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah's shaky administration, the United Kingdom stated its intention to intervene when the UN mission began to falter. British Operation Palliser was able to finally defeat the RUF and take control of Freetown with the aid of a renewed UN mandate and Guinean air support. President Kabbah proclaimed the end of the Sierra Leone Civil War on February 18, 2002, but because of the child soldiers' involvement in this war, it created lots of challenges for peacekeepers and foreign troops before the actualization of the peace process.

⁷⁹ Abraham, 118.

⁸⁰ Arthur Abraham, "The Elusive Quest for Peace: From Abidjan to Lome," in *Between Democracy and Terror: The Sierra Leone Civil War*, ed. Ibrahim Abdullah (Dakar, Senegal: Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa, 2004), 214–17.

2. Child Soldiers in the Sierra Leone Civil War

Forced recruitment was frequent in Sierra Leone during the war, and “abducted child soldiers [were] obliged to accomplish responsibilities across the entire spectrum of military functions” because of their extensive “socialization into violence.”⁸¹ Peacekeeping forces had to cope not just with rebel groups but with a sizable number of child combatants. Rebel groups like the West Side Boys (WSB) employed the Small Boys Unit (SBU), an all-youth force. Young people were frequently recruited by armed groups to increase their numbers or commit crimes against civilians.

In Sierra Leone, many coercively recruited adolescents were given alcohol or narcotics by their leaders to ensure they followed orders. To decrease children’s defenses and promote aggression, all armed groups adopted the practice of giving children drugs under duress, according to a 2008 report by the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers. In the years that followed the conflict, many young people developed drug addictions, which were accompanied by psychological and other health problems.⁸² This was a strategy for armed groups and non-state actors to maximize their strength in terms of causing havoc during the conflict. Child soldiers were used as frontline fighters, spies, suicide bombers, and so on (refer to the Paris Principles quoted later). The previously mentioned RUF child soldiers *inter alia* stated that most of the havoc and extreme suffering caused to the civilian populace and by extension to UN peacekeepers and other foreign troops were perpetrated by child soldiers.⁸³ These roles of the child soldiers were some of the strategies of RUF to incapacitate the regime at that time. Professional foreign troops including the UN peacekeepers were trapped in this interactive turmoil with child soldiers throughout the conflict in Sierra Leone.

⁸¹ A. B. Zack-Williams, “Child Soldiers in the Civil War in Sierra Leone,” *Review of African Political Economy* 28, no. 87 (2001): 80, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4006694>.

⁸² Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, *Child Soldiers: Global Report 2008* (London: Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, 2008), 299.

⁸³ UN International Children’s Emergency Fund, *The Paris Principles*, 7.

3. Child Soldiers and Peacekeeping Forces in the Sierra Leone Civil War

Based on this author's own experience in the Sierra Leone civil war, the peacekeeping troops—non-UN peacekeepers from the West Africa regional body's and ECOMOG's operation in the Sierra Leone crisis—were seen as complete violators of human rights, the IHL, and committers of war crimes and crimes against humanity even though they were operating as peacekeepers. This author noticed that well-trained and professional armies should always exercise restraint in executing their tasks under all conditions. But the question remains to what extent should restraint be maintained to keep troops' lives from being jeopardized? During the ECOMOG operation, most atrocities or violations committed by peacekeepers were due to fear and lack of thorough supervision, and the *jus in bello* was ignored. At first, they were seen as heroes, but a documentary called "Cry Freetown," which referred to an invasion of the city of Freetown by an opposing armed group, changed that perception.

The producer filmed tactfully, at some points pretending to be favoring the fighting forces' actions, to allow him to carry out his film production. During the battle of Freetown, this armed group conducted extensive recruitment of child soldiers and used children as a human shield, which weakened ECOMOG's powers of retaliation. At this point peacekeepers were seen as professional. However, the international law provided them no support once the armed group had violated it. In fact, the law restricted the peacekeepers' counteraction, and this allowed ECOMOG to cede grounds to opposing armed groups. At some point in the battle, violations mounted, and victims of the conflict were abandoned and left in the middle to decide which side was safer between the warring parties. Both sides kept accusing boys of being enemies, and killing, raping, and maiming were rampant during this period. As foreign troops, ECOMOG did not seem to have strong leadership, and the front-line soldiers were taking what actions they considered necessary for their security and ignoring their fundamental and lofty objectives of achieving peace and security. Many boys who attempted to surrender to ECOMOG were killed openly, and some were accused, and these actions exacerbated and escalated the level of violence and threats of the conflict. When armed groups heard about ECOMOG's cruelty against their members, they too intensified their actions. Even though the situation was bloody, the foreign troops, whose

mission was to install security and peace, perpetrated most of the crimes this author had learned about in the IHL and International Human Rights training.

ECOMOG distrusted the armed groups because they had been tricked by them, so they obstructed any child soldiers' attempts to self-demobilize in hopes of surviving as POWs. The protection of POWs was established under the IHL Geneva Convention III, but those self-demobilizing (meaning they voluntarily and without permission exited their military unit) were not accorded the status and treatment of POWs. The inhuman treatment of some of the boys accused of being rebels was also a violation of international law. That was why the author previously referred to these actions of ECOMOG peacekeepers as cowardly behavior and lacking leadership control; they were supposed to have supervised every action of their troops during the heat of battle. Most of the violations by these armed groups were brought before the ICC and the leaders of these armed groups were prosecuted and punished. But this author did not at any point in time hear a charge against any peacekeeping personnel or their leadership, and this is the weakness of international law and examples of unfairness in the Sierra Leone context.

Before the completion of the civil war conflict, the ECOMOG mission was replaced by the UN peace support operation, UNAMSIL. UN peacekeepers took the conflict to the disarmament stage. It was when UN peacekeepers were embarking on convoy movement and the disarmament process that they also encountered child soldiers at checkpoints and in instances of self-demobilizing child soldiers. Such encounters occurred before the time when the British intervention troops arrived to support the peace process alongside UN peacekeepers. This pattern of interactions with child soldiers continued until the British troops' intervention.

4. Child Soldiers and British Forces in the Sierra Leone Civil War

Due to the region's persistent tensions and bloodshed, Sierra Leone's colonial master, the British, decided to intervene by restoring peace and sanity within the borders of their former colony. They conducted operations and restructuring activities to revive the state political and defense mechanisms on how to secure their territorial integrity.

The British were also collaborating with the UN and regional organizations to enact the sanctions imposed on Liberia for supporting the armed group in Sierra Leone.⁸⁴ Even though they were sent in to help with security operations and offer training, the military was aware of the dangerous environment in which they were being placed. However, British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook said, in 2000,

They [the rebels] would be very wise not to attempt anything that posed any form of threat to our forces. When I say they will not be combat troops, I don't want any misunderstanding by the rebels that these people cannot hit back and cannot hit back hard if they are attacked, and that should be fully understood by the rebels.⁸⁵

The British troops expanded their duties to include both vehicle and foot patrols to protect and reassure the local populace.⁸⁶ The British patrol troops were frequently surrounded by child soldiers while performing these tasks because the child soldiers were also active in the area, either carrying out errands or guarding checkpoints; however, how much intelligence they received about the children's activities before the British troops embarked on the patrol was uncertain.⁸⁷ This was another high-risk interaction with child soldiers wherein arms were always present, and such a situation always reduces or dampens the morale of troops, regardless of their military capabilities.

In August 2000, British soldiers were captured by the WSB and the SBU. This incident changed the nature of British engagement in Sierra Leone and became notorious for the patrol team.

On August 25, 2000, in the Masiaka-Foradugu area, seven British service members, including one member of the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces (RSLAF) patrol team, were kidnapped, and held hostage at a camp run by the WSB and SBU. According to

⁸⁴ Department of Peacekeeping Operations, *Lessons Learned from United Nations Peacekeeping Experiences in Sierra Leone* (New York: UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations, 2003), 6/83.

⁸⁵ Michael Ellison, Richard Norton-Taylor, and Ewen MacAskill, "UN Sees British Forces as Only Hope," *The Guardian*, May 11, 2000, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2000/may/12/sierraleone.unitednations1>.

⁸⁶ Will Fowler, *Certain Death in Sierra Leone: The SAS and Operation Barras 2000* (Oxford, UK: Osprey Publishing, 2010), 9.

⁸⁷ Fowler, 36.

Brigadier Pearson, “It is unclear how a well-armed British patrol could be so readily overpowered by a far less organized, if numerically superior, gang of armed criminals.”⁸⁸ Brigadier Pearson was tasked with preparing a report on how this happened.

Even though the particulars of the kidnapping are still a mystery, it has been alleged that the kidnapers in question belonged to a unit that consisted of drugged-up child soldiers. Discussions of the incident focused heavily on the suspected involvement of the WSB with children, and it was this fact that made it possible to apprehend the British patrol team. According to Ann Scott Tyson, “The squad commander had reportedly refused to open fire on children armed with AK-47s.”⁸⁹ And this author suspect that the patrol team was surprised and wanted to exploit all possible means for peaceful engagement or avoid fighting children with firearms. Also, Paul Kan has claimed, “the patrol was captured and taken hostage when the patrol leader refused to fire on the enemy force which was comprised of drugged boys, of whom the oldest was fifteen and the youngest seven.”⁹⁰ The British soldiers were kept in a camp with child soldiers, some of whom may have been a part of the gang that took them hostage. Emmanuel Fabba, a prisoner who was rescued from the gang’s SBU along with British forces, said that the young militants were always close to the soldiers. These children, some of whom were only ten, outnumbered the adults, said Mr. Fabba.⁹¹ Since so many of the children were under the influence of narcotics and displaying paranoid tendencies, professional soldiers frequently claimed to feel exposed and afraid when they came across child soldiers at checkpoints. The child soldiers were quite aggressive in their positions of authority and treated their work as a game. Lack of adult

⁸⁸ Michael Smith, “Major to Escape Court Martial over Kidnap of Jungle Patrol,” *The Telegraph*, September 15, 2000, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/africaandindianocean/sierraleone/1355567/Major-to-escape-court-martial-over-kidnap-of-jungle-patrol.html>.

⁸⁹ Ann Scott Tyson, “Tough Calls in Child-Soldier Encounters,” *Christian Science Monitor*, June 27, 2002, <https://www.csmonitor.com/2002/0627/p03s01-usmi.html>.

⁹⁰ Paul Rexton Kan, “Conflict in the Veins: Drug Use by Violent Non-State Actors,” in *Blood Sacrifices: Violent Non-State Actors and Dark Magico-Religious*, ed. Robert J. Bunker (Bloomington, IN: Iuniverse Com, 2016), 39.

⁹¹ Philip Sherwell and David Blair, “Kidnapped British Troops Were Made to Beg,” *The Telegraph*, September 17, 2000, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/1355808/Kidnapped-British-troops-were-made-to-beg.html>.

supervision, knowledge of the LOAC, and erratic behavior made these adolescent troops difficult to manage.

The British soldiers' experiences in Sierra Leone represent an early Western military experience with child fighters. And because of the British hostages, a negotiation was attempted but it appeared as though the negotiations failed after two weeks. The demands of the WSB grew more outrageous, and there were worries that the hostages would be executed at any time. operation Barras, a rescue effort, was launched on September 10.⁹² Though the realization of operation Barras precipitated the achievement of the UN peacekeeping mission in Sierra Leone, it negatively impacted on the British Defense budget, which could constrain future decision-making on rescue or peace operations. This is an argument for improving all military doctrine in terms of how to handle interactions with child soldiers to avoid unbudgeted expenditures and save the lives of peacekeepers.

C. Summary

These days children and adolescents can be forced to participate in battles as direct soldiers. They are, however, more typically employed as support staff as mentioned in the previous chapter. They may also be forced into providing sexual services. The employment of child soldiers in the fight undermines post-conflict stability, leading to the deployment of peacekeepers when peace resolution is very difficult and more likely to lead to the reoccurrence of conflict.⁹³ Consequently, these conflict zones are where UN peacekeepers and professional foreign troops are likely to interact with child soldiers, and these zones are more challenging.

This chapter has highlighted the brief background of the Sierra Leone civil war wherein the recruitment of child soldiers was obvious. The chapter also examined how UN peacekeepers, including foreign troops, could interact with child soldiers at various stages of conflict and in ways that pose various levels of risk for use of force. The recruitment and

⁹² "Operation Barras," National Army Museum, accessed October 13, 2022, <https://www.nam.ac.uk/explore/operation-barras>.

⁹³ Zorzeta Bakaki and Kaisa Hinkkainen, "Do Child Soldiers Influence UN Peacekeeping?" *International Peacekeeping* 23, no. 4 (2016): 540–67, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13533312.2016.1173512>.

use of child soldiers is always a challenging situation for UN peacekeeping and other military operations, and this raises security concerns and has broader implications for those involved. Hence, the next chapter focuses on how peacekeeping operation personnel's interaction with child soldiers has socially, physically, and psychologically impacted troops and the community.

IV. IMPACTS OF INTERACTIONS WITH CHILD SOLDIERS ON PEACEKEEPERS AND COMMUNITY

The recruitment and use of child soldiers is a clear breach of international rules and legal statutes, as mentioned in Chapter I. However, these standards are frequently disregarded, and the use of child soldiers on battlefields and throughout the conflict environment has been commonplace as illustrated by the case study on Sierra Leone in the previous chapter. As a result, understanding the mechanics of this occurrence is critical for professional armed forces, especially peacekeepers who will encounter them in the future.⁹⁴ The interaction with child soldiers can impact peacekeepers and the community where they operate negatively, especially at first sight, when a child will appear to be an innocent rather than a non-combatant. Strategically, this issue of child soldiers can cause insecurity around peacekeepers' locations or deployment. The use of force or cruelty against children who have committed crimes must be regulated in accordance with UNICEF, article 37, requiring professional soldiers to act rationally.⁹⁵ The interaction with child soldiers is a security concern that needs to be addressed because of the impact it creates on the mission community and the peacekeepers.

In addition, troops contributing countries (TCC) to the UN peacekeeping missions have their own individual rules of engagement (ROE), which should be aligned with the UN mandates, but often they are not. This discrepancy can be critical as the ROE dictate the level of restraint that should be applied before turning to other options such as use of force. Due to a lack of standard operating procedures (SOP), security sector actors engaged in domestic or international operations sometimes receive very little direction on how to respond when they come across child soldiers in a hazardous but non-lethal environment.⁹⁶ These are some of the difficulties with the SOP and ROE that restrict or make it more difficult for professional armies and UN peacekeepers to cope with interactions with child

⁹⁴ Singer, "Caution."

⁹⁵ UNICEF, "United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child," accessed May 14, 2022, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child>.

⁹⁶ Whitman, Zayed, and Conradi, *Child Soldiers*, 2012, 49.

soldiers. The DFS and DPKO have jointly published a doctrine on the use of intelligence gathering in peace operations. The use of sophisticated and modernized tools, including the nature of collecting intelligence related to child soldiers, has made it difficult for tactical commanders and made interactions with child soldiers even trickier.

This chapter explores how peacekeeping operation personnel's interactions with child soldiers have socially, physically, and psychologically impacted troops and the community, especially in the case of Sierra Leone. Peacekeeping troops' interactions with child soldiers whether in defense or in offensive operations, have always been a nightmare situation, notably in armed conflict environments where some of the community has been radicalized on the recruitment and use of child soldiers.

A. PHYSICAL IMPACT ON PEACEKEEPERS AND THE COMMUNITY

This section provides a contextual understanding of the physical impact child soldiers levy on peacekeepers and the community. Although conflict has profound physical, psychological, and social repercussions on children too, the impact on peacekeepers and the community is the focus of this section. Beyond simply the child, war has negative effects on their families, society, the country, and neighbors as well as on their futures and on the peacekeepers who interact with them.

The types of interactions and their associated levels of risk for use of force are highlighted in Chapter II, where it is explained states one level of risk can be escalated and precipitate bad effects. For example, peacekeepers who are charged with protecting children from prostitution might end up exploiting the children themselves. Paradoxically, while non-state actors may be seen as perpetrating crimes against child soldiers, peacekeepers may also, because girls and young women are particularly vulnerable to sexual exploitation and abuse due to the power differential between adult and child soldiers. Sexual exploitation and abuse are defined as “profiting monetarily, socially, or politically from another person’s

sexual exploitation.”⁹⁷ Often peacekeepers around conflict zones do sexually exploit child soldiers through low and mid-risk interactions, wherein peacekeepers offer food or money for sex, which is not different from the actions of non-state actors. And committing sexual violence against children is one of the six grave violations of international law (see Chapter II).

In other scholarly work and my experience in Sierra Leone, there were a lot of acts of violation, especially sexual exploitation. Many parents, because of the hardship created by the war, have allowed UN and non-UN peacekeepers, and other perpetrators, to fraternize with their daughters for their survival. In such instances, peacekeepers, since they were provided with resources such as food and money that solve the pressing needs of human beings, have taken advantage of the situation by offering food and money for sex. In the aftermath, many girls who are now adults were impregnated and left as single parents, some were infected with sexually transmitted diseases (STD), and some died through arms fighting while following peacekeepers in their deployment areas. And most of these peacekeepers originated in states, such as Zambia, Kenya, and Nigeria, spiking that have high rates of infection for HIV and AIDS. According to James Astill, one study indicated that out of 800 of these troops tested for AIDS (mostly Nigerians), approximately 700 were positive—and the test was administered only to those soldiers who were exhibiting symptoms.⁹⁸ Many previously non-infected peacekeepers became infected and transported STDs to their home countries, which increased the mortality rates in those countries. Therefore, there is a need for UN and non-UN peacekeepers to adhere to and maintain zero tolerance of sexual exploitation because it can cripple a state by depleting its human resources.

⁹⁷ Dyan Mazurana and Khristopher Carlson, “The Girl Child and Armed Conflict: Recognizing and Addressing Grave Violations of Girls’ Human Rights” (Expert Group Meeting on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination and Violence against the Girl Child, New York: United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women, 2006), 8, <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/elim-disc-viol-girlchild/ExpertPapers/EP.12%20Mazurana.pdf>.

⁹⁸ James Astill, “War Injects Aids into the Tragedy of Sierra Leone,” *The Guardian*, May 12, 2001, sec. World news, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2001/may/12/aids.sierraleone>.

The Sierra Leone communities are no exception to this menace. UN peacekeepers were making peace but also contributing to hardship. For many of these reasons, the United Nations made strategic efforts to address the effects of war on women, which are discussed in the Security Council Resolution on women, peace, and security as is the need for women's equal participation in bringing an end to hostilities, constructing a lasting peace, providing humanitarian aid, and rebuilding after the war has ended.⁹⁹ The UN deserves credit for trying to address this issue of sexual exploitation. However, does this fully address the issue of sexual exploitation? To some extent, yes; however, there is still a need to address the issue specifically in terms of peacekeepers' interactions with child soldiers, especially because the UN peacekeeping organization will always require male peacekeepers based on the threat of the mission.

Similarly, another example of a high-risk interaction involving a child soldier and UN peacekeepers in Sierra Leone from this author's experience was an attempt at self-demobilization by a female child soldier escaping from her armed group, seeking refuge from the unpleasant bush life. This child soldier had a strong bond with her bush husband, a local rebel commander who later noticed that his bush wife had escaped. He regrouped fighters and chased his wife. The girl arrived safely at the UN peacekeepers' deployment within their domain, but the peacekeepers delayed their processes and did not provide a secure environment while they were trying to figure out the demobilization stages. Unfortunately, the husband arrived at the scene and surprised the peacekeepers with an exchange of gunfire. In the end, three people were reported killed, including a child soldier, one peacekeeper, and one member of the armed group. This example illustrates how high-risk interactions can escalate to life-threatening situations for UN peacekeepers. It is this author's opinion that no secured area was created by the peacekeepers while processing the self-demobilizing child and there was no countermeasures mechanism. The process should have been speedy with maximized security alertness throughout the process.

⁹⁹ UN Security Council, Resolution 1325, *Women and Peace and Security*, S/RES/1325, (October 31, 2000)

Professional soldiers or peacekeepers who have experienced interactions with child soldiers have faced very challenging situations, some of which have cost them their lives. The excessive reactions of many peacekeepers toward child soldiers in interactions ranging from the low to the high-risk level have caused many peacekeeping troops to withdraw from peacekeeping operations prematurely, if they have not been deliberately withdrawn on disciplinary grounds or to maintain clean records. Similarly, as the U.S. Army considers the issue of child soldiers as a factor in asymmetric warfare, the United States Intelligence Community (USIC) is urged to have knowledge on the issues of child soldiers. U.S. forces are unprepared to engage in armed conflict with children, to take them as prisoners of war, or to engage in maneuver-based warfare where there are no established laws or rules of engagement.¹⁰⁰ In support to this, there is the example of an Afghan boy aged 14 who killed an American soldier during operation Enduring Freedom.¹⁰¹ These are some of the physical impacts faced by peacekeepers.

B. PSYCHOLOGICAL AND SOCIAL IMPACTS

The psychological toll of dealing with child troops is obvious.¹⁰² To determine who is a lawful target in war, the just-war theory is used, specifically, the principle of *jus in bello* (the law that governs the way in which warfare is conducted) and discrimination.¹⁰³ Combatants are either combatants or not; there is no middle ground. For this rigorous division, child troops pose a challenge. As Dave Grossman observes, “Being able to identify your victim as a combatant is important to the rationalization that occurs after the kill.”¹⁰⁴ Grossman’s preconceived and simplistic notions about fighters are encapsulated as follows:

¹⁰⁰ Borchini, Lanz, and O’Connell, *Child Soldiers: Implications for U.S. Forces*.

¹⁰¹ Borchini, Lanz, and O’Connell, 11–12.

¹⁰² Alexander D. Mircica et al., “The Psychological Well-Being of Professional Armed Forces Personnel Facing Child Soldiers: A Literature Review,” in *Child Soldiers as the Opposing Force*, ed. Desirée Verweij et al., RTO-TM-HFM-159 (Neuilly-sur-Seine Cedex, France: North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, Research & Technology Organisation, 2011), 5–1 through 5–36, [https://www.sto.nato.int/publications/STO%20Technical%20Reports/RTO-TM-HFM-159/\\$\\$TM-HFM-159-ALL.pdf](https://www.sto.nato.int/publications/STO%20Technical%20Reports/RTO-TM-HFM-159/$$TM-HFM-159-ALL.pdf).

¹⁰³ Alexander Moseley, “Just War Theory,” *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, accessed October 17, 2022, <https://iep.utm.edu/justwar/>.

¹⁰⁴ Dave Grossman, *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society* (Boston: Little & Brown, 1995), 174.

“Even if he kills in self-defense, there is enormous reluctance associated with killing an individual who is not normally associated with relevance or a payoff.”¹⁰⁵ The *jus in bello* premise, however, includes the concepts of proportionality and the amount of force used, in addition to the idea of discriminating. “Proportionality is not primarily applied to combatants, but rather to non-combatants who may be harmed in the course of combat activities directed at the adversary,” according to conventional doctrine.¹⁰⁶ Consequently, the recruitment and use of child soldiers raises questions about proportionality and seriously impact stakeholders in conflicts and peace resolution, including the communities that are concerned.

This situation can erode the morale of troops, and this can cause the ineffectiveness of personnel in a combat zone. From this author’s experience, the Indian UN peacekeepers, or the Indian Battalion (IND-BATT), during the Sierra Leone armed conflict, withdrew entirely from the UN mission immediately after the release of the 222 Indian UN peacekeepers who were taken as hostages by the RUF, which contained more child soldiers.¹⁰⁷ To prevent the situation from escalating to the point where peacekeepers might shoot child soldiers, the IND-BATT tried to de-escalate the situation, and as a result, they became hostages of the RUF until they were rescued. This was a major cause for the dampened morale of the IND-BATT personnel, and this cost the entire UN peacekeeping mission in Sierra Leone embarrassment and more resources to settle the crisis with one of the UN contingents. Given the army’s renowned reputation and capabilities, the Indian contingent’s self-esteem was damaged after it was captured and held hostage by the armed group containing child soldiers. Even though it was the best option for the IND-BATT personnel to yield, they suffered from a deep psychological impact.

All military operations, including peacekeeping, that ended in high-risk interactions with child soldiers damage the emotional well-being of individual peacekeepers and the

¹⁰⁵ Grossman, 174–75.

¹⁰⁶ Tor Arne Berntsen and Bård Mæland, “The Agency of Child Soldiers: Rethinking the Principle of Discrimination,” in *Routledge Handbook of Ethics and War: Just War Theory in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Fritz Allhoff et al., Routledge Handbooks (Milton Park, UK: Routledge, 2013), 280.

¹⁰⁷ Douglas Farah, “UN Rescues Hostages in Sierra Leone,” *The Guardian*, July 19, 2000, sec. World news, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2000/jul/20/sierraleone.unitednations>.

mission itself. Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is an after-effect that professional military personnel must always confront, especially when the lion (peacekeepers) has allowed itself to be defeated by a cat (child soldiers). It is little better, though, when the lion defeats the cat and can feel no sense of victory in defeating such an immature opponent. Allowing oneself to be defeated by the child soldiers is derogatory too, and this is the dilemma faced by peacekeepers. This can sometimes lead to moral injuries, which are referred to as “committing, failing to avoid, witnessing, or becoming aware of acts that violate strongly held moral beliefs and expectations.”¹⁰⁸ Even though the IND-BATT yielded to hostility from the RUF and paid the price of humiliation, torture, and all sorts of molestation just to avoid firefighting with child soldiers, the aftermath was negative. This author’s view is that there are lacunas in guidance and studies on the issues related to peacekeepers’ and child soldiers’ interactions, and these concerns need to be addressed; otherwise, they will continue to create societal threats. So, there is a need for national armies or policymakers to improve the doctrine on military operations. Apart from the Indian army, several Western armies have also experienced these horrible situations involving child soldiers’ in Sierra Leone, such as the British soldiers who were cornered and captured by a rogue militia made up mostly of teenagers, named the West Side Boys, in Sierra Leone in late 2000.

C. IMPACT ON THE COMMUNITY

In most communities that have experienced armed conflicts, parents consented to their children joining armed groups, like some mothers in the case of ISIS in the Mid-East and the Sierra Leone crisis. Even though the international community frowns on the recruitment and use of child soldiers, perpetrators continue to idealize parents who offer their children based on community ties and hope of a better future for the child. In the post-war situation, children who become ex-combatants always have the tendency to be recalcitrant and supportive of violent gangs and civil unrest activities, and they may sometimes be isolated by the populace because of their legacies as child soldiers.

¹⁰⁸ Brett T. Litz et al., “Moral Injury and Moral Repair in War Veterans: A Preliminary Model and Intervention Strategy,” *Clinical Psychology Review* 29, no. 8 (December 2009): 700, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cpr.2009.07.003>.

Peacekeepers find it very challenging to cope in these communities, especially where parents have close ties with non-state actors. In such instances, if the peacekeepers kill any of the children, whether or not in self-defense, the community will glare at the peacekeepers regardless of their emblem of peace. Unclear cooperation will facilitate and maintain peace but will also sabotage peace missions. This situation will continue to exasperate peacekeepers if the recruitment of child soldiers exists. Thus, there is a need for the policymakers and military chain of command to create more strategies and tactics that will mitigate the risk that is involved between the peacekeepers or national armies and the child soldiers.

Another social impact in a community affected by an armed conflict involving child soldiers is the deprivation of education for children while they are within the armed group and seeing themselves as left out after the demobilization processes. It is very common for former child soldiers to have a hard time accepting and making peace with their brutal pasts.¹⁰⁹ The recovery from negative effects on health and education can take years, making this issue crucial for post-conflict economic development. Such harm to human capital could consequently prevent affected countries' productivity and growth for decades given the large number of child ex-combatants. Furthermore, the long-term stability and progress of a society could be jeopardized by any effect military service has on unfairness, violence, or political marginalization.¹¹⁰

In the years immediately following the end of hostilities in Sierra Leone, a few short-term educational and training initiatives were supported by NGOs and foreign governments. These initiatives focused more on empowering former child soldiers with fundamental

¹⁰⁹ N. Boothby, J. Crawford, and J. Halperin, "Mozambique Child Soldier Life Outcome Study: Lessons Learned in Rehabilitation and Reintegration Efforts," *Global Public Health* 1, no. 1 (2006): 87–107, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17441690500324347>.

¹¹⁰ Rational choice theories of conflict suggest that "Weak economic opportunities in turn may serve to exacerbate the conflict if individuals have more to gain from soldiering when peacetime economic opportunities are limited." Patricia Justino, *Violent Conflict and Human Capital Accumulation* (London: Institute of Development Studies, 2011), 10, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.2040-0209.2011.00379_2.x; "Others argue that inequality, perhaps even that arising between combatants and non-combatants, leads to greater discontent and, ultimately, rebellion and turmoil." Christopher Blattman and Jeannie Annan, "Child Combatants in Northern Uganda: Reintegration Myths and Realities," in *Security and Post-Conflict Reconstruction: Dealing with Fighters in the Aftermath of War*, ed. Robert Muggah (London: Routledge, 2008), 118.

literacy, practical life skills, and job training than on reintegrating them into the conventional instructional system. At some point, funders noticed that the program that was designed for child ex-combatants had experienced an influx of non-deserving children. The requirement was set for only those children who had gone through a Disarmament Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) program. This requirement, therefore, discriminated against former female child soldiers, who preferred returning to their communities rather than going through the DDR programs because of shame.¹¹¹ So, most of the Sierra Leonean young females were deprived because they did not participate in DDR programs and were denied access to a variety of resources, including medical care, family reunification services, and psychosocial treatment in addition to school fees and training aid. This was one of the ways child soldiers caused problems in the Sierra Leone community, where most girls who had been soldiers ended up in prostitution to earn a living, and these are possible challenges any state may be exposed to in an armed conflict that involves child soldiers.

D. SUMMARY

This chapter examined how the interactions between the peacekeepers and child soldiers have socially, physically, and psychologically impacted troops and the community. The chapter further outlined some instances or situations that resulted in humiliation, life threats, huge costs in resources, depletion of state human capital, and even threats for states to contribute troops for future UN missions. Also, the chapter looked at why a community allows its children to be recruited by non-state actors serving as disturbances and causing more challenges for peacekeepers. There are all indications that if this child soldier phenomenon is not tackled with global concern, peacekeepers' and communities' interactions with child soldiers will continue to exacerbate challenges. This chapter also showed how international community efforts made so far, can be disrupted, undermine world peace, and increase the spread of diseases that will weaken the health and well-being of affected states.

¹¹¹ Susan McKay and Dyan Mazurana, *Where Are Girls? Girls in Fighting Forces in Northern Uganda, Sierra Leone and Mozambique: Their Lives During and After War* (Montreal: International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development, 2004).

This chapter also explored the gaps that need to be addressed by the policymakers, which is still a security concern for the future of the community and all the stakeholders involved in maintaining peace. The final chapter explores the preventive mechanisms available and offers suggestions and recommendations for policymakers to make rational decisions to reduce the impacts on affected communities and to address the risk that is involved in the interactions between UN peacekeepers and child soldiers.

V. PREVENTING PEACEKEEPING TROOPS FROM INTERACTING WITH CHILD SOLDIERS DURING AND AFTER CONFLICT

The purpose of this thesis was to present empirical evidence that would contribute to the current literature on how UN and non-UN peacekeepers should cope with child soldiers. Considering the social, physical, and psychological impact child soldiers present to peacekeepers and the affected communities both during and after civil conflicts, this study would strengthen deliberations on the issue by focusing on what the UN and non-UN peacekeepers, including Western world militaries, have experienced while interacting with child soldiers.

The literature review in Chapter I revealed clear gaps in the information on interactions between child soldiers and peacekeepers during deployments. Despite continued efforts to address the issue of child soldier recruitment and use, there are obvious indications that armed organizations will continue violating international norms and laws. Moreover, there is also evidence to support allegations that most armies that interact with child soldiers in peacekeeping missions also commit violations against children in armed situations. Most armies contributing to peacekeeping missions also lack effective methods for monitoring and reporting on the six grave violations of human rights highlighted in Chapter I. Another issue investigated was a lack of reliable intelligence and underestimating the presence of child soldiers within the mission area of operations. The issues of the hesitance or overreaction of peacekeepers, as well as the lack of non-tactical conventions on how to handle child soldiers can contribute to PTSD for peacekeepers.

This final chapter of the thesis discusses the benefits of preventing the recruitment and use of child soldiers by both state and non-state armed groups, and how the local community, the state, and the international community can employ these mechanisms. Thereafter, suggestions and recommendations on the preventive mechanisms are discussed to assist policymakers during their decision-making processes related to the risk associated with child soldiers.

A. PREVENTION OF INTERACTIONS WITH CHILD SOLDIERS

Recruiting children is not just a social and economic problem; it is also a security issue that could have long-term repercussions for peace and stability because of the unique advantages children provide in a conflict. There must be concrete measures to prevent the recruitment of children for armed conflict if there is to be any hope of guaranteeing that existing and future conflicts are settled effectively. In her 2000 critical review on child protection, Graça Machel said, “Our collective failure to protect children must be transformed into an opportunity to confront the problems that cause their suffering.”¹¹² The issues of child soldiers have greatly impacted the activities of UN and non-UN peacekeeping missions and often disturb or make the peace process become more challenging for peacekeepers. According to Zorzeta Bakaki and Kaisa Hinkkainen, the United Nations is more likely to label a conflict as “tough” if it involves the use of child soldiers.¹¹³ Consequently, according to Roos Haer and Tobias Böhmelt, it has been argued that employing children as combatants raises the probability of future conflicts.¹¹⁴ Therefore, peacekeepers are more prevalent in confrontations involving child soldiers, and this is why preventive mechanisms must be considered at all levels of decision making.

While the international community is making rigorous efforts to mitigate the recruitment and use of child soldiers, some armies around the world are establishing policies on regulating the actions of their troops in armed conflict. There is a conundrum, however, because some of these armed groups consider using child soldiers a unique ploy, and so tackling this problem requires a strategic approach. There is a dire need for armies, especially peacekeeping troops, to modify these challenging issues in this era of armed conflicts. The humanitarian and retired lieutenant-general of the Canadian Forces Romeo Dallaire summed up the inadequate instruction and minimal guidance given to Canadian

¹¹² Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, *Machel Study 10-Year Strategic Review: Children and Conflict in a Changing World* (New York: UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF), 2009), iv, <https://www.refworld.org/docid/4a389ca92.html>.

¹¹³ Bakaki and Hinkkainen, “Do Child Soldiers Influence UN Peacekeeping?” 542.

¹¹⁴ Roos Haer and Tobias Böhmelt, “Child Soldiers as Time Bombs? Adolescents’ Participation in Rebel Groups and the Recurrence of Armed Conflict,” *European Journal of International Relations* 22, no. 2 (June 2016): 408–36, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066115581910>.

Armed Forces (CAF) members: “Our peacekeepers, facing child soldiers in the field, are told that they just need to do their jobs, trust their training, keep their focus on the mission and apply the rules of engagement. *That doesn’t seem to me to be all that we need to tell them.*”¹¹⁵

In every armed conflict zone, notably in the Sierra Leone civil war, the recruitment and use of child soldiers have become dominant, and there is a likelihood for such conflicts to be prolonged and reoccur within those domains if not properly addressed. Virginia Page Fortna affirms that UN peacekeeping personnel are not randomly assigned to conflicts; rather, they are assigned to those areas where resolution is most difficult, and recurrence is likely.¹¹⁶ And for this reason, UN and non-UN peacekeeping operations will be possible options within conflict localities to maintain world peace.

Therefore, UN peacekeepers will continue to face the burden of interacting with child soldiers. The problem of professional soldiers who are directly or indirectly bound by the responsibility to protect children, but end up exploiting them, has become a serious global concern. It is always the strategy of non-state actors to undermine the political will and support for the operation at home and in the host nation. Consequently, peacekeepers are often compelled to confront child soldiers with destructive force, and the consequences of the hesitance to do so can result in negative media propaganda against peacekeepers and present a dangerous set of circumstances. This will precipitate TCC to lose the hearts and minds campaign at home and abroad. The Indian troops, the British patrol troops, and other peacekeeping contingents in Sierra Leone mentioned in this study yielded when surprised by the presence of children and became hostages who suffered at the hands of armed groups consisting of children, so the peacekeepers would not look like monsters who kill children in the eyes of the world. Such situations might be avoided if peacekeepers have better intelligence and situational awareness. Thus, there is a need for state armies to contribute

¹¹⁵ Dallaire, *They Fight like Soldiers, They Die like Children*, 185. (Emphasis added in the quotation.)

¹¹⁶ Virginia Page Fortna, “Does Peacekeeping Keep Peace? International Intervention and the Duration of Peace after Civil War,” *International Studies Quarterly* 48, no. 2 (2004): 269–92, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3693574>.

troops to UN and non-UN peacekeeping missions to ensure they improve their intelligence gathering and tactics while on operations.

If armed conflicts are free from the challenges of interacting with child soldiers, this will create freedom of action for UN and non-UN peacekeepers and enable them to achieve their mission-specific goals. Until such time, however, armies with exacting standards of behavior and ethics, while executing duties or roles within a peacekeeping environment containing child soldiers, do risk PTSD. The human mind has a wide range of abilities and activities in its ongoing duty of resolving and addressing a wide range of problems. So, the need to improve or establish counseling centers with expertise and professionals who will help to recover the broken minds of the personnel experiencing PTSD is desperately needed.

Politicians have the power to direct the deployment of their military forces. Therefore, their armed forces are required to act in conformity with laws that derive from fundamental human principles, especially in democracies. Thus, moral professionalism must be included while discussing professionalism in a military setting. Peacekeepers serving as a conduit for STDs in Sierra Leone represented a lack of morals and zero tolerance for sexual exploitation of children in armed conflict zones. There is a need for the political wing of every state contributing troops for peacekeeping missions to solidify the rules and regulations surrounding the risks associated with interacting with child soldiers in peacekeeping environments. Also, politicians and military leadership must improve the mechanism of the function of monitoring and reporting perpetrators. Therefore, the suggestions and recommendations highlighted in the following sections will help policymakers and practitioners in their future endeavors.

B. CONCLUSION

Using Sierra Leone's past civil war as a case that involved varieties of UN and non-UN peacekeeping operations, this thesis discussed how child soldiers shape contemporary peace support operations. The study was built upon the social, physical, and psychological impacts suffered by peacekeepers and the communities where child soldiers exist. Future scholarly works might make a valuable contribution to solving these problems by exploring how to improve communication and collaboration as a preventive mechanism. Working

together and sharing information among stakeholders in an armed conflict zone is an advantageous tool that peacekeeping operations should use; indeed, had such a strategy been used in Sierra Leone, the British patrol team most likely would not have been taken as hostages.

The thesis touched on the three levels of interactions (low-risk, mid-risk, and high-risk) and how these levels can escalate to life-threatening situations. Also, it explored how peacekeepers, because of the lack of a zero-tolerance policy, perpetrated six grave human rights violations. The presence of and use of children in mission areas leads to acts of sexual exploitation and the spreading of STDs among peacekeepers and in the community. This research identified key international statutes as measures to prevent the recruitment and employment of child soldiers. It was discovered that children can be manipulated to commit dangerous actions, and this thesis analyzed the experiences of UN and non-UN peacekeeping troops to demonstrate how hostile child soldiers can have ramifications for peace support operations and serve as a threat to professional armed forces.

This research work also suggested the study of peace support operations security by highlighting the importance of considering children as a serious security issue that may present moral and practical dilemmas for peacekeepers in the same operating terrain. To that end, further studies will need to explore the tactics or doctrines that could be implemented into military training programs to prevent interactions with children as perpetrators to peacekeepers.

C. RECOMMENDATIONS

Although this thesis explored the matter through the eyes of the UN and non-UN peacekeepers, it is crucial to recognize that the issue of interacting with child soldiers impacts a variety of professional national military. As a result, the debates and recommendations in this section are based on proposals from scholarly publications, international bodies, and this author's own study findings. Because this thesis focuses on peacekeeping operations, it offers a series of recommendations to help prevent or mitigate peacekeepers' interactions with child soldiers and the abuse of children in armed conflict areas.

1. Education and Military Training

The Vancouver Convention is a recent treaty signed by states which made provisions to ensure all UN peacekeeping-contributing countries must implement pre-deployment training. Although the convention was signed by most states for compliance, most Western armies like those of Great Britain and the United States do not contribute troops or contribute only minimally to UN peacekeeping operations. So, much of the content in this convention is not used by the Western armies who conduct non-UN peacekeeping operations like operation Barras in Sierra Leone. Also, military basic training is the initial stage of a military career for the purpose of imparting knowledge to military personnel. As the saying goes, “Train up a child the way he/she will grow, and when he/she grows up he/she will not depart from it.” It is recommended that policymakers should ensure that the conventions which contain the Child Soldiers Initiative training programs must be incorporated into all armies’ basic military education and training so that it is not biased only toward UN peacekeepers. They must also ensure to improve UN peacekeeping pre-deployment training by conducting evaluation exercises to affirm peacekeepers’ knowledge capabilities for deployment.

Also, policymakers should make provisions to print out booklets that contain all rules and regulations presented in simple language and that they must be issued to peacekeepers to serve as reminders while on peace operations.

2. Improve Peacekeeping Intelligence-gathering Strategies

If using Mark Lowenthal’s definition of national security as including matters related to foreign policy, intelligence products are crucial to all military operations, including UN peacekeeping.¹¹⁷ Most peacekeepers, even those who are up to date in their training, do not do well with child soldiers’ roles and how they have been deployed to armed groups. Therefore, it is crucial that any training must be grounded in actual scenarios in order to improve on the framework and dealing with the child soldiers, and other political education training experience should be included to raise awareness of the problem.

¹¹⁷ Lowenthal, *Intelligence from Secrets to Policy*, 5.

Every advanced army must now take into consideration child soldiers' issues while preparing military operational orders, so troops should have awareness of the ground. Education about intelligence will provides soldiers with a lot of information about the places they are going to be stationed, so they could include talks about children in these regions.¹¹⁸ Intelligence insights like these brief soldiers on the history and customs of the place they will soon be called to defend. The information about the British patrol team captured as hostages in Sierra Leone, though there is no literature to show that intelligence was insufficient before they set out for their patrol, makes it clear that the troops were not adequately informed about the ground deploying child soldiers, and that the troops underestimated the capabilities of an armed group of underage soldiers. It is recommended that decision making should ensure peacekeepers do not underestimate the capabilities of child soldiers and that troops must improve on their intelligence gathering to include considerations related to child soldiers before moving out for patrols.

UN DPKO should ensure field commanders have a thorough understanding of the usage of modern techniques and equipment to collect intelligence in the field. Also, conducting training during peace support operations involves an awareness that children might be used to gather intelligence on adversaries.

3. Improve Communication and Emphasize Its Importance

In order to completely integrate peacekeepers' efforts into their UN mission, it is important to improve communication by collaborating with other security agencies, government players, non-governmental actors, and community actors through exchanging information, sharing resources, coordinating strategic objectives, and co-implementing programs. Doing so will help to prevent or mitigate the interaction between peacekeepers and child soldiers.

Although children deserve special protection and must be treated as innocent persons, peacekeepers must be always conscientious and discourage the loitering of children around their deployments. Peacekeepers must also remember that they are not aid workers.

¹¹⁸ Borchini, Lanz, and O'Connell, *Child Soldiers: Implications for U.S. Forces*, 29.

In this author's experience in Sierra Leone during the armed conflict, children would visit multiple locations in their quest for food and jobs for a cash reward. During this period, peacekeepers became vulnerable because most of the children were related to members of the armed groups, and they could well have been spies. To avoid this threat, peacekeepers must make all efforts to reproach children in armed conflict zones who reach peacekeeper locations, and they should report these children to child protection officers, their community leaders, or the local police. Such communication is the essence of collaboration and improving working relationships with other agencies.

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