

Chapter 6

Understanding Organizational Efforts Regarding Child Soldiers in Somalia

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ABSTRACT

A child soldier is an individual under 18 years of age who accompanies or is a part of an armed force or group in any capacity, including cooks, porters, messengers, or girls recruited for sexual purposes and forced into marriage. In the case of Somalia, child soldiers have been embroiled in the armed conflict since the fall of Siad Barre's government in the early 1990s. When the government collapsed, armed groups recruited, captured, and forced children to fight opposing groups. Abducted children were forced to spy, scout and recruit, gather explosives, and at times participate in suicide missions. The fear of recruitment and abduction of Somali children by either armed groups, terrorist organizations, or government forces endures today. This chapter will primarily focus on the exploitation of child soldiers by Al-Shabaab and examine the possible solutions that various organizations and programs can implement to restrict the recruitment of child soldiers in Somalia.

INTRODUCTION

A child soldier is an individual under 18 years of age who accompanies or is a part

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of an armed force or group in any capacity, including cooks, porters, messengers, or girls recruited for sexual purposes and forced into marriage (Amnesty International, 2011). In the case of Somalia, child soldiers have been embroiled in the armed conflict since the fall of Siad Barre's government in the early 1990s. When the government collapsed, armed groups recruited, captured, and forced children to fight opposing groups. Abducted children were forced to spy, scout and recruit, gather explosives, and at times participate in suicide missions (Regilme & Spoldi, 2021; Shil, 2011). The fear of recruitment and abduction of Somali children by either armed groups, terrorist organizations, or government forces endures today. According to Action on Armed Violence (2020), military forces and rebel groups recruited 6,143 youths, with Al-Shabaab accounting for 80% of child soldiers (4,910), the Somali National Army for 6% (391), and the Somali police for 2.7% (172). This chapter will primarily focus on the exploitation of child soldiers by Al-Shabaab and examine the possible solutions that various organizations and programs can implement to restrict the recruitment of child soldiers in Somalia.

BACKGROUND

Somalia, the nation with the longest coastline in the mainland African continent, was historically known as an important commercial center. Located in the Horn of Africa, the wealth in gold, ivory, ebony, Blackwood, beeswax, and wild animals made Somalia the center for African, Middle Eastern, and Asian merchants (Joseph & Maruf, 2018). During the European scramble for Africa, Somalia was under British and Italian colonial rule until independence in 1960. By 1969, the military conducted a coup d'état overthrowing the Somali government after the assassination of President Abdirashid Ali Shermarke. During this time, Major General Mohamed Siad Barre became the new President of the Somali Democratic Republic, suspending the Constitution, dissolving the parliament and Supreme Court, banning political parties, and repressing former government members and anyone else that opposed his rule (Ingiriis, 2016). Barre ruled Somalia for the next two decades as a dictator with one of the gravest human rights records in the African continent (United Nations Development Programme, 2001). Barre developed a personality cult in Somalia and perceived himself as a scientific socialist state leader who advocates and blends Somali nationalism, Islam, and Marxism (Ononogbu & Nwangwu, 2018). The reality of Barre's rule was one of death, destruction, and the appropriation of the country's wealth to his clan and staunchest supporters. There were multiple attempts to overthrow Barre by various insurgent groups (Mukhtar, 2003), but none were successful until 1991. Barre fled Mogadishu to launch a military campaign to regain power. After the failed attempts, General Mohamed Farrah Aidid's army

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