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The Securitization of Child Soldiers by Burmese Insurgent Groups:Preliminary Research from the Field

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Introduction

The literature on securitization is dominated by an ontology that sees states and state elites as the primary actors engaged in the securitization of both traditional and non-traditional threats. Whereas this process is certainly occurring, over-emphasis on the role of the state obfuscates the role of non-state actors involved in the securitization processes. It is possible to extend the concept both vertically above the state to the level of international society, as well as horizontally within the state in order to include non-state actors. Adopting this approach will demonstrate not only non-conventional threats and actors, but also the emergence of non-traditional security relationships that

are a response to the state rather than constitutive of it. In order to elucidate this process, this paper will seek to apply the concept of securitization to the use of child soldiers by insurgent groups in Burma. Doing so will demonstrate that an existential threat may not be an external challenge to the securitizing actor in question, but may instead be a strategy or set of practices conducted by said actor.

It will be demonstrated that a process of securitization is occurring between international society and insurgent groups. Doing so will also address the puzzle presented by the fact that some insurgent groups are reducing their reliance on child soldiers, even though it is not in their immediate strategic interest to do so. Even though insurgent groups are experiencing a relative decline in power in regards to the state, they are reducing their numbers of recruits while continuing to wage insurgency. In order to establish and demonstrate how the hypothesized process of securitization emerges, a plausibility probe will be used. This will be done in order to demonstrate how the process occurs in the cases of two insurgent groups. Specifically, the two groups here analyzed are the Karenni National Progressive Party and the Kachin Independence organization. Analysis of these two groups will show that securitization may occur as a reaction to the state, rather than beginning as a process brought about at its behest. Additionally, this approach can help explain the puzzle presented by the fact that insurgent groups are increasingly removing children from their ranks even though they are increasingly marginalized through ceasefire negotiations and government reform.

Overview and Case Selection

This essay will proceed as follows. Firstly, this section will provide a brief overview of the argument and a discussion of the case selection. Secondly, I will provide a short discussion of the use of child soldiers in Burma. Thirdly, the concept of securitization within the English School, and the manner in which it can be extended to included non-state actors, will be used in connection with the first case study, specifically using the Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP). It will be shown that the KNPP is removing child soldiers from its ranks as a mechanism to signal that it is norm-compliant where the Burmese state is not. I will go on to outline the actors

involved in the securitization process as well as the logic of the actors' involved for following the mechanism. The fourth section of this will be an attempt demonstrate how the causal mechanism can be demonstrated by tracing the process in additional supporting case study, namely the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO).

It is important to acknowledge that groups like the KNPP and KIO are suffering serious manpower shortages, and as such should not be reducing their ranks.[1] In addition to the KNNP, the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) will be used as a further confirming example, due to the fact that it is a much larger organization, which will thus provide some variance in cases under analysis. Additionally, the KIO represents a different region, operating in Kachin state rather than Karenni. Whereas the KNNP is a small and highly localized ethno-nationalist insurgency, the KIO maintains a large area of operations over which it has territorial control. Additionally, the KIO represents a useful case study as it is one of the few large insurgent groups who has continued to challenge the government military without an active ceasefire. The two cases, therefore, vary in terms of region of operations, size of armed force, ability to hold territory, and level of hostile relations with government. Though not a definitive test of the hypothesis, these two cases lend support to the plausibility probe approach discussed below.

In order to establish that a clear existential threat exists in the use of child soldiers, it is also important to here to establish that the securitization process is not based on an instrumentalist logic on the part of the insurgents. This can be accomplished by brief discussion on the methods that insurgents may use to continue operations, most notably in terms of black market activities. Whereas armed groups may use such a means of temporarily prolonging their insurgencies, the success of this approach is contingent on the state allowing them to do so. The state has been complicit in the drug trade with certain groups it has ceasefires with, while for others the state is

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[1] David I. Steinberg, *Burma/Myanmar: What Everyone Needs to Know* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 111.

blocking this as a potential option for insurgencies to turn to in order to support themselves.[2]

Insurgencies are thus finding themselves in a context with fewer and fewer options available to them, in addition to a massive decline in relative power in relation to the state. Their three broad options in this regard are therefore: (1) to continue an insurgency they are unlikely to win, due to absence of external allies and increased marginalization; (2) to move in to increased black market trade to sustain operations; or (3) to seek to take part in the reform process as a legitimate actor. In the face of increasing reforms on the part of the state, and ceasefire agreements with non-state actors, it is becoming necessary for insurgent groups to move towards more legitimate forms of political participation.

A clear scope condition that emerges here, therefore, is that the hypothesis of this paper applies specifically to insurgencies that are continuing to challenge the state. It does not apply to those that have been co-opted into a mutually beneficial relationship based on collusion and joint participation in the black market. In addition to challenging groups who might seek to move into the illegal trade in narcotics, the government is also ensuring that those who embrace the peace process take an active role in quelling narcotics trade that is not sanctioned by the state. A key stipulation in ceasefire agreements that the government is increasingly asserting is that insurgent groups must take part in joint counter-narcotics operations.[3] This is suggestive of two things. Firstly, that the state is seeking to undermine the potential black trade of insurgent groups. Secondly, this suggests that any attempted retreat into narcotics production and trade will remain a non-viable option. As insurgent groups increasingly experience a decline in relative power, it will become necessary for them to appear as legitimate actors. In order to accomplish, they must increasingly be seen by international actors as obeying international humanitarian law. As noted above, the most apparent violation of humanitarian law on the part of insurgent groups is this

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[2] Patrick Meehan, "Drugs, insurgency and state-building in Burma: Why the drugs trade is central to Burma's changing political order," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies.* 42 (3), 2011: pp. 389-396.

[3] Paul.Keenan, *Briefing Paper No. 1: Burma's Ethnic Ceasefire Agreements* [online].Burma Centre for Ethnic Studies, 2012a. Available from: http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs13/BCES-BP-01-ceasefires(en).pdf . [Accessed 23/04/2012].

recruitment and deployment of underage fighters. In order to accomplish appear as legitimate, the removal of child soldiers becomes the most important area in which action is needed. The deployment of child soldiers within its own ranks, therefore, becomes an existentialist threat to the insurgent group which it must respond to with an active process of securitization. This approach, therefore, is not one which does not seek to address several groups (such as the United Wa State Army) which are already heavily involved in black market actives in which the state colludes. It does, however, seek to explain the remainder.

A brief note on methodology will be here useful in order to establish why these case studies have been selected, and how they are useful in demonstrating the proposed hypothesis. It is important to note that the use of such case studies here is not designed to prove the hypothesis true or false outright. More in-depth within-case analysis of these groups would be required in order to acquire data establishing or falsifying the hypothesis in question. The case structures have instead been selected in order to demonstrate Eckstein's notion of a plausibility probe, which is done in order to strengthen the prospects of the theory rather than prove it. Establishing the plausibility therefore goes beyond raising confidence in the proposed hypothesis, and instead works towards establishing confidence in validity to the point it may be tested.[4] King, Keohane and Verba have warned that this kind of selecting on the dependant variable will lead to truncation of the data, and a potential positive bias in the assessment of the hypothesis.[5] We can imagine, therefore, that King, Keohane and Verba might suggest that the selection of cases here is one which may exaggerate the hypothesized relationship, in which what we observe is instrumentalist approach on the part of one or several insurgent group rather than an existential threat faced by Burmese insurgencies. This criticism might suggest that even if the hypothesis can be demonstrated in the case studies, it may not be indicative of any broader trends of securitization.

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[4] Harry Eckstein, *Regarding Politics: Essays on Political Theory, Stability, and Change,* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992), pp. 147-152.

[5] Gary Robert King, O Keohane, and Sidney Verba. *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), pp. 124-148.

The approach adopted here can sidestep such concerns in two key ways. The first, is that selecting cases based on the outcome of interest will not exaggerate external validity due to the fact that this is a plausibility probe and not an outright confirmation or rejection of the hypothesis. As such, the approach either credibly demonstrates the theory in the proposed cases or it does not. Further generalizability will come once a clearer means of testing the hypothesis and gathering of data are developed. Secondly, by tracing the causal mechanism in each case study, determinacy in argument and selection bias on the dependant variable can both be avoided for the same reason that the first concern can be rejected. Again, this issue is tied to the fact that the causal mechanism is either demonstrated or it is not. As Collier, Mahoney and Seawright have noted, the within-case analysis does not need to concern itself with this kind of selection bias due to the fact that its inferential leverage is not reliant on level of variance.[6] Therefore, the approach here is one which seeks to establish the plausibility of the hypothesis in several cases, while also seeking to establish a clear causal pathway in each study. This allows the analysis here to demonstrate plausibility in the proposed hypothesis, and to trace a causal mechanism from the speech act to the securitizing outcome of interest. It is acknowledged, however, that a confirmation or falsification of the theory would be reliant on additional research and gathering of primary data.

Insurgency and the Use of Child Soldiers in Burma

An increasing trend in low-intensity conflict in failing states is the use of children as irregular soldiers in both insurgent and state military forces. The commonly accepted definition of achild person is "any person under 18 years of age who is part of any kind of regular or irregular armed force or armed group in any capacity, including but not limited to cooks, porters, messengers, and anyone accompanying such groups, other than family members."[7] Though such a definition is broad and cumbersome in many ways – due to the fact that it extends conceptual understanding of a child soldier well

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[6] David Collier, James Mahoney and Jason Seawright. "Claiming too Much: Warnings about Selection Bias," In Henry E. Brady and David Collier, eds. *Rethinking Social Inquiry: Diverse Tools, Shared Standards*, (London: Rowman and Littleford, 2010), pp. 100-101.

[7] United Nations Children's Fund. *Guide to the Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict*. (New York: UNICEF, 2003).

beyond fighters – it will be used here for two reasons. The first of these is the simple reason that it is not the purpose of this paper to challenge definitional approaches, and as such, it is most efficient to accept the commonly accepted definition of a child soldier. The second reason is tied to the fact that the hypothesized relationship is between international society and the insurgent group. Because of this, it must be acknowledge that the catalyst for this process is the speech act from the international society itself. As such, their definition of a child soldier not only determines the understanding of definitions in the securitization process, but also frames the conceptual context in which the insurgent must respond.

In the most recent literature on child soldiers in Burma, two broad themes dominate discussion. The first is that there is a broad consensus that there are more child soldiers in Burma than in any other country.[8] Even though estimates of total numbers of child soldiers can be problematic, it is important to acknowledge that it is a clear and not well-understood problem. The second theme is that there is shockingly little analysis or data on the subject in the context of Burma.[9] Whereas an intuitive response may be that it is difficult to gather data on insurgent groups and child soldiers, the same difficulties have not prevented the emergence of a massive body of literature on child soldiers in Africa.[10] In this context, a recent trend noted by

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[8] Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, 2008. *Global 2008 Report.* [online]. Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers Available from:
http://www.childsoldiersglobalreport.org/files/country_pdfs/FINAL_2008_Global_Report.pdf . [Accessed 30/12/2012]. p. 15.

[9] For examples see Michael Wessells, *Child Soldiers: From Violence to Protection* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006); Romeo Dallaire, *They Fight Like Soldiers, They Die Like Children* (London: Random House, 2010); Human Rights Education Institute of Burma (HREIB), Forgotten Future: Children and Armed Conflict in Burma." HREIB. 2011. Available from
http://www.essex.ac.uk/armedcon/story_id/childrenandarmedconburma.pdf; and Mark A. Drumbl, *Reimagining Child Soldiers in International Law and Policy*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

[10] For notable examples see Tim Allen, and Kloen Vlassenroot, eds., *The Lord's Resistance Army: Myth and Reality*," (London: Zed Books, 2010); Chris Dolan, *Social Torture: The Case of Northern Uganda, 1985-2006,*" (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2009); Alcinda Honwana, *Child Soldiers in Africa,*" (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006); David Keen, *Conflict and Collusion in Sierra Leone,*" (Oxford: James Currey, 2005); Krijn Peters, ,*"* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); John-Peter Pham,*"* (New York: Nova Science, 2005); Paul Richards, *Fighting for the Rainforest: War, Youth and Resources in Sierra Leone,*" (Oxford: James Currey Press, 1995); and Peter Warren Singer, *Children at War,*" (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2006).

humanitarian organizations is that certain insurgent groups are seeking to gain attention from international actors by releasing the child soldiers in their ranks.[11] This is occurring even in the face of continued fighting, and the inability of certain insurgent groups to gain favourable ceasefires or reconciliation with the Burmese state. As such, there is a clear puzzle here, in that insurgent groups are reacting to a normative influence which runs contrary to the immediate strategic needs that should be prioritized in a rationalist explanation.

It is important to acknowledge that both the state military and insurgent groups are increasingly reliant on the use of child soldiers to fill their ranks. Whereas it is difficult to enumerate the number of child soldiers in the Tatmadaw, recent estimates have suggested that 20 percent of active fighters are children, while 35 to 45 percent of new recruits are children who have been forcibly recruited. Additionally, it has been estimated that approximately 20 percent of the ranks of insurgent groups.[12] (Becker, 2011: 108-111). Whereas it is important to acknowledge that both the state military and the insurgent groups operate similar recruitment processes, they are not necessarily subject to the same kinds of structural dynamics and forces.

Where they are subject to the same kind of international incentives or constraints, the state and the insurgent group are able to respond to them in radically different ways, while mobilizing fundamentally distinct networks of allies. Wilson has noted that one of the most remarkable characteristics of the Burmese regime is its consistency in behaviour, despite enormous pressure to change its behaviour regarding child soldiers.[13] Whereas the Burmese state may seek protection behind alliances or partnerships with other regional powers, insurgent groups will likely only be able to seek alliances with other non-state groups. These may appear in the form of other insurgent groups, or as representatives of international civil society organizations. As

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[11] Olivier Bangerter, "Reasons why armed groups choose to respect international humanitarian law or not," *International Review of the Red Cross* 93-882 (2011): pp. 353-384.

[12] Jo Becker, "Child Recruitment in Burma, Sri Lanka, and Nepal," i*n* Scott Gates and Simon Reich, eds., *Child Soldiers in the Age of Fractured States* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2010), pp. 108-111.

[13] Trevor Wilson, "The Use of Normative Processes in Achieving Behaviour Change by the Regime in Myanmar," i*n* Nick Cheesman, Monique Skidmore and Trevor Wilson, eds., *Ruling Myanmar: From Cyclone Nargis to National Elections* (Singapore: ISEAS Publishing, 2010), pp. 294-318.

such, though both incumbent and insurgent may use child soldiers, and may be subject to similar international pressures, their available options are distinct. The state can adopt an instrumentalist approach in which it recruits child soldiers or refrains from doing so according to its own immediate cost benefit analysis. As such, the analysis here is only intended to apply to the insurgent group and how it must react to both international and state-level actors.

Securitization, Child Soldiers and the KNPP

In order to demonstrate the manner in which the issue of child soldiers is securitized, this section will adopt three key goals. The first will be to provide a summary of the literature on securitization, and the manner in which it applies to Burma. The second key goal will be to expand on Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde's concepts in order to extend their state-centric analysis and conceptualize an approach in which non-state actors can be seen as functional actors in the securitizing process. The third goal of this section will be to simultaneously demonstrate the first two goals by playing them out within a single case study. This will demonstrate how the process of securitization begins, how the insurgent group understands the existentialist threat presented by the use of child soldiers, and how they seek to go about securitizing the issue in order to gain increased legitimacy in the eyes of actors representing international society.

One example of such an organization is the Karenni Army, the armed wing of the Karenni National Progressive Party (for purposes of simplicity, both will hereafter be referred to as the KNPP). This organization has been leading an ethno-nationalist insurgency in Karenni state since the breakdown of the first ceasefire in 1988. In the face of government offensives, the KNPP became a highly mobile guerrilla insurgency holding little territory.[14] Though the KNPP signed a ceasefire with the government in 2009, this has since broken down due to the fact state have been seizing logging and mining rights from local actors, and excluding local workers from any potential

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[14] Ashley South, *Mon Nationalism and Civil War in Burma: The Golden Sheldrake.* (Routledge: London, 2003), p. 225.

benefits.[15] A key concern for insurgent groups is to address concerns of underdevelopment in their area of control, while naturally also ensuring that local actors receive a piece of the pi. In order to embrace this development incentive, it is necessary for insurgent groups to be able to present themselves as a legitimate authority. In response to calls from village leaders to encourage in UN development assistance programs, being regarded as legitimate became a core concern of the KNPP.[16]). Following from this, since as early as 2007, humanitarian organizations noted that the KNPP was reducing their reliance on child soldiers even as hostilities increased. In doing this, the KNPP also asked for independent monitors to confirm they did not have child soldiers in their ranks.[17] It is interesting to note the continuation of this trend even in the face of a breakdown in the ceasefire with the state, which would suggest that the KNPP should not be reducing its manpower, but instead increasing it in the face of government offensives against their holdings and operations.

The KNPP have even gone as far as issuing press releases requesting that the United Nations conduct formal investigations to prove they have ceased using child soldiers.[18] The issue, however, remains at a standstill due to unwillingness on the part of the UN to contact and engage with insurgent groups without the permission of the state in questions. The most recent report of the UN Secretary-General on children in conflict notes that in spite of KNPP efforts, there remains no ceasefire and no comprehensive agreement on monitoring child soldiers due to continued blocking by the government.[19] An immediate counterpoint to the argument here would be to

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[15] Huma Haider, *Helpdesk Research Report: Vulnerable groups in Burma and access to services,* 2011. [online].Governance and Social Development Resource Centre. Available from http://www.gsdrc.org/docs/open/HDQ756.pdf . [Accessed 30/12/2012].

[16] Zaw Oo and Win Min, *Assessing Burma's Ceasefire Accords* (Washington, D.C.: East-West Center Washington, 2007).

[17] Human Rights Watch, *Sold to be Soldiers: The Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers in Burma*[online]. Human Rights Watch 2007a. Available at http://www.hrw.org/reports/2007/10/30/sold-be-soldiers [Accessed 30/12/2012].

[18] Karenni National Progressive Party, Executive Committee, 2008. Call for the Karenni Army's name to be removed from the list of non-state armed groups making use of child soldiers in armed combat [online]. KNPP. Available at http://www.karennihomeland.com/ArticleArticle.php?ContentID=138[Accessed 30/12/2012].

[19] U.N. Security Council, 23/04/2011. Agenda Item 64 - Children and Armed Conflict: Report of the Secretary-General,[online]. Available at http://unispal.un.org/UNISPAL.NSF/0/70BF34991DA5D6B08525788E004BA583[Accessed 30/12/2012].

suggest that even though the leadership of the KNPP is asserting that it is attempting to remove child soldiers, this could by simply rhetoric. However, though the leadership of the KNPP may be disingenuous, the mere fact that they are calling for independent international monitoring suggests two key conclusions. The first is that the organization is likely following though on their claims to be reducing child soldiers if they are engaging with both IGOs and NGOs.[20] Secondly, even regardless of whether or not this is merely rhetoric, it is demonstrative of the fact that the KNPP is seeking legitimacy in the eyes of international actors and sees value in how it is portrayed internationally.

In August 2012 they became of the first ANSAs to sign an additional Deed of Commitment with Geneva Call. The KA currently has a preliminary ceasefire signed with the Burmese government, though there have been a number of violations in Kachin and Karen regions. They accuse the government of continuing to lay landmines around the area of a major hydroelectric dam (the Lawpita Falls Dam).[21]

The KA openly admits having used child soldiers in the past, but now asserts that they include child protection as a part of officer training and that rules regarding treatment of children are included in their constitution. They openly claim that they would like to have international verifiers confirm that they do not use child soldiers, but have had difficulty in getting any to come. They also have a problem with Karenni children being taken by the government and forced into the Tatmadaw. They are currently developing a code of conduct with Geneva Call, and do not have a clear setting of training guidelines for officers regarding child protection. Having said that, the leadership claims to be *very* keen on becoming increasingly involved in such activities. [22]

In this case, it can be shown to be clear that the KNPP both cares about the opinion of the international community, and at the same time is taking efforts towards

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[20] If the KNPP was simply making appeals to the UN when it new full well the UN would not participate without the permission of the state, then it could be argued that the KNPP statements were simply rhetoric. However, given that they are willingly engaging with international NGO's who do not operate within the same limitations as the UN, this is suggestive of the fact that they are following through with the actions they have claimed to undertake.

[21] Aung Sun Myint, Secretary Two of KNPP. Interview with author, 06/07/2012.

[22]Ku Ooh Reh, Secretary One of KNPP. Interview with author, 06/07/2012.

convincing key international actors that it is willing to follow norms being presented to it from external sources. In Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde's conceptualization of securitization, there are three main units: the referent object seen as the threat, the securitizing actor declaring the referent to be a threat; and the functional actor who is affected by the referent and carries out securitization.[23] In the process outlined here, the securitizing actor commencing the performative speech act is international society. For the purposes of this argument, international society is understood in terms of Bull's notion of an international society that broadly shares pluralist norms without enforcing them.[24] International society in this sense includes NGOs that criticize the use of child soldiers – such as Human Rights Watch– as well as the U.N. Security Council taking action to condemn the use of child soldiers. Although the UNSC has not acknowledged the successful securitizing efforts of non-state groups and child soldiers, it is illustrative that the council's Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict has directly addressed Burmese insurgents in statements criticizing the use of underage recruits.[25].Therefore, the securitising actors are both the IGOs who criticize non-state groups but may be limited in their ability to engage with them directly, as well as the international NGOs who are more able to reward norm compliance.

The functional actor in this case is the insurgent group that recruits child soldiers, though it is important to acknowledge that both sets of actors have different understandings of the threats in question. The referent threat is the child soldier, though whereas international actors perceive the child soldier to be a threat to human security and the stability of developing states, the insurgent group sees their own use of child soldiers to be an existential threat. This is because insurgent groups seek international legitimacy and development aid, as discussed earlier. In addition to this, humanitarian aid can be used to increase relative levels of local power and influence. Although humanitarian aid may seem to be a small incentive, the ICRC has noted that

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[23] Barry Buzan , Ole Wæver & Jaap de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* (London: Lynn Rienner, 1998), p. 36.

[24] Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977), p. 38.

[25] U.N. Security Council, 63rd year. Statement by the Chairman addressed to the non-State armed groups in Myanmar, [online]. Available at http://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/cae/servlet/contentblob/619998/publicationFile/169347/120612_VN_Bericht_Kinder_Konflikte.pdf .[Accessed 30/12/2012].

in its dealings with rebel groups, that some will attempt to gain the moral high-ground by obeying international humanitarian law. Though this will not 'win' the conflict, it is still a useful area of gaining even advantages of legitimacy as well as the aid and attention from humanitarian groups that follows.[26] Even small amounts of material assistance in the form of food and medication are useful to an insurgent group engage in protracted conflict.

At the same time this is occurring, however, the argument presented here is that in the speech act that commences the process, international society perceives its audience to be the state, as demonstrated by the fact that both IGOs and NGOs address states directly in their speech acts condemning the use of child soldiers.[27]This demonstrates that even if the attempt to compel the state to securitize a given issue fails, the normative influence may still trickle down to sub-state actors willing to securitize the referent threat. This, in turn, has the effect of demonstrating to international society that the non-state insurgent group is willing to respond to the speech acts, thus encouraging the emergence of direct communication between society and insurgent – even if this is only in the form of UN reports condemning certain forms of behaviour. A second and more direct speech act thus occurs, as international society establishes discursive links with the rebel groups. Whereas the UN has been engaged with shaming and opprobrium of states since its inception, this is not the case with insurgent groups on issues of normative issues such as the mobilization of child soldiers. Normative appeals to states pre-date and outweigh such appeals to insurgent groups. Increased attempt to conform with normative expectations, and the response from international society that follows, therefore suggests that insurgent groups are seeking to establish the relationship hypothesized in this paper.

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[26] Bangerter, "Reasons why armed groups choose to respect international humanitarian law or not."

[27] For examples of each, see U.N. General Assembly, 25/05/2000.Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, [online].. Available fromhttp://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/crc-conflict.htm[Accessed 30/12/2012]; and ICRC, Customary IHL Database. Rule 136. Recruitment of Child Soldiers [online]. International Red Committee of the Red Cross. Available from http://www.icrc.org/customary-ihl/eng/docs/v1_cha_chapter39_rule136#Fn12[Accessed 30/12/2012]. (2003).

For small ethno-nationalist insurgent groups like the KNPP, therefore, the process of securitizing child soldiers is both a method of appealing above the state and a key mechanism for the insurgent group to seek survival. Using child soldiers to fight the state is a dead-end strategy if they are not able to emerge successful (especially as other insurgent groups increase relative power through narco-criminal enterprise) while also gaining no outside assistance. At the same time, securitizing child soldiers is a means to extend survival and gain even small amounts of aid and legitimacy by demonstrating willingness to securitize something the state is not. This remains faithful to Wæver's conceptualization of security as a discursive act of the elite.[28] It also remains faithful to Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde's argument that the process of securitization is to elevate a concern "above politics".[29] In the case of Burmese insurgents, the act of securitizing child soldiers and making appeals to international actors is, in effect, an attempt to move the issue above the politics of the state and into the realm of the international.

It is important to remember that all of this is taking place in a context in which the number of insurgent more insurgent groups are moving from conflict, to ceasefire, to resolution.[30] It is in this context that the use of child soldiers is shown to be an existentialist threat to the organizations in question. Three important factors must here be stressed here to clarify this. The first is that insurgent groups are in a position where it is increasingly difficult to move to narcotics production as a source of revenue, due to increased counter-narcotics operations by both the state and insurgent groups. As noted earlier, illegal trade as a means of supporting insurgency will only work so long as the state condones or ignores it. The MTA is an example of an insurgent group which sought to continue such activity in the face of government challenges, though were forced to surrender once the government began counter-narcotics operations.[31]

The second is that the relational advantage that insurgent groups can claim over the state is one of legitimacy, and in order to gain this in the eyes of international actors, they must increasingly follow international humanitarian law. Given, as noted earlier,

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[28] Ole Wæver, "Securitization and Desecuritization," *in* R. Lipschutz, ed., *On Security,* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), p. 46.
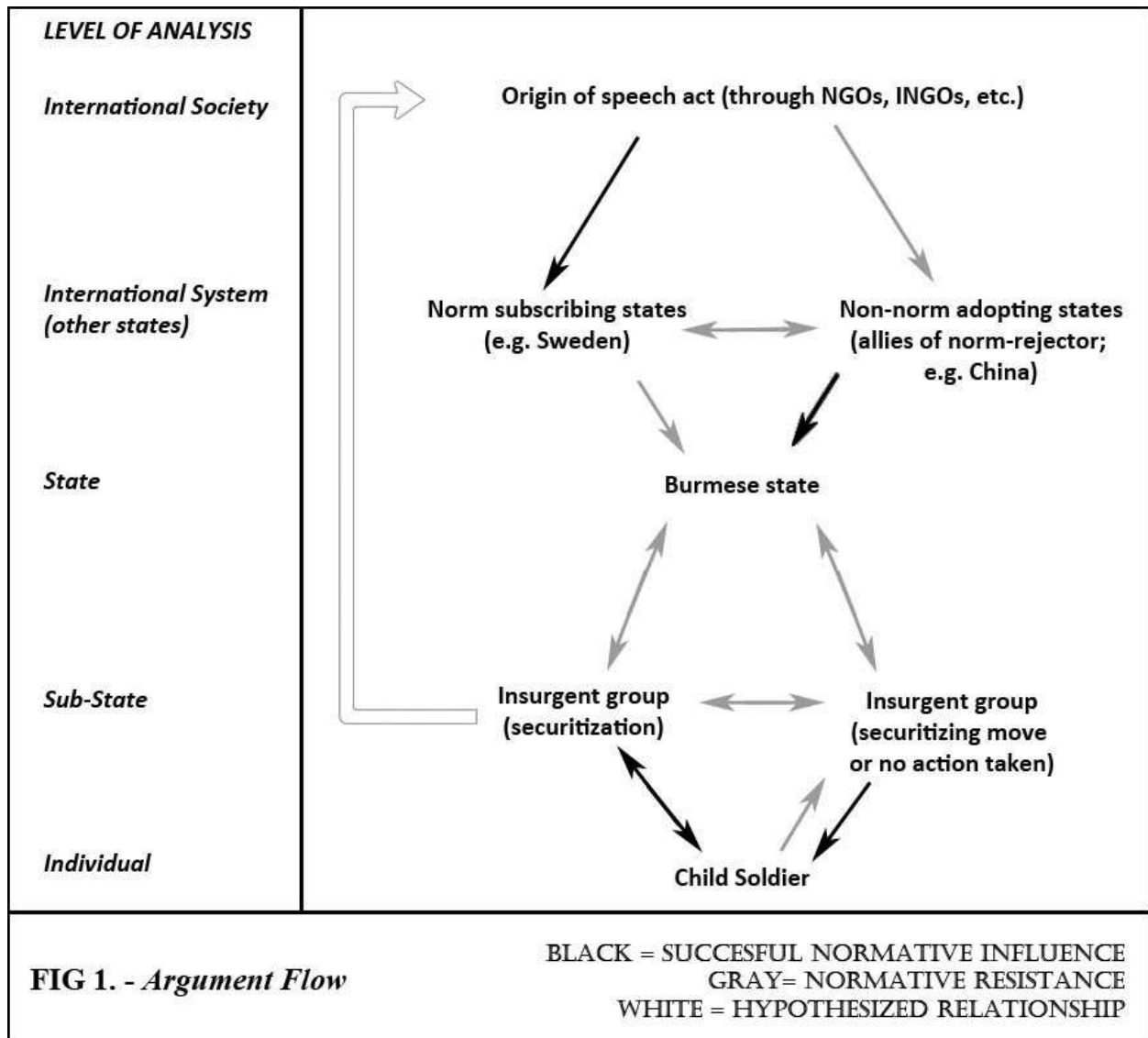
[29] Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis,* p. 23.

[30] Keenan, *Briefing Paper No. 1,* p. 8.

[31] Oo & Min, *Assessing Burma's Ceasefire Accords*, p. 13.

that insurgent groups are heavily reliant on child soldiers to fill their ranks, and given that crimes against the civilian population are limited, the use of child soldiers becomes the area that immediately necessitates reform and change within the insurgent group. Thirdly, this is all occurring in a context of socio-political change and reform in Burma. This causes a snowball effect, in that the more insurgent groups and pro-democracy groups embrace reform, the more the others are pushed into a position of 'reform or die.' Therefore, removing child soldiers from the ranks of the insurgent group is not one amongst a constellation of actions they may adopt on an instrumentalist basis. Instead, it is a course of action that insurgent groups must adopt in the context of a changing strategic environment, due to their need of some kind of international support, their search for legitimacy, and their declining ability to challenge the state militarily.

This process can be further demonstrated by illustrating the manner in which the speech act flows from the securitizing actor to the functional actor (see Fig. 1, following page). Although the diagram may seem to present multiple securitization relationships, in fact this represents a single though diffuse securitization process that filters down to the non-state actor from the initial speech act. As the diagram shows, though actors at the international society level perceive their audience in the securitizing process as the state, they are unsuccessful in this due to the pluralist nature of norms and their adoption process. Though many states will adopt the

FIG 1. - *Argument Flow*

BLACK = SUCCESFUL NORMATIVE INFLUENCE
GRAY= NORMATIVE RESISTANCE
WHITE = HYPOTHESIZED RELATIONSHIP

norm, others will outright ignore it (in this case Burma), while a third set of actors adopt the norm while rejecting its enforcement (in this case China). The relationship in which states like China support Burma allows the Tatmadaw to remain in power and continue its use of child soldiers. As long as the Tatmadaw remains in power with some form of international allies, the small ethno-nationalist movements will be unable to secede from the state, overpower it or induce reform. Insurgent groups like the KNPP respond by securitizing the threat in question, and appealing above the state. Even though actors like the UNSC are unlikely to directly reward sub-state actors, increased access to humanitarian aid (food and medicaments) is vital, while perceived legitimacy and international awareness of the group are also both are raised.

By focussing on the KNPP as an active actor in the securitization process, it is possible to see the manner in which securitization can occur independent of actions by the state. Whereas initially actors in international society seek to encourage the state to securitize the issue of child soldiers they are unwilling to do this due to the presence of the state's external allies. Insurgent groups conduct securitizing moves in response, demonstrating that the relationship does not begin as an intersubjective dialogue in the manner in which Waever has suggested. The discursive act certainly begins at the level of international society, and it becomes a process of securitization as the insurgent group conceptualizes it as an existential threat in the way Buzan, Waever and de Wilde assert.[32] As noted earlier, the process instead commences when the initial speech act is delivered to the state, and the insurgent group responds, thus leading to a relationship in which international society delivers speech acts directly to the non-state group.

In concluding, the securitization of child soldiers by non-state actors in Burma shows the development of non-traditional security relationships as well as non-traditional threats. Two caveats should be noted here, the first of which is that this is a process of securitization rather than norm creation. The actors at the level of international society do not create the norm, though through their speech act they commence the securitization process. Secondly, it should be clarified that this process must necessarily occur in a diffuse way rather than as a direct relationship between international society and insurgent. Actors such as the UNSC are institutionally unable either to contact insurgent groups directly or reward them for their behaviour. Humanitarian groups are unable to speak to states in the same way, though are able engage the insurgents directly. Therefore, both IGOs and NGOs are necessary in this process in order for the diffuse securitization process to both initiate a speech act and reward compliance. This explains why the UNSC might criticize non-state actors in Burma, even though it will not follow through either with praise or material support. NGOs such as the ICRC signal support through dialogue while remaining neutral, whereas those who reject humanitarian political neutrality – most notably HRW or MSF – can give rhetorical and material support. It is in this manner that insurgent groups can increase international profile and relative local power levels, by adopting a norm of securitization that the state will not.

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[32] Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis,* p. 26.

Supporting Example: the Kachin Independence Organization

In order to aid in demonstrating that the approach of the KNPP is not an instrumentalist one, but instead is a necessary course of action they must adopt in the face of an existentialist crisis, analysis will here briefly analyze an additional case study. Namely, this will be the Kachin Independence Organization and their armed with the Karenni Independence Army (hereafter, both will be referred to as the KIO). This case study provides a degree of variance in the case selection, due to the fact that the KIO is a much larger insurgent group than KIO, and emerged as a breakaway faction from the NDF. The KIO signed a ceasefire agreement during the third-wave of ceasefires amongst ethno-nationalist insurgencies during 1994-5. Although the ceasefire contained no real political resolution to the causes of conflict between the KIO and the state, the ceasefire served the interests of the KIO in that it was able to focus its efforts on recruitment and expansion. In the decade following the signing of the ceasefire, the KIO expanded from approximately 7,000 to 10,000.[33] Included in these cohorts of new recruits were a large number of children.

Initially, the KIO operated a policy of forced recruitment in which each family in the territory under its control was required to provide one child for recruitment.[34] Although the KIO avoided forced recruitment of children, it considers accepting children into non-combat roles in the army as a form of foster care for vulnerable children. In the past, it has preferred to deal with the issue of child soldiers without outside involvement.[35] The ceasefire was tenuous at best, however, with the KIO refusing to be subsumed under government control or authority.[36] After the ceasefire later broke down, the KIO became one of the largest insurgent groups fighting the government. It is therefore in a position in which its current stance opposing the government militarily while demanding autonomy is untenable. The KIO thus risks

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[33] Oo & Min, *Assessing Burma's Ceasefire Accords*, p. 24.

[34] Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict, 2009. No More Denial: Children Affected by Armed Conflict in Burma, [online] Available at:
http://watchlist.org/no-more-denial-children-affected-by-armed-conflict-in-myanmar-burma-may-2009/ . [Accessed 30/12/2012].

[35] Human Rights Watch, 2007b. The Plight of Child Soldiers in Burma." Human Rights Watch. Available at http://www.hrw.org/news/2007/11/01/plight-child-soldiers-burma . [Accessed 30/12/2012].

[36] Paul Chambers and Aurel Croissant, eds., *Democracy Under Stress: Civil-Military Relations in South and Southeast Asia* (Bangkok: ISIS Thailand, 2010), p. 115.

becoming increasingly isolated from other insurgent groups as well as actors representative of international society.[37]

In this context, the KIO has increasingly begun to engage with humanitarian actors. As early as 2007, Human Rights Watch reported that the KIO was engaging with issues of child protection, though was doing so hesitantly and without a desire for outside confirmation.[38] Additionally, the KIO sought to encourage partnerships between local NGOs and international NGOs and UN development agencies.[39] More recently, however, Burmese NGOs are noting an increased desire on the part of the KIO to have international monitors confirm that there are no child soldiers in its ranks.[40] Local NGOs have also listed reports noting that not only is the KIO no longer recruiting children actively, but that an increased number of children are attempting to join but being refused entry into the organization.[41] A recent report by Human Rights Watch has noted that although there were some children still in the ranks of the KIO, they could not confirm that recruitment was still occurring (HRW, 2012: 60). This is occurring as the state military has been increasing offensive action against KIO strongholds.[42]

For the purposes of this paper, there is insufficient data available to establish concretely whether or not the hypothesized relationship is occurring in the case of the KIO. However, several core conclusions can be drawn from this which lend support to the plausibility probe approach noted above. Firstly, the simple fact that the KIO is engaging with international humanitarian actors as well as local NGOs demonstrates that they see legitimacy as important. Regardless of whether this is solely based on an

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[37] Keenan, Paul, 2012a. *Briefing Paper No. 1: Burma's Ethnic Ceasefire Agreements* [online].Burma Centre for Ethnic Studies.Available from: http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs13/BCES-BP-01-ceasefires(en).pdf . [Accessed 23/04/2012].

[38] Human Rights Watch, 2007b. The Plight of Child Soldiers in Burma." Human Rights Watch. Available at http://www.hrw.org/news/2007/11/01/plight-child-soldiers-burma . [Accessed 30/12/2012].

[39] Oo & Min, *Assessing Burma's Ceasefire Accords*, p. 25.

[40] Human Rights Education Institute of Burma (HREIB), 2011. Forgotten Future: Children and Armed Conflict in Burma." HREIB, p. 49. Available from
http://www.essex.ac.uk/armedcon/story_id/childrenandarmedconburma.pdf . [Accessed 30/12/2012].

[41] Ibid, p. 88.

[42] Kachin News Group, "Burma Army offensive against KIO in jade area forces more to flee" [online], 2012. Available at:
http://www.kachinnews.com/news/war/2201-burma-army-offensive-against-kio-in-jade-area-forces-more-to-flee.html . [Accessed 30/12/2012].

instrumentalist logic or whether they are being increasingly socialized, even the fact that they are talking about child soldiers and engaging with humanitarians demonstrates that it is a strategic concern to them. Secondly, it can be demonstrated that the KIO are interpreting the speech act from international society as a signal that its own military strategy can be an existentialist threat to the insurgent group regardless of the state response. Child soldiers within their own ranks are the threat that may bring them down.

Thirdly, it has been shown that the KIO are being increasingly marginalized both as an organization challenging the state in addition to the fact that illegitimacy will preclude long term survival. The fact that the KIO altered its forced recruitment programs, and has begun refusing entry to children, who seek to volunteer, demonstrates that they are- increasingly interpreting the use of child soldiers as an existentialist threat. The fact that this is occurring at the same time that they are being increasingly marginalized as an organization demonstrates an important hierarchy of strategic necessities. Regardless of the fact that the KIO is facing increasing challenges from the state, they are reducing their manpower and bases of potential recruitment. This demonstrates that even in the face of an onslaught form the state, the use of child soldiers is considered an even larger threat. Thirdly, the increased willingness on the part of the KIO to engage with humanitarians in order to construct monitoring mechanisms demonstrates the attempted securitization of child soldiers, and a desire to appeal to the level of international society rather than the state itself.

Taken together, these three conclusions demonstrate that the IO cares what international actors say (the speech act), prioritize removing child soldiers above other considerations (the existentialist threat), and are taking measures to demonstrate their commitment (the securitization process).Therefore, in this case we can see the hypothesized process occurring. Increased pressure from international society has resulted in a change of considerations on the part of the insurgent group. Whereas the state is not willing to expel child soldiers from its ranks, due to the presence of external allies willing to support it, the insurgent groups are increasingly realizing that they are being marginalized still further, and that the continued use of child soldiers remains an existentialist threat to them.

Concluding Remarks

This final concluding section will seek to establish means by which the proposed hypothesis may actually be tested and observed. Secondly, the attempt will be made to draw out some of the theoretical implications that this approach may offer. In terms of the first goal, it is a core argument of this paper that the two case studies of the KNPP and the KIO serve as a plausibility probe into demonstrating the manner in which insurgencies respond to speech acts that emerge from the level of international society, and are willing to securitize the threats. Whereas the Burmese state may be unwilling to remove its child soldiers, this is a response to the fact that it has supporting allies that the non-state actors do not. For them, therefore, the use of child soldiers is not an existentialist threat, though it may become so in the future if allies are wiling to draw support.

A method of testing this hypothesis would be therefore to construct a deeper within-case analysis of several case studies in order to process trace the process by which insurgencies become increasingly marginalized, while also seek to securitize the threats proposed. It will be necessary to demonstrate both increased marginalization due to continued use of child soldiers alongside leading to a process in which child soldiers were removed from ranks as a means of gaining such legitimacy. In order to establish that this is not an instrumentalist approach on the part of insurgents, an additional parallel account could be process traced in order to show clearly how the failure to do so led to the decline or collapse of an organization.

A number of theoretical implications for English School and the process of securitization also flow from this argument once it is tested and confirmed. This approach expands the scope of actors from civil society and the state, by moving both vertically above the state to the level of international society, as well as horizontally within the state, taking into account rival claimants to legitimacy. It expands the securitizing relationship from being an intersubjective one between the state and international actors, to one which brings in non-state actors, as well as non-direct relationships. Rather than securitization following from a speech act from one actor to a state, this approach sees securitization as occurring through a network of relationships both international above the state as well as domestically within its territory.

Although in this case, the securitization process is one which flows down through the hierarchy from international society to non-state actor, the implications or this argument suggest that securitization it is not necessarily a linear process, or even a simple intersubjective process between two actors. Instead, if the insurgent groups are successful in their securitization attempts, they will be able to gain legitimacy in the eyes of international actors at the expense of the state. This suggests that they in term may be able to reciprocate the speech act against both the state and its external allies, and potentially even international society itself. Whereas the potential for this to occur should not be exaggerated, it should also be noted that this presents a rethinking of the securitization process, as well as the manner in which international actors may use both material and normative incentives in order to encourage certain kinds of behaviour from insurgent groups.

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