Chapter 5
Supporter, Activist, Rebel, Terrorist: Children in Syria

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ABSTRACT

Children have always been a part of the war for millennia but child soldiering is often portrayed as something rather new, as a side product of the Post-Cold War in most of the fragile states in the world. Underdevelopment is a feature of the fragile state and especially political violence is a common figure in such states. This paper argues that, children’s role changes in fragile states, and further focuses on children in Syrian war and their changing role in the society. While the conflict was turning into a war the role of the children both in the society and in the conflict of which increasing tension was turning it into a war. And when the country, one of the fragile states in the world, collapsed, the government lost control and the children took the sides as terrorists. Given the brief information about the changing roles of Syrian children in this dynamically violent environment, this article will examine the transformation of the role of the children in the fragile state Syria.

INTRODUCTION

Interestingly, despite their significant impact as actors, children are rather neglected in the international relations (IR) studies, hence there are not many studies in the literature addressing the very issue of children in war throughoutly. Child soldiers have been around for millennia, looking at the history, the Spartans of ancient

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-2817-3.ch005
Greece, for example, relied heavily on boys who were around seven years old. Later, the British Navy recruited young boys to serve as cabin boys and cannon prepping throughout the 18th and 19th centuries. Also, substantial numbers of children fought on both sides in the U.S. Civil War, from 1861 to 1865 (Gates and Reich, 2009). Nowadays, more and more children are becoming a part of the conflicts. Of the thirty one countries where there were armed conflicts in 1998, 87 per cent used child soldiers below the age of 18 years while 71 per cent used children under the age of 15 (Global Report, 2008).

State failure is always associated with intrastate violence, the rise of non-state actors, an increased lethality of the weapons employed in offensive and defensive combat, a shady trade in small arms, and a reciprocal commerce in illegally mined and exported minerals, timber, narcotics, and women and children--indeed, in anything that will pay for the desired guns and ammunition. Tensions can deteriorate into conflict through a variety of circumstances, such as predatory or fractured leadership, corruption, or unresolved group grievances. Although the reasons for state weakness and failure are complex, underdevelopment is a feature of a fragile state. Especially political violence is a common figure in such states which are incapable of delivering basic public services to their citizens. When tension and violence exists between groups, the state’s ability to provide security and social contract are undermined and further violence may ensue. When the states become “fragile”, human rights can be violated or unevenly protected and children may be a part of conflicts due to the lack of governance. States can do more to end child soldier use via policies and practices on arms transfers and military assistance, and in the design of security sector reform programs but when states become “fragile” what can be done to prevent child soldiers?

This paper will try to develop a comprehensive understanding for the relation/correlation between fragile state and the children in conflicts. More and more children are becoming a part of the conflicts, could this trend be driven by the fact that they live in a fragile state? This article attempts to demonstrate the situation of the children in a fragile state, and as an example Syrian war will be examined. First, the definitions of a fragile state and the fragile state index will be given and Syria’s position in the fragile state index will be discussed. Then the situation of children in conflicts and in war is demonstrated. Finally, a descriptive picture of children in Syrian war will be presented to see their changing role in war and the link between fragile state index and children suffering will be questioned.

From Failed to Fragile: “Fragile State”

“Failed state” is used by, two retired American burocrats, Gerald B. Helman and Steven R. Ratner in their article called “Saving Failed States” in 1992 and according
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