



CHILD RECRUITMENT AND ABUSE IN STRATEGIES OF TERRORIST ORGANIZATIONS

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Over the past few years, child recruitment and abuse has been notoriously increasing across the world by extremist and terrorist groups. Many international reports have highlighted imminent threats. The article discusses child recruitment and abuse by violent extremist groups and terrorist organizations, bringing to focus religious or ethnic factors, criminal motives, and the pretexts behind such practices.

Ubiquitous Child Abuse

UN reports state that Boko Haram recruited and exploited about 8,000 children in Nigeria between 2009 and 2018. In 2015, the United Nations monitored about 275 cases of children recruited by ISIS in Syria. In Somalia, a UN report revealed that the Mujahideen Youth Movement recruited and exploited up to 2,228 children and 72 girls in 2018. Terrorist groups in the Central African Republic exploited 291 children and in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, 1,049 children. In Yemen, the Arab-European Forum for Human Rights presented in the 42 session of the United Nations Human Rights Council, held in May 2020 in Geneva, Switzerland, a memorandum revealing the recruitment of armed groups of about 23,000 Yemeni children in the country. The African Sahel region still records continued recruitment of children into terrorist organizations. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) documented the killing of 150 children in the first two quarters of 2019.

As revealed by a research paper published by the Middle East Institute, the Iranian BASIJ Organization, established in the wake of the outbreak of the Islamic Revolution and came under the official authority of the Revolutionary Guards in 2007, recruits and trains fighters, including children, in the Revolutionary Guards. According to the US Treasury official website, in addition to Iranian citizens, the BASIJ also recruits Afghan immigrants, including children as young as 14 to join the FATEMIYOUN Brigade, an armed fighting group under the control of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards in Syria. It

recruits others into the ZAINABIYOUN Brigade, a fighting group that includes Pakistani nationals who are also under the control of the Revolutionary Guards in Syria.

The report of the General Inspection Department of the US Department of Defense (Pentagon) indicates that the Syrian Democratic Forces, which are dominated by the YPG or alternatively PKK Party, still recruit children after forcibly detaining them from refugee camps in northeastern Syria.

Child Recruitment Motives

Extremist and terrorist organizations seek to attract children, who well display purity of thought and innocence of instinct to inflame their feelings and instill the inevitability and sanctity of fighting in their mindset, and the passion for violence deep in their hearts, so that they would later be dropped into the battlefields and become docile, sycophantic and obsequious killing agents.

Terrorist groups exploit children and adolescents because it is easier to indoctrinate them and less likely to reject and resist. They are more willing and subservient to accept the ideology of hate, be trained in programs of violence, and undergo brainwashing in special camps. This can be done by watching the video footages of executions and killings, while urging them to carry out such terrorist operations, which proves their aggression and brutality, and makes them more loyal and obedient in the implementation of orders, turning them into human suicide bombs.

In addition, children do not cause suspicious behaviors, and their exploitation often leads to unobtrusive tasks. By the same token, children are financially paid much less than men and women.

Children are deceived by various means, such as gifts, inviting them to advocacy camps, providing them with game weapons. Children and orphans may be kidnapped and recruited without the knowledge of their parents and guardians. Terrorist organizations readily recruit children online and via social networking websites, where children are an easy prey when engaged searching for entertainment and exploration.

Extremist and terrorist organizations use ideological, ideological, religious, ethnic and fanatical drivers as pretexts to justify their recruitment and exploitation of children. After recruitment, such terrorist organizations teach and train them to fight. Several cohorts of boys become fully groomed and ready to fight, as young as 16 years old; they are often recruited into groups of suicide agents or spies; their ability to move and hide

covertly and learn about the ins and outs on the ground, or being involved in supportive missions, such as couriers and informants.

ISIS and Caliphate Cubs

In jihad that has become more onerous, labyrinthine and octopus-like reality, the term CUBS OF THE CALIPHATE used by ISIS describes the candidates for recruitment through many methods. United Nations reports indicate that ISIS is the most recruiting and exploiting of children; ISIS has recruited four thousand children in Syria since it rose to prominence in Raqqa at the end of August of 2014.

ISIS instrumentalized children as spies, agents, and scouts, and used them to plant bombs and mines, grooming some into becoming fighters and suicide bombers. The ISIS propaganda videos show children beheading and shooting prisoners down. Some children have been indoctrinated by ISIS for years in special courses held on clandestine camps for hand-making explosives and honing their fighting skills to perfection.

The labyrinth of CUBS OF THE CALIPHATE still echoes and is rife in circles, especially with many children detained in overcrowded centers in Syria, such as Al-Hol Camp, or in Iraq in Nineveh. Peter Neumann, Director of the International Center for the Study of Radicalization at King's College London, states that at least 13,000 foreign followers of ISIS are being held in Syria, including 12,000 women and children. Also 1,400 children detained in Iraq. However, several countries, including Russia, Kosovo, Kazakhstan, Indonesia and France, have successfully repatriated some of their citizens. While other countries have preferred to separate children from extremist parents, placing them with their relatives, or in foster homes or put up for adoption; mothers often refuse to be separated from their children.

Some countries, such as Jordan, have required that children born in the so-called Caliphate undergo a DNA test to prove their parentage, and then prove their nationality, before returning to their home countries. Other countries, such as Tunisia, have refused to repatriate their citizens, leaving at least 200 Tunisian children and 100 women in Syria and Libya, according to Human Rights Watch.

Joseph Kony

Historically, the northern region of Uganda inhabited by the Acholi people, steeped in symbols and spiritual values, and deeply imbued with spirits, ghosts and hidden forces, witnessed the emergence of many insurgencies; the most notorious is the Holy Spirit

Movement, which was founded by Alice Lucina in 1985, a woman who claimed that her body was reincarnated the spirit of an Italian who was killed in the First World War, and that she had supernatural abilities; Alice Lucina claimed the ability to treat patients. She immediately announced the establishment of the Holy Spirit Movement, which adopted a general belief that the Acholi people were threatened with demise, and that maintaining their survival required the establishment of a supernatural power from the Acholi.

Inspired by such movements, Joseph Kony established the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in 1988, with ideologies and beliefs that shadowed Kony's mindset. Sometimes, the LRA believes in Christianity and rejects magic and voodoo, and sometimes it practices other religious rituals. On the whole, the LRA represents a syncretic mixture of mysticism, Acholi nationalism and Christian fundamentalism; it seeks to overthrow the Ugandan regime, claims to establish a theocratic state based on Acholi traditions, the provisions of the Bible and the Ten Commandments mentioned in the Bibles. The movement is now classified as a global terrorist organization.

Kony claimed to be a prophet, and that he speaks in the name of the Lord, and that he is a shaman who is visited by spirits! While he deceptively decoys people, others see him as an accomplished liar and charlatan, leading a group of boys and fanatics, and combining the contradictions of religious mysticism, the thinking of a seasoned gangster, and the ruthlessness of bloodthirsty tribal hate. Despite international and regional efforts to catch him, he is still at large today.

The LRA has suffered many defections and repeated defeats, nonetheless it still attacks civilians in villages in the border areas of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Central African Republic, South Sudan and Sudan. Although the LRA is not considered today a major and dangerous military threat, its affiliated cells, ubiquitously rampant in many areas, still support kidnap children. In 2019, the terrorist insurgents kidnapped 222 people, including dozens of children.

In 2012, millions learnt about the Ugandan LRA in a movie that had more than 100 million views, made by the American non-profit organization Invisible Children, that addresses the children recruited by the LRA and Joseph Kony, one of the most notorious leaders of internecine wars and despicable massacres.

A UN report published in 2013 reveals that the LRA claimed the lives of more than 100,000 people in the last twenty-five years, kidnapping and enslaving between 60,000

and 100,000 children to recruit males (some sources state that about 80% of the Ugandan LRA are kidnapped children), or to sexually exploit females. The United Nations report also states that about two and a half million citizens were forced to flee and escape the oppression of the Ugandan LRA to live in the camps, relying on international humanitarian aid.

The LRA still promotes recruitment, coercion and indoctrination of children with hate speech and extremism. Children are often kidnapped from villages, where they are brutally recruited. New developments and increased military pressures have come into play to reduce the LRA's violence; a shift was made to the religious narrative that the movement has maintained over the past decades. Joseph Kony and his fugitive comrades turned from the doctrine of murder in the name of Lord to a murderous and criminal motive to survive.

Kony may not want to give up, but others may, and yet many of them are frustrated and afraid to do so because according to the accounts made by the dissidents and defectors, they no longer knew where their homes were or where they were going! Others fear retaliatory reactions possibly to be staged by the locals or the national civilian and military forces.

At the present time, the LRA remains a lethal force that hinders security and stability. Perhaps, the ubiquity of the LRA in the forests of the Republic of the Congo, parts of southern Sudan, and the Central African Republic keeps the populations of these countries in constant fear, reduces them helpless to practice their agricultural business as livelihoods and their everyday life activities. During the past two years or so, food production in these areas has been severely hampered, and it was previously considered the main breadbasket for a region like South Sudan.

Conclusion

Given the inaction of the international community to provide radical solutions, it seems that child recruitment and exploitation by extremist and terrorist organizations and parties to the conflict will still drag on; it persists as long as such conflicts slip into everyday realities. When children grow stubbornly more aggressive and brutal, feeding on fanatic ideology, it seems that bringing back to track is a chimera; such rehabilitation will require more time and more effort. If governments do not crack down on such criminal practices, present and future generations will capitalize on more crimes,

kidnappings, killings while beheading becomes quite normal. Against a backdrop of ruthless behaviors, the world will grow wilder than is.