

## CUBS OF THE CALIPHATE: MINORS AT THE SERVICE OF THE ISLAMIC STATE

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### Abstract

Throughout history the minors have been used in acts of violence and conflict, they have been treated as mere instruments for the struggle and have assumed different roles within the conflicts themselves, coming to fight in the front line of battle, the Islamic State poses a new form of recruitment with a clear objective of continuity for his caliphate project in which children play a crucial role which can have consequences in two aspects: on the one hand for European society and its resilience and on the other hand to put Test the security of the old continent. This paper aims to analyze the recruitment of minors by the Islamic State in order to prevent and rehabilitate these minors.

In 2017, children were victims of attacks on a scale never before seen, due to total disregard for international standards that protect the weakest on the part of the entire international community. As revealed in the latest report of the Syrian Observatory of Human Rights, in the last days of combat in 2017, ISIS suffered around 480 casualties, of which almost 300 were minors known as “the Cubs of the Caliphate”. Nearly 300 children recruited by the Islamic State were killed when they were sent to the battlefield in the fight against Iraqi troops and the international coalition for control of Mosul in Iraq. In its last campaign, the United Nations Children’s Agency (hereinafter UNICEF)<sup>1</sup>, in June 2018, quantified in 1,000 children killed or injured in violent acts or recruited by one of the factions present in the conflict, only in both The first months of 2018. In the same way, it warned again that only in 2017 violent extremist groups present in this conflict had recruited three times more than in 2015, considered to be the hardest year for Syria since the beginning of the year. conflict.

Despite the provisions in international law that seek to protect and prevent the radicalization and enlistment of children in armed conflict, the recruitment of minors as a basis for various strategies and the advantages that for the extremist groups suppose make that this practice continues being habitual. More than 8 million Syrian children have been affected, both psycho-

<sup>1</sup> UNICEF. (2018). “Campaña 7... y no más”. 03/06/2018, of UNICEF. Web: [https://www.unicef.es/ causas/emergencias/conflicto-en-siria](https://www.unicef.es/causas/emergencias/conflicto-en-siria).

logically and physically, by the violence and destruction of the civil war in Syria. An estimated 2.5 million children have been forced to flee their homes as internally displaced persons or refugees since 2011.

However, those children and their families who have chosen or been forced to remain within Syria face an additional threat from the jihadist insurgent organizations that compete to control the territory and the civilians living there. The Islamic State group (hereinafter EI), which is the case study for this investigation, is not the only organization operating in Syria and neighboring Iraq to recruit children into its ranks. As Mahmoud Houzan, a former Communist Party Kurdish activist, points out, "most Iraqi Shiite militias aligned with the government recruit children, while in Syria, the Free Syrian Army (FSA), the Islamic Front, the Workers' Party of Kurdistan (PKK) and Ahrar al-Sham also make up their ranks of minors. "The IS has, however, been the most prolific recruiter and has made a public dissemination of the recruitment of minors.

Regardless of the humanitarian issues that initially led to my interest in this topic, the motivations that have led to this research are mainly the lack of information and scientific literature in Spanish that we can find about minors recruited by Daesh, the lack of official figures and above, the problems of rehabilitation suffered on the one hand by minors who, after the conflict, are forced, because they have no means, to remain in Syrian territory and, on the other, those minors who, accompanied by their parents, traveled to Daesh territory and return to Europe. The objective here is to understand the recruitment process used by the IS in minors within a conflict zone in order to prevent their radicalization and help their rehabilitation and reinsertion. Another motivation of this study is the concern about the situation of minors who arrive in European territory and how both the international community and each State is treating them.

Having therefore two fronts open in this study:

- Minors recruited in the Daesh territory, methodology, consequences and alternatives to their rehabilitation in the field.
- Returned minors, born or not in Daesh territory, problems they face in European soil, but we will not go in depth to this point in this study.

In detail these are the motivations of this work:

In the first place we find two types of recruitment, which occurs in the conflict zone (Syria, Iraq) and even on the border with both countries and on the other hand the recruitment of minors in the West, not limiting us to Europe if not expanding the geographical scope to countries such as Australia, Malaysia or Pakistan.<sup>2</sup> In these two "typologies" of recruitment, Daesh uses different methods and tools for the recruitment of minors than for adults and therefore does not share the same approach.

Two other issues to be addressed derive directly from this situation, firstly, the fact that more and more children are traveling to the Syrian and Iraq conflict zones. This trend is highlighted by the annual report on terrorism and detainees that Europol published in June 2017, in which countries such as the United Kingdom and the Netherlands reported the decrease in the average age of children traveling to Syria with relatives related to ISIS, For its part, Holland reported that

<sup>2</sup> The Wilson Journal of International Affairs. . (2015). "Pakistan: IS Has Recruited at Least 400 Child Soldiers in Syria since January." . 06/07/2018, de The Wilson Journal of International Affairs. Sitio web: [https://issuu.com/wilsonjournal/docs/spring\\_2016\\_wilson\\_journal](https://issuu.com/wilsonjournal/docs/spring_2016_wilson_journal)

more than 40 children between 0-12 years old would have traveled to the conflict zone in 2016. Secondly, a significant number of children have returned with or without their parents to European territory<sup>3</sup>, these minors were either taken to Syria by one or both parents related to the IS or were born in Syrian territory, within families loyal to the group . This fact has caused not only that they have been exposed to unprecedented violence since their birth, but also that some of these children are in a situation of statelessness since the birth certificates issued by Dáesh are not valid.

The third motivation of this study is the somewhat particular situation for which the international community has not yet known or refused to respond, and there are no international legal instruments to resolve it. We refer to the cases of minors accused of commission of a terrorist act, the only reference we have in this regard is Resolution 70/291 of the General Assembly of the United Nations on the revision of the Global Strategy against Terrorism<sup>4</sup>, in which it is reiterated that any minor accused of the commission of a terrorist act must have a fair trial and its rights must be respected based on the Convention on the Rights of the Child (art 40), the Resolution goes on tiptoe for this issue, so there is a lack of precision when addressing this question, it is undoubtedly necessary to address it.

## **OBJECTIVE**

Analyze to understand the recruitment of IS in minors, inside and outside their territory in order to prevent their violent radicalization in times of peace and help their rehabilitation and reintegration. Not only for a humanitarian issue but also for the possible consequences and threat that these minors with ideology can pose for European security.

## **HYPOTHESIS**

This work establishes as initial hypothesis, the need to react to the phenomenon with a mixed strategy in which effective legal instruments are established together with soft measures on the prevention of radicalization in minors and rehabilitation of those radicalized under IS indoctrination.

## **METHODOLOGY**

Both primary sources of law, regulations, recommendations, circulars, secondary sources, research articles and books among others have been used.

In order to have a multidisciplinary vision of the subject to be addressed, a total of 8 interviews were requested with researchers, state security forces, NGO collaborators and social workers, of which up to now 9 have been made Specifically, the Head of an Investigation Group of the Provincial Information Brigade of the CNP of Granada, a Médecins Sans Fron-

<sup>3</sup> CONFERENCE PAPER. "Radicalization in Prison. Risk assessment tools ". Working meeting with experts - General Directorate of Justice. Brussels, February, 2018.

<sup>4</sup> General Resolution of the United Nations of July 1, 2016, whereby the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy is examined. Available at <http://www.un.org/es/comun/docs/?symbol=A/RES/70/291>, (last accessed 05.04.2018).

tières worker who worked in Syria in 2013, the Head of Security Operations of ACTED (a private non-profit organization that operates in Iraq), a worker of the PREVENT plan in the United Kingdom and after trying it with the Civil Guard at the border of Ceuta and Melilla without having satisfactory results, it was decided to request an interview with the agency FRONTEX, which led to a response and explanations institutions without too much investigative value, but that in some way has been useful to the investigation because it has allowed to establish a first contact with on the agency. It has also contacted the EASO agency in Malta, closing an interview for 01. 02.2019. The content of these interviews have been integrated and used during this work and undoubtedly have contributed dynamism and freshness to this research, as well as a highly relevant and truthful content based on the experiences of the professionals interviewed. Unfortunately not all the interviews have been carried out due to an agenda issue so both Nikita Malik (former senior researcher at Quilliams), current director of the Center on Radicalization and Terrorism in London and the PREVENT plan worker specialist deradicalization actions in minors and adolescents, in the United Kingdom, (who prefers to remain anonymous), they have postponed the interview until the end of January 2019, which will make their contributions can not be collected in this work but they will surely see the light in future studies.

#### **MINORS AT THE SERVICE OF THE ISLAMIC STATE**

The deaths of children in Syrian and Iraqi territory have been a constant throughout the conflict that has lasted seven years, organizations like UNICEF and the Syrian Observatory of Human Rights,<sup>5</sup> located in the United Kingdom, have sounded the alarm for several years in the brutal treatment that minors were suffering in this armed conflict but above all echoed the cruelty with which the IS recruits, trains and sends to the battlefield to said children. UNICEF emphasized that the numbers for 2018 could be even worse, so in the presentation of the report called on the agents involved to end the “attacks on schools and hospitals” which suggests that there is is respecting the International Humanitarian Law by which prevails in times of war the duty to treat the wounded and sick, as well as the protection of medical personnel and facilities, these foundations have been at the center of International Humanitarian Law (IHL) since its creation in 1864. These principles are further enshrined in the four Geneva Conventions of 1949 and the Two Additional Protocols of 1977. The protection of medical services in war zones is also part of the International Customary Humanitarian Rules and is reflected or it should be reflected in domestic law and military codes of all countries in the world. Despite International Humanitarian Law, UNICEF, called for efforts to rebuild “prioritizing the needs of children, including people with disabilities.”<sup>6</sup>

One more sign that it is the International Agencies and the NGOs that are taking the reins in these matters and that prove that the rules of Humanitarian Law have not been met.

<sup>5</sup> The SOHR was founded in May 2006. It cooperates with human rights organizations in Syria, the Arab world and the international community. Web available at <http://www.syriahr.com/en/>, (last seen on 09.04.2018).

<sup>6</sup> The Guardian, "2017 was the deadliest year of Syrian war for children, says Unicef", March 2018. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/mar/12/2017-deadliest-year-of-syrian-war-for-children-says-unicef-psychological-ruin>, (last seen on 08.05.2018).

But UNICEF is not the only voice that has risen in this regard, think - tanks such as Quilliam (United Kingdom) and CTC Sentiel (United States) have issued reports in which the figures speak for themselves and point to the issue of minors used in the Syrian conflict as a matter of concern.

In other cases, minors have served as messengers, carriers of materials, smugglers or spies, they have even been treated as slaves and systematically subjected to sexual abuse and exploitation, the latter supposed above all in the case of girls. In this context of exposure to violence suffered by children in conflict zones, it is not surprising that UNICEF echoed again in August 2017 the use of minors this time by another of the IS factions. The organization claimed that since January 1, 2017, Boko Haram (organization that adopts the name of EI in West Africa since the oath of allegiance to Abu Bark Al Bagdadi in March 2015 and based in the northeast of Nigeria, also active in Chad, Niger and northern Cameroon) had used 83 children to carry out explosive attacks in northeastern Nigeria, which is four times more than during all of 2016.

Proof of the different roles that children assume once they enroll in the ranks of the IS reflects the report published by the CTC Sentinel in February 2016 that focusing on the Syrian conflict, states that of the 89 cases of children studied, the 39 % died by detonating an improvised explosive device transported by a vehicle (VBIED) against its target. 33% were killed as infantry soldiers in unspecified operations in the battlefield, 6% died while working as propagandists integrated in units / brigades, and 4% committed suicide in massive attacks against civilians. The final 18% were the so-called Inghimasis (derived from the Arabic "dip"), which means that they died in what we commonly call assault operations in which a group of mostly adult fighters infiltrates and attacks an enemy position. using light automatic weapons before committing suicide detonating suicide belts, for the Inghimasis, the aim is to die for Allah and this is reflected in the modus operandi of their actions. Depending on the role the child was performing, according to the report forty percent of the time, the children and young people died in operations aimed at the state's security forces (including military and police targets). 21% died fighting against paramilitary forces (militias and non-state opposition) and only 3% perpetrated suicide attacks against civilians. No target was specified for the remaining 36%.

In other cases, minors have been used in support work, assuming the roles of messengers, smugglers or spies, they have even been and are treated as slaves being systematically subjected to abuse and sexual exploitation.

We can also have proof of the growth of the recruitment of minors in conflict areas such as Syria, since according to the CTC Sentinel report, from January 1, 2015 to January 31, 2016, 89 children and young people were praised in the propaganda of the Islamic State. As for the countries, the study concludes that 51% died in Iraq, while 36% died in Syria. The rest died during operations in Yemen, Libya and Nigeria. 31% were Syrians, 25% Syrian / Iraqi and 11% Iraqi. The remaining 33% came from Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, Libya, the United Kingdom, France, Australia and Nigeria.

These figures reveal that in some circumstances children are less aware than the elderly of the risks involved in these situations, so they can handle anxiety much better and, in some cases, can be more effective than adults. From the cases and figures presented, we can see that the use of children to carry out terrorist attacks, both in conflict situations and in times of peace, is gaining more prominence and this undoubtedly occurs due to the ease of recruiting

a child and shows how little protection they have, including from the international community. If we focus on the crisis in Syria, to date it has left more than 470,000 deaths, (according to the Syrian Center for Policy Research, 2016), which includes more than 12,000 children and more than 7.6 million internally displaced people. According to UNICEF, there are 8.4 million children affected by the conflict, either within the country or as refugees. In addition, there are 6 million Syrian children who need humanitarian assistance and more than 2 million can not receive them because they live in areas of difficult access or are besieged.

This situation is the result of the constant violation of international norms and the Law to protect children, of course, in the case of Syria, humanitarian law and its repeated prohibition of attacking civilian objects such as hospitals or schools, not only not They have been respected, but they have been systematically violated. Therefore, it is necessary to recognize that the safeguarding of the rights of children that was also included in the Convention on the Rights of the Child has been a failure in the light of the figures.

### **WHY RECRUIT MINORS?**

Already in 1999, Taylor and Horgan predicted that the future direction of state and non-state violence would imply the deliberate victimization of children, as an indicator and result of an increased willingness to escalate the general climate of fear and the severity of violence.<sup>7</sup> On the other hand Benotman and Malik reinforce this observation, arguing that, "while in the scenarios of previous conflicts children were used despite their youth, they are increasingly used for their youth".<sup>8</sup>

According to Benotman and Malik, children continued to play an important role in the insurgency that followed the invasion of Iraq, referring to some reports of US military intelligence. UU They highlighted the role they played as attackers and observers in ambushes. Already in 2004, the 'Mahdi Army' of the radical cleric Muqtada al-Sadr employed child soldiers, who could be seen in battle by British and American forces. They were clearly and strongly indoctrinated; a 12-year-old boy who was fighting with the group proclaimed that, "Americans are weak. They fight for money and status and scream like pigs when they die. But let's kill the infidels because faith is the most powerful weapon. " As the security situation deteriorated, the UN was forced to establish a working group on children and armed conflict in Iraq in March 2009, after Al-Qaeda in Iraq (predecessor of the Islamic State) was included by the Secretary General as a recruiting organization for minors.<sup>9</sup>

On the other hand, some authors point out that the legacy of Saddam Hussein it is at the base of the administrative and bureaucratic structures of the Islamic State. This fact can be sure to be largely due to the decision made by Paul Bremer, who was director of the Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance in Iraq (Coalition Provisional Authority)

<sup>7</sup> Taylor M. and Horgan J. Future Developments of Political Terrorism in Europe, Terrorism and Political Violence, 1999, pp. 83-93.

<sup>8</sup> Benotman N. and Malik N., The Children of Islamic State, Londres. Quilliam Foundation, 2016.

<sup>9</sup> Report of the Secretary-General of the United Nations on children and armed conflicts in Iraq ", United Nations Security Council, November 9, 2015, p.2, available at [http://www.un.org/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=S/2015/852&Lang=E&Area=UNDOC](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2015/852&Lang=E&Area=UNDOC), (last seen on 05.25.2018)

appointed by Bush in 2003, made the decision to demobilize the Iraqi military and dismiss all Baathist officials from civil service posts, leaving more than 100,000 Iraqis unemployed, angry and in many armed cases.

As a result, many former Baathist officers and officials joined IE at the highest levels, bringing with them their military and organizational skills, network of experienced bureaucrats, and perhaps most importantly, their knowledge of the smuggling networks Established to bypass sanctions in the 1990s, and now facilitate the institutional strengthening of illegal oil trade. This Baathist influence is evident in all aspects of the recruitment of children by IS, from the terminology (Saddam's Lion cubs to Cubs of the Caliphate), to military-style training camps and techniques such as desensitization to violence that they are used to train children. Beyond the ideological ones, the reasons why minors are an easy target for organizations such as the IS can be collected in four which in turn can be divided into two groups: on the one hand the reasons that obey a purely strategic aspect part of certain extremist violent groups and, on the other, those whose *raison d'être* is the very nature of the minor and his vulnerability.

- STRATEGIC SENSE

First, we must bear in mind that in some regions or collectives, this group is seen as a salvation against the threat of the government or the "Western enemy", including other violent local groups that are called infidels. In this sense, joining their ranks guarantees survival and protection. In some cases, it is their own families that push and encourage the child to be part of the EI. On the other hand, in populations where IS is no longer strong or has lost most of the support of the local population, adults are likely to be difficult to recruit, while the recruitment of minors guarantees geographic expansion and control of the population. area although its support at the beginning weakens. We must admit that in terms of strategy it is very practical and useful, since it allows the IS to continue with the control of a region or at least not disappear from it, apart from gaining time to change tactics and direct it towards the recovery of territory.

Secondly, some groups such as EI and their voice in Africa, Boko Haram, have intensified in recent years in the recruitment of children and the publication of videos and images on the Internet. These videos and images are material in which children are the authors of cruel and extremely bloody scenes. The main objective of these images in these cases is to generate alarm in the international community and, at the same time, show the power and cruelty of the group. The third of the strategic approaches is economic, since it is much more profitable to feed and care for a child than an adult, for the simple fact that children need less food than adults, therefore the cost of maintenance is more cheap for the group. In addition, the market for small arms in such countries, especially in areas of conflict, is also a relevant factor, since it is little regulated or at least easier to circumvent the laws that regulate it. Small arms become more accessible to children who can handle them much more easily than large caliber weapons, in this case the use of children as killers and perpetrators of a terrorist attack reduces the cost of the attack, which does not necessarily mean reducing the effectiveness of a child that is used to apply violence.

- NATURE OF THE CHILD

The fourth of the reasons related to the nature of the child, is that which focuses on that we must not forget, on the other hand, that children tend to be easier to manipulate than adults and that it is relatively easy to generate a feeling of dependency and affectivity, especially with unaccompanied minors. These minors, on numerous occasions, do not have a family atmosphere that could dissuade them from joining the ranks of any of these violent extremist groups. In addition, children tend to show their loyalty and respect towards the leaders they admire and respect relatively quickly, which is a particularly relevant element when families intervene in the recruitment process, that is, when they are a brother or a member of the family. family is the one who recruits.

### MODELS OF RECRUITMENT IN MINORS BY THE ISLAMIC STATE

The need for minors to become in the long term symbols and bastions of radical values and the vision of the extremist world posed and defended by IS has altered how the tools and methods used for recruitment could not be otherwise.

We can find several authors who have tried to limit and describe this recruitment process. Singer, delved into the militarization of children in his book *Children at War* 2005, reducing to three the key phases suffered by a minor involved in armed conflict: selection, mental preparation or indoctrination, and action. This model is useful in a first approach to the phenomenon but it is necessary to specify and define the long-term model, this is just what Horgan et al. In his book: *From Cubs to Lions: A Six Stage Model of Child Socialization into Islamic State* of 2016, which also serves as a reference to the RAN in its treatment of returned children. Instead, they propose six stages of child recruitment: seduction (initial exposure to ideas and staff); schooling (routine, direct exposure and intensive indoctrination); selection (institutionalized preparation for military and other functions); subjugation (physical and psychological training and brutalization to deepen commitment and loyalty); specialization (promotion of experience in specialized training); and consolidation (assignment of functions, deployment and recruitment of new members). The investment in the model by Horgan<sup>10</sup> et al. of the steps that Singer proposes in his model, that is, indoctrination techniques precede those of selection imply a change in the critical development of the recruitment process, particularly in the case of IS. This change clearly occurs in light of the long-term objective pursued by the IS, ensuring long-term group security and reducing the likelihood of desertion or betrayal.

It is vital for terrorist organizations like EI to build trust, meet emotional needs and isolate potential recruits from compensatory influences. Changing the moral point of view of people before enlistment is essential to ensure the selection of more loyal members, and therefore more committed. In order to analyze the contacts of minors with the EI and the factors that motivate them to enlist, this chapter focuses on the first two stages of Horgan's model: seduction and schooling. It could be said that, however, these two modes of indoctrination do not reflect the reality of the reach and radicalization of children in their territory since the IS combines formal and informal, direct and indirect, cooperative and coercive recruitment in addition to individual methods and systematic scope to create a holistic and immersive strategy that radicalizes children under its territory.



Researchers have identified a number of IS methods to initially influence and recruit children, including kidnapping, public promotion events, incentive and gifts, and influence of other supporters of EI. In the interview with an Spanish Doctor Without Borders worker in Siria, Héctor Caballero, who worked in Syria during the conflict, specifically in 2013 it also includes the controversial issue of radicalization of children and “voluntary” participation in IS systems and activities. Highlights in the interview the various factors that encourage minors to actively seek and join the ISIS to “escape from difficulties at home or at school, often as a result of insecurity, boredom and war-induced poverty “ In this interview the aid worker explains the way in which the IS gains power in Syria to conquer Aleppo and how the minors in most cases enlist in the ranks of the ISI for a matter of prestige and social recognition dragged by the lack of prospects of futures that exist and that the international community seems to be neglecting, which will undoubtedly have an impact on the future of these generations.

The factors of concurrent attraction may be the promise of food, the possibility of fighting for an ideology, acquire an income, seek social credit, obtain protection, and sometimes simply entertainment. Therefore, while recognizing the difficulties in determining the motives of individuals for joining extremist groups, this chapter seeks to examine the plausible pathways of IS influence on minors: direct and indirect; voluntary and coercive: under a “first contact” stage. Unifying and focusing on the first two stages of Horgan’s “seduction” and “schooling”, considering them the most important to understand this process and be able to act on it. Seven subcategories are presented under the “first contact” stage:

1. Forced enlistment;
2. Questionable voluntary membership and voluntary enlistment;
3. International recruitment;
4. Desensitization to violence;
5. Pseudo-State and “governance”;
6. Social factors;
7. Loss of adult models of reference and loss of confidence

Although these lines proceed to examine each category in turn, it is important to note that the radicalization and recruitment of adults or children can not be attributed to single or isolated events or factors, but is often the product of combined influences and pressures that lead to the adoption of extremist beliefs and / or active enlistment.

## 1. FORCED ENLISTMENT

Although much of the recruitment of IS is voluntary, the recruitment of children by IS has been extended to the means of force. Similar to the traditional recruitment techniques used with child soldiers, the terrorist group has separated from their families and forcibly recruited children by force, has also carried out kidnappings in refugee camps and orphanages. The most prominent and devastating example of this tactic was the genocide of Yazidis on Mount Sinjar in August 2014. The United Nations and Kurdish officials estimated that a total of 400,000 Yazidis<sup>11</sup> lived in Sinjar at the time of the attack. An approximate number of

<sup>11</sup> The Yazidis form a pre-Islamic minority whose roots go back to 2000 BC.

9,900 dead and 6,800 kidnapped are estimated, those under 14 years constitute 33.7% of the kidnapped.<sup>12</sup>

Although obviously it is impossible to determine the fate of each child captured by EI, there is a general consensus that the roles assigned to children are gender specific, with girls being sold as sex slaves to combatants, and children trained as first-line combatants or suicide bombers.

Gawry Rasho, a Yazidi woman released by the IS in April 2015, testified that the terrorist organization had thousands of Yazidis in captivity.<sup>13</sup> She was released after 8 months, but her 7-year-old daughter was detained. While the IS liberated some young and elderly Yazidis, Gawry mentions that children are often taken by force, forced to marry and selected for sex. In the same way, he said: "They treated girls and young women very badly, I saw them choose and take them, and if they refused, they would be defeated." Minority youth are vulnerable targets of this type of "recruitment" of IS, while children assume a variety of functions. The boys kidnapped by the IS are trained later, after which they are released or assigned a position in the ranks of the Islamic State, explained the woman. But for the IS, the "forced recruitment of children" has not been limited to minority populations. In January 2016, a joint report of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) confirmed that a total of 800-900 children between 9 and 15 years old were kidnapped in Mosul,<sup>14</sup> along with other sources, reported abductions of children in orphanages, family homes, schools and recreation areas.

Although the use of force by IS does not allow families and communities to resist the kidnapping, enlistment and enslavement of children, the selection of the group of the most innocent and vulnerable members of the community could discredit the image of the caliphate as the model ideal of Islamic society. In fact, it is important to note the IS legacy of this tactic of Saddam Hussein's Baathist regime, which by the end of the 1970s, the Futuwah (Youth Vanguard) movement was formed and, in the mid-1990s, extensive military training camps were established for children and the special Saddam's Lion Cubs.

Efforts to reduce support for ISIS and other jihadist organizations that forcefully recruit children can undoubtedly be strengthened by highlighting the hypocrisy of the tactics they employ and the constant violations of human rights that transform children from the hopes of the child future to the current war booty in which they have become.

## 2. QUESTIONABLE VOLUNTARY MEMBERSHIP

Despite the ambiguity regarding the number of opinions on why minors join the IS, it is a fact that these minors join their ranks voluntarily, although after having been attracted by the organization by different tactics that we will see below. The ability of the IS to convince children to join their ranks is noteworthy. The success of the terrorist organization in convincing the minors reflects the organization's greatest success in recruiting and its impressive ability to reach people from all over the world.

The minors who are recruited and taken to the front of battles are related to adults involved with the EI, especially the case of children of combatants.<sup>15</sup> Either because the parents are originals of Syria or Iraq or because their parents travel to the Islamic State, where they, as well as their children, become citizens of the Islamic State. Apparently, the group encourages parents to send their children to training camps.<sup>16</sup>

The question that arises in these cases is to what extent it is clear the voluntariness and the participation and the motivation of a minor to be part of the terrorist organization in situations in which the minors start in the ranks of the IS through family connections. While the group describes the children as "happy" in their training and subsequent indoctrination, this type of recruitment leaves unanswered questions about the conscience of the children about the nature of the activities in which they have been immersed. Undoubtedly, the role of parents and other adult figures of reference in a child's life is an important factor in determining the way in which children are involved in the organization.

### 2.1 VOLUNTARY ENLISTMENT

Despite the ambiguity regarding the number of opinions that children have when they join the EI when their parents are the ones that lead them to be part of the terrorist group, the children also join voluntarily, although after having been attracted by the organization. In the past, terrorist groups and other armed groups that recruited and continued to recruit child soldiers in the vast majority of cases were forced or abandoned to be praised as martyrs. In this case, the success of the EI in reaching children and choosing to join the filar of the terrorist group reflects the success of the organization in the recruitment and its impressive ability to reach people around the world.

### 2.2 CAPTATION THROUGH MATERIAL COMPENSATION

Children are vulnerable targets: as a general rule they feel more attracted by the material and psychological benefits offered by the EI and that is a factor that the organization takes advantage of. Materially, it offers children a variety of gifts. Abu Hassan, a resident of Mosul, declared: "They are providing their fighters everything: gasoline, wages, supplies and women to get married, gifts". Especially in Iraq and Syria, devastated by war, IS simply offers a better standard of living for children. It is important to stop at this point and mention the positioning that the group made in the region in 2013, which has allowed it to establish itself as an organization capable of offering these incentives for young people to join their cause. As reflected in the interview with the MSF worker, it was in mid-2013, specifically in May of that year, when the presence of Dáesh in the region began to be heard, at least in the area of Sheik Najjar,

Aleppo,<sup>17</sup> according to explained the cooperator at that time ISI or ISIL, arrived in the region in small groups and specific areas, "and initially it was said among the local people they assumed that they were coming to throw a cable in the fight against the enemy (Al Assad) and that they were going to collaborate with the FSA without any conquering intentions. " In the words of the aid worker, everything changed very quickly, in a matter of days the battles between the different rebel factions and ISIS for the control of the border areas were heard; what should have been a high source of income while at the strategic level.

### 2.3 PSYCHOLOGICAL APPROACH

The psychological aspect of IS recruitment is crucial to understanding the group as a whole and its success in recruiting people from around the world. Although the psychological aspect of recruitment is not new and was systematized under Osama Bin Laden's Al-Qaeda organization, which recognized the relevance of creating recruitment videos, web pages and even a recruitment manual, the group's global recruiting success through psychological methods is unprecedented throughout history. Much of the skill, especially in the West, can be attributed to the global reach and influence they have achieved. The American fears of terrorism as of December 2015 were as high as those that were generated after 9/11, which can certainly be attributed to the striking psychological appeal. This characteristic, therefore, can not be underestimated. Children are by no means immune to this aspect of recruitment. In particular, the group offers young people a new identity, a sense of belonging as well as a different set of values and beliefs, which means a Salafi and jihadist interpretation of Islam.

Because the IS operates as a pseudo-state, it helps provide welfare, education and religious services to people who live in areas under its control. The EI, therefore offers a restoration (although incomplete) of these systems, and is more appropriate to provide the necessary structure and order in the life of a child. In addition, the group receives and attends children suffering from congenital malformations. Although this strategy appeals to your desire for a better standard of living and a more promising future, it also attracts a recruit's sense of identity and community. The repair of congenital malformations allows a recruit to be more fully accepted in society. In addition, in this way the group seeks to evoke jealousy among children, a strategy to recruit children. When the group deliberately shows children who have new clothes, weapons and medals, other children who are not involved in a group want the same thing and feel more discriminated against. This feeling of jealousy can make children choose to join the organization and consolidate their reasoning and justification to join the group. The psychological appeal of IS, especially as seen in young adults and adolescents in the Western world, should not be underestimated in children living in areas affected by the organization. The group can use a variety of psychological methods to reach the audience they want to reach.

### 3. INTERNATIONAL RECRUITMENT

The threat of IS in children is real even outside the Middle East. The recruitment of children outside the Middle East is mostly psychological, not material. The organization makes these children feel loved, loved and understood, and then uses these emotions to get the child away from

<sup>17</sup> Motaparthi, PRIYANKA, Human Rights Watch, "Maybe we live and maybe we die" 2014.

their parents and loved ones. Schoolchildren from countries such as Germany and the United Kingdom have left the Western countries with the aim of joining the terrorist organization. In March 2015, 70 young women, including 9 schoolchildren, left Germany to join the EI. German intelligence believes that approximately 400 people went to Iraq and Syria, of which 24 are minors. Some of these children are under 13 years old and four of them were women.<sup>18</sup> In addition, the United Kingdom believes that approximately 900 Britons have traveled to join the EI<sup>19</sup>. Most of them, young people and teenagers, but the exact number of children among the 900 is not clear. Indonesia is also a vulnerable target for the recruitment of children, as it is a predominantly Muslim nation. The Secretary General of the Indonesian Child Protection Commission noted that since August 2014, Islamic State extremists had infiltrated the extracurricular Islamic classes as "imams". Here, they propagate to the children that the brand of Islam that defends the IS is good, they encourage them to join the IS and advocate the fight against the infidels. To further consolidate this indoctrination, children read the same messages through social networks and the Internet. The group has militarized education, using schools where Islam is taught to reach children internationally and essentially brainwash them. Islamic countries are especially vulnerable to the militarization of ISIS education. As will be discussed later, education is a crucial tool not only to recruit children nationally and internationally, but also to reform them. In addition, as the IS gained influence and began to establish branches in the vicinity of Iraq and Syria, the recruitment of children will increase in North Africa and other areas of the Middle East. According to reports, ISIS has established camps through its Libya branch in order to train children. Many of the recruits are African children between 12 and 15 years old, brought from nations such as Nigeria, Mali, Ghana and Niger with the help of Boko Haram, who swore allegiance to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi in March 2015. Other recruits they come from Libya and Egypt<sup>20</sup>. By recruiting children internationally, the organization can show its brutality and extend its influence, which ultimately causes a greater sense of panic in the Western world.

With respect to the general recruitment of IS, foreign fighters comprise half of its members, including almost 4,000 westerners. Since January 26, 2015, approximately 20,730 people from 90 countries have traveled to Syria to fight in the ranks of the IS, the majority of these people come from Arab nations.<sup>21</sup> In Europe, France (1,200), the United Kingdom (500-600) and Germany (500-600) have produced the largest number of foreign fighters. However, in relation to the size of the population, the majority of foreign fighters come from Belgium, Denmark and Sweden. It is estimated that 11,000 people come from the Middle East and 3,000 come from the countries of the former Soviet Union. Of course, it is not entirely clear how the recruitment of children fits into these figures, since children from Western countries are more likely to

<sup>18</sup> Al Arabiya News, Chief of German espionage: 13-year-old children who join extremist groups September 22, 2014.

<sup>19</sup> HALL, J, ISIS decapita a un soldado libio fuera de una mezquita, 4 de junio de 2015.

<sup>20</sup> BBC Monitoring Middle East. "Islamic State reportedly trains children to fight in Libya secret camps." BBC Monitoring Worldwide. April, 2015

<sup>21</sup> The International Center for the Study of Radicalization and Political Violence, "Foreign Fighter Total in Syria / Iraq Now Exceeds 20,000; Surpasses Afghanistan Conflict in 1980s." January 2015.

travel with their families to Syria and Iraq, and in this way real motivation can not be measured. voluntariness of the child to join Daesh.

What is certain is that among other tools, the internet and online propaganda, has played a crucial role in directly incited recruitment and self-radicalization leading to violence in the international arena. Not in vain, the organization has invested a lot of their time and money in the elaboration of propaganda campaigns worthy of the best of Hollywood movies.

### 3.1 DESENSITIZATION TO VIOLENCE

Through each stage of the IS's strategy to indoctrinate and train the children as future jihadist warriors, the group sought to normalize exposure of minors to violence and death. While most audiences would be disturbed by images of child soldiers executioners, the organization promotes these roles with great "honor" and responsibility to which children should aspire and for which they must even compete.

Something certainly new, because to date the different violent extremist groups rather kept secret the recruitment of minors, or the child did not boast about it and did not exhibit it with pride. This normalization is achieved through constant exposure to violence and brutality, as in IS propaganda on the internet while witnessing (or even carrying out directly) acts of violence. The terrorist organization is present as we have previously commented on the state structures not only sanitary but also in educational ones, which allows them to control the most effective tool for the indoctrination of minors such as education.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, published in October 2016<sup>22</sup> a report that echoed the long-term strategy that ISIS intended to recruit minors, in the same way noted the creation by the terrorist organization of Sharia courses under the name of "invasion of territory" in the area of Deir Ezzor, in which children aged 12 and over participated for 40 days. The report indicated how public schools had been closed under the pretext of being military targets, thus pressuring the remaining students to join in these courses.

In the same way they had created at least five training camps and training for minors in the region of Deir Ezzor, in which they prepared the children both militarily and ideologically. The observatory also explained the creation of "secret mobile camps", created after the international coalition attacked the fields of Manjam to Melh, Palm Farm, al-Tebni and Husseiniya, attacks in which ten members of the organization died.

This direct and indirect exposure to violence serves to numb and desensitize the natural feelings of fear, disgust or guilt of children, and instead reinforces the group's message that violence is a necessary and "normal" way of life.

This situation makes the mere fact of being in the territory of the IS the exposure to its message and violence almost inevitable. As we have already seen, the terrorist organization occupies both public and private spaces, making the constant exposure to its message provoke in the minor a change of ethical and moral values and normalize the violent behaviors that naturalize when exposed to them in their day a day. Fundamentally, the active participation of children in violence is a tool that the IS uses as an instrument of coercion, since it prevents the desertion,

<sup>22</sup> Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, "Syrian children from school seating to" Caliphate Cubs ", available at <http://www.syriahr.com/en/?p=53635> (last consulted on 06.25.2018)

the minor would face the loss of prestige of the families in disapproval on the one hand and on the other the punishment in virtue of national and international law.

### **3.2 PSEUDO- STATE AND “GOVERNANCE”**

It is important to recognize that, in the context of Syria’s civil war and the consequent suffering of local populations, ISI was considerably strengthened due to its practices of incipient “state” or pseudo-state government. Interviews with former IS militants and ex-civilians praise the reduction in crime, and the lack of “decorum” that the IS brought with it, stating that “when they arrived, things were going well, very well. Islam”. As noted by Speckhard Yayla, in his book *ISIS Defectors: Inside Stories of the Terrorist Caliphate of 2016*. This same initial approach is confirmed by Hector Caballero, the Doctor Without Border worker interviewed, in his own words: “Among the locals you could hear they were coming to throw a cable against the enemy.” At the level of “Governance”, when the IS seizes a city, it maintains selected services while using brute force to impose its vision of a fundamentalist Islamic State. The religious police make sure that shops close during Muslim prayers and that women cover their hair and faces in public. The public spaces are walled with heavy metal fences and the black flags of the IS are flying. People accused of disobeying the law are punished with public executions or amputations. At the same time, the EI keeps markets, bakeries and service stations in operation. In this way, it maintains a situation of false normality and control in the face of the chaos of war, which inevitably leads many of the local people to consider them as “saviors” and to interpret this situation as desirable if they compare it with the situations of begging and destabilization of Syria’s conflict zones.

The ideological mission of the group, therefore, to create its own model of the Islamic caliphate has resulted in practically the provision of goods and services, ranging from food and drinking water to health care and education for its “citizens”, and even the provision of traffic agents. The EI recognizes and exploits the propagandistic value of its welfare services, with 31% of its images and videos published dedicated to showing schools, health services, aiming to highlight the service they offer and the scope of their domain in the areas that occupy.

### **3.3. SOCIAL FACTOR**

The EI has focused its strategy with the minors in its concentration in groups, in this way it limits the usual social dynamics and uses classic social tools such as peer pressure, competition and “group thinking”, to create an environment in the echo of the ISIS ideology resounds everywhere and there is a worldview among equals of trust. As children build their own collective confirmation bias, individuals are indoctrinated into the group through informal socialization, thus normalizing the process of radicalization and finding authoritarian voices among their own trusted peers. IS established institutions such as the Central Cub Scouts of the Caliphate to somehow “ensure that military training and religious training are combined with a generalized sense of community, identity and belonging, and thus strengthen the control of IS in the minds of their young recruits. “David J. Wasserstein on page 144 of his book *Black Banner of ISIS: The Roofs of*

<sup>23</sup> The New York Times, How ISIS works, September, 2014. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2014/09/16/world/middleeast/how-isis-works.html>. (Last checked: 07.07.2018)

the New Caliphatese echoed the creation of this institution, explaining that in May 2015 a circular announced the celebration of the Second session of the Central Cub Scouts of the Caliphate in the province of Raqqa, aimed at children from ten to fifteen years of age who had some ability for reading and writing, and offered classes Sharia, the art of struggle and science military. In this way the children's roles are promoted as an immersion experience, providing satisfaction through social bonds, physical adventures and ideological purification, demonstrating finally that although only in appearance the IS values Syria and its minors both in life and in death. In spite of this message that the group transmits, in practice, the children are exploited solely for the tactical and ideological benefit of the group.

Bloom et al. observed that despite the extensive marketing and glorification of the IS of their puppies and pure children of the caliphate, the age of the child combatants and martyrs is never reflected in the propaganda that the organization spreads.

Although children are granted the "glory" of fighting alongside adults, the loss of their lives and their childhoods is not recognized at any time in the propaganda seen to date. We could take this fact as a weak point in the organization's strategy, using it to undermine the "heroic" call that the IS makes to join its ranks, especially by highlighting the group's hypocrisy.

The short-term celebrity and wealth enjoyed by the IS families in the case of some of them have led to ostracism and even to the statelessness of the children of women who were born in the caliphate. Efforts to counteract the radicalization of minors and undermine the messages of jihadi recruiters should focus on the long-term positive outcomes of alternative lifestyles. Investing in education can equip children, at least the most vulnerable, with the knowledge and skills necessary to be able to protect themselves against extremist narratives and, instead, find a satisfactory and sustainable job to sustain themselves and others. Following the positive career paths of doctors, engineers, activists, lawyers and other community leaders and influential people will not only gain the respect of their communities in the short term, but also, most importantly, allow them to play a role active and influential in the reconstruction and revitalization of their communities in a post-conflict era.

### **LOST OF ADULT REFERENCE MODELS**

Regarding the confidence of these children in adults, although many children voluntarily enlisted and initially interacted with the IS independently of their parents and guardians (as seen above), the family unit remains a key to influence children, introducing and reinforcing extreme ideas and worldviews. Radicalization through the private and domestic sphere, particularly through family ties or kinship, obscures efforts to detect and prevent the indoctrination of people, particularly children. Close ties and family radicalization are based on feelings of trust and respect in order to attract the possible recruit, while the process of radicalization is normalized through its integration in the upbringing and informal education of children in the home. Therefore, it is important to consider that the search for individual motivations may not always be useful to explain why people are involved with terrorism because the motivation may not reside in the individual actors themselves, but in the small extremist environment from which they come. . In the same way, once several influential members of the family unit have committed themselves to the cause, rejection and distancing of these shared ideas it becomes more difficult that is to say, the desertion of the group implies a double treason:



to betray the cause and betray the own family. Therefore, children born or raised in jihadist families, particularly within Syrian territory, are vulnerable to pressure to follow the example of relatives, people of trust and not to stray or betray the worldview of the family unit. The normalization of the upbringing of children within jihadist it has been formally institutionalized under the education of the IS system. The climate of fear under the control of ISIS has repressed the ability and willingness of citizens to speak out against the actions and ideology of the group, particularly in the case of school teachers.

Briefly

We find suitable two models to define the recruitment

- SINGER, 2005 (*Children at War*)

Three key phases of children's involvement in armed conflict:

1. Selection
2. mental preparation (indoctrination)
3. and action

- HORGAN et. al, 2016 (*From Cubs to Lions: A Six Stage Model of Child Socialization into the Islamic State*)

Emphasising a gradual process of both formal and informal learning and engagement with the organisation.

Six stages of child recruitment:

1. Seduction (initial exposure to ideas and personnel);
2. Schooling (routine, direct exposure and intensive indoctrination);
3. Selection (institutionalised grooming for military and other roles);
4. Subjugation (physical and psychological training and brutalisation to deepen commitment and loyalty);
5. Specialisation (fostering expertise in specialised training);
6. Stationing (role assignment, recruitment of new members)

But the true is that IS combines:

- formal and informal recruitment
- direct and indirect recruitment
- cooperative and coercive recruitment
- Individual and systematic methods of outreach to create a holistic and immersive strategy to radicalize minors.

PROPOSED STAGES MODEL

1. Kidnapping and forced enlistment; from schools, mosques...
2. desensitization to violence; continue exposure to it.

3. 'positive' governance;
4. social factors;
5. lost/replacement of positive role model(s);
6. and trusted adult influencers.

## 1. KIDNAPPING AND FORCED ENLISTMENT

The most prominent and devastating example of this tactic: IS' genocide of Yazidis on Mount Sinjar in August 2014. The United Nations and Kurdish officials have estimated that a total of 400,000 Yazidis were living in Sinjar at the time of the attack. An extensive retrospective survey of those killed and kidnapped has calculated an approximate 9,900 deceased and 6,800 abducted, with children under 14 constituting 33.7% of those kidnapped.

## 2. DESENSITIZATION TO VIOLENCE

Whereas most audiences would be perturbed by images of child soldiers and executioners, it promotes these roles as a great 'honour' and compete. To complement its structured indoctrination courses in its schools and military training camps, it ensures that violence becomes integrated into the everyday life of its 'citizens'. eliminating the need for internet access to view its propaganda.

## 3. 'POSITIVE' GOVERNANCE

The group's ideological mission to create their own model of the Islamic caliphate has translated practically into the provision of goods and services, ranging from food and safe water to healthcare and education for its 'citizens', and even provision of traffic officers.

## 4. SOCIAL FACTORS

By gathering and isolating groups of children, it has sought to build on normal social dynamics – such as peer pressure, competition and 'groupthink'.

## 5. LOST/REPLACEMENT OF POSITIVE ROLE MODEL(S)

With a civilian death toll of over half a million Syrians (with 4,166 civilian fatalities in 2018 alone), it responded to children's desire for vengeance, family income or simply a new role model to follow. For the 'cubs' (boys), trusted figures of fathers, businessmen and community leaders were replaced with hypermasculine fighters wealth, status and an outlet for adventure and aggression.

## 6. TRUSTED ADULT INFLUENCERS

Though many children reportedly enlisted 'voluntarily' and initially interacted with it independently from their parents and guardians, the family unit remains a key influencer for children, introducing and reinforcing extreme ideas and worldviews.

Radicalization through the private and domestic sphere, particularly through family or kinship bonds, obscures efforts to detect and prevent the indoctrination of individuals, particularly children.

## CONCLUSIONS

After this study, some conclusions have been reached that undoubtedly should continue to be studied and analyzed based on the continuous changes that the IS makes in its strategy with the minors. However, we can highlight in the light of the data and situations studied that:

1. Radical ideologies cause the minor to occasionally join the ranks of the IS voluntarily, which hinders their integration into society once the armed conflict ends.
2. The nature of the minor, his vulnerability and the ability to feel admiration for his recruiters as role models, facilitates their recruitment and manipulation.
3. In the recruitment of minors in the territory of the IS, the family plays a great role as a recruiter, but at the same time it can be used as a rehabilitation instrument. In addition it seems necessary:
  - Provide a multidisciplinary approach to prevention programs both in Europe and in Syria, it is therefore necessary to understand the complexity of ISIS recruitment in minors, as well as the training of front-line professionals, police, workers social, psychologists but mainly in crucial training in the creators of these prevention policies, it is essential that the creators (mostly politicians) know the first processes and pursue viable, real and tangible results to avoid as commented by the Spanish National Police in the interview, with the National Strategic Plan to Combat Violent Radicalization, which does not end up being implemented, in fact in this sense, the latest figures show that in August 2017, only 13 of the 8,000 Spanish municipalities had implemented any of the plan's actions.
  - Insist on the need for a real political commitment, in Syria and Iraq, it is not admissible that tasks and actions that are competences of the institutions (national or international) in light of the situation of "ruin" and lack of basic structures that the country suffers, NGOs implement them, they have a limited operational capacity and they also can not develop long-term programs because of the instability and financing they experience. It is up to the international community with the help of the NGOs and other agents operating in the area to restore the basic structures and provide the area with stability in order to launch programs for the rehabilitation of children adapted to the training peculiarities of ISIS and its great religious and belonging component..
  - It is also necessary, a multi-agency approach, it is essential the join effort between the different agencies, state security bodies, border control and NGOs that intervene in the process of detention, prosecution and enforcement of the sentence of returned minors and minors recruited in Europe accused of terrorist acts.

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