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Perspectives on the Growing Trend of Child Piracy

Lt. Gen. Roméo Dallaire
Imagine telling a politician to face the camera. I am always a bit tongue and cheek. I laugh when people ask me if they can take a picture with me, and I say, “What politician do you know that doesn’t want his picture taken?” And so I am flattered for that opportunity and also for those who are watching us streaming on the web.

First, thank you very much for, one, the invitation to be able to address you as a lay person and not from the legal background, although I have chaired a number of court marshals and thrown a bunch of people in jail in my time, but as a commander and not necessarily the pure JAG side of the house or Judge Advocate General or legal side.

Secondly, thank you very much for the Frederick K. Cox International Law Center Award, and also the funds that are so attached that are going directly into our research work at Dalhousie. So thank you very much for permitting us to continue to do our work.

I think that, if I may, I will try to watch the clock so that we do have time for questions and answers, and I probably would like to

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stay longer, but our leader here has got us lined up with NPR. So I
don’t think we will be able to play with those timings.

So first of all, I would like to say that I consider it quite risky for
an American institution to invite so many Canucks or Canadians
down here, particularly in this time frame when we are in Canada
celebrating the War of 1812, and you are commemorating it.

We know we won it, so we don’t have many problems with that,
but we don’t really like rubbing the noses of our friendly colleagues on
that.

It adds an interesting link, though, to the discussions of today
because there was quite a Naval component to that war if you
remember, mostly on the Great Lakes, and there was some piracy
done; of course, by your side, not ours.

And so I tend to like some of the anecdotal history of the War of
1812, because, as an example, the farthest north you actually made it
was to attack and burn a fort called York, which ultimately is
Toronto. I’m from Montreal. That doesn’t bother me much.

We thought we would do you a favor and come down south, and
we found this town, built on a swamp, and it was hot, and it was
humid, and there were lots of mosquitoes. And so we thought we
would burn it down and do you a favor, and what you do is you
rebuild it, and it is Washington. So we are not too sure who really
understood how to win a complex war even in that era.

I am also in a scenario that is not totally foreign to me in regards
to trying to establish some naval credentials. I am an artillery officer
by profession of arms. But I am a graduate of your U.S. Marine Corps
Staff College, and so I spent a year with Marines afloat and have
served with a number of them over the years.

It was interesting that during my year there in my syndicate
there was a naval P-3 pilot, you know, the antisubmarine aircraft that
you have, and we have the same one who wrote a paper on how to
bring naval gunfire back into the diplomatic arena by creating
lightweight 8-inch guns on destroyers.

And so it was interesting to see a pilot pull that out, and that
made me quite warm to him because, as an artillery officer, I was also
trained on naval gunfire. However, since we have gotten rid of the big
guns, I think that that has been quite a downer for us who love the
Navy and respect that tradition and that service significantly. Back
home we call it the senior service, and it rightly deserves that title.

I am—because we are talking child pirates and child soldiers, I
decided to wear my—a bit gaudy tie, which is my UNICEF tie today,
as UNICEF is one of those front line NGOs very much involved in
this arena, as they are included also in Somalia where we are doing
some work with them and have been heavily involved on the child
soldier but on the demobilization, rehabilitation, reintegration side of
the house, which I will argue is a way of handling the problem.
But it is not necessarily reducing its impact, picking up the pieces afterwards is not necessarily stopping its use, and so I will get into where I think we can be far more effective in the preventative side of the house, which, ultimately, I hope takes away a weapons platform from the inventory of conflict or use in other realms, including, as an example, piracy, banditry, and similar activities.

I nearly forgot that two of my children are in the Naval Reserve, but I am saved by the fact that my oldest son is in the infantry so we will continue.

In regards to today, I am going to be a bit constrained by two factors. The first one is, I am not using a PowerPoint, or for those who are more modern, with Apple Keynote. And the second one is, I was asked to be relatively brief, and brevity is not the strength of retired generals nor politicians, particularly if you want time for questions, which I hope we will have a dynamic exercise in so doing.

I also want to tell you that I come from a country that is, at times, talking from both sides of its mouth, which makes it rather difficult to be credible here at this podium and many others in the international sphere in these days, because, on the one hand, Canada was leading, as with the United States, in moving the Optional Protocol on Child Rights, as an example, in regards to child soldiers and the recognition thereof,\(^1\) but on the other hand refused to repatriate a child soldier from Guantanamo Bay, who was Canadian, and who was, in fact, ultimately dumped in Canada after he was tried in Guantanamo and is now in a Canadian jail.\(^2\)

And it was interesting, we just fleetingly touched upon by one of our speakers on child terrorism, and there was a heated debate back home on whether or not this fifteen year-old, who had been taken to Afghanistan by his dad, who was very close to the Al-Qaeda hierarchy, four years indoctrinated over there, and at the age of fifteen ended up in a firefight, and in so doing was accused of killing an American soldier.\(^3\)

He was shot twice in the back, two years held in prison, where some of the people who imprisoned him were ultimately court marshaled for having killed other prisoners, and then held seven years

without trial and then did a plea bargain to eight more years of jail, in maximum jail back home in Canada finally.4

And so there was significant debate whether or not Omar Khadr was a child soldier, or was he a child terrorist, and does that change all the rules of the exercise?

And I have been quite adamant in that throwing the catalyst of terrorism to a fifteen year-old engaged in a conflict does not override the Optional Protocol on Child Rights. And I still consider that individual a child soldier, and I would be happy to see if the debate is as interesting down here as it has been up north.

Now, there has been establishing some of the parameters that we have discussed this morning, and particularly with the last panel, a significant debate on age, a significant debate on volunteerism and so on, and we have had—we shared panels right before on this, and I want to bring an angle to this discussion.

And I want to bring the angle to the question of not the age because it is a reference point, and it is interesting that we in our military do not permit people to be recruited, trained, and particularly used in operations under the age of eighteen, although our military academies do recruit under the age of eighteen, but they don’t deploy under eighteen.

And yet, we have problems accepting that that is a criteria that can be used in other countries for youth who are engaged in conflicts, but it is the volunteerism side and the link I make that comes from my Rwanda experience as the Force Commander.

At one point, there were elements of my force that were very much engaged, if I can use that term, in fraternization with the locals. And Rwanda was a country that was imploding. Rwanda was a country that was in conflict and, ultimately, went into a civil war and genocide.

And so this country in conflict, you had these foreign troops coming in and fraternizing with the locals, and the question is: Does that actually stand a test of ethical responsiveness by military or forces coming into a conflict zone? Should fraternization be accepted?

And so the debate, very short one I must say because within the military we don’t have to debate too long, so the debate was voluntarily these women are presenting themselves to these soldiers. And so, yes, fraternization can be recognized as possible and acceptable.

I, however, came down and said there is no such thing as fraternization in a conflict zone. Women do not voluntarily give themselves to men of foreign forces who are coming in because they

are falling in love; they are doing it because they need security, they are doing it because they need money, they need food, they need protection. And so there are a whole series of parameters that surround, that create, the atmosphere that have permitted this action to happen.

And so I put a whole bunch of places out of bounds, and I prevented and took action against those who did fraternize in Rwanda with either side. I look at child soldiers, and I say, is it possible that you can actually argue volunteerism in a country in conflict, in an imploding nation, with youths?

Is there really that free atmosphere permitting them to actually define volunteerism the same way we do under the context of where we are here, where we volunteer to join the forces, we volunteer to join an organization. Is it the same?

And I would argue that it is not, and I would go as far as to argue that no matter how they get into the recruitment of whatever the force, be it a national body, be it a non-state actor, or be a belligerent of whatever type, including piracy gangs and so on, that youths do not volunteer in those nations where we know the whole atmosphere is one of a failing state, where rule of law probably doesn’t even—it is not even applied, let alone the sense of security that the families or the individuals find themselves in. And I will argue that it is still a vulnerable body that is there within the youth, even at sixteen and seventeen, that can be induced into the extremes. And the example I would like to use is the example of Sierra Leone and, of course, knowing that that war was fought by, on all sides, youths and the exactations that they conducted and so on, and I applaud the International Tribunal of Sierra Leone that did not prosecute child soldiers.5

But I will bring you back, again, if I may, to Rwanda. I mean, we are in the twentieth anniversary year of that genocide—and how a political party used the radio and a great radio station, great music, great attachment, was created by this radio station that was funded by this political party, how it brought in a youth movement within its party.

It gave them uniforms. It organized soccer games. It organized Sunday activities for them. It gave them a sense of a certain empowerment and joining a club and so on, and how they, in less than a year, were able to change that group from being a youth movement of fraternity and collegiality and learning and esprit de corps and so on, into the primary weapons system used in the

genocide, into a militia that with machetes slaughtered the bulk of the Rwandans in that genocide.

And they were under eighteen, a lot of them, not even counting those who were part of the two fighting forces that had under-eighteen child soldiers on both sides fighting in the conflict, but then you had the Interahamwe, as they were called, behind the lines, conducting all the slaughtering under orders, under influence by that same extremist political party, the CDR that was ultimately held accountable in the international tribunal.6

So we are talking very much of still an entity that can be maneuvered and can be maneuvered to incredible extremes and be used very effectively. And so that is why I, apart from the fact that I had a child soldier with an AK-47 stuffed up one of my nostrils with his finger on the trigger, and the only reason to this day I believe he didn’t pull the trigger is he saw the chocolate bar in my hand.

Apart from that, I feel that this child soldier dimension, this introduction of youths in piracy as we are doing in other endeavors, as we are seeing youth being engaged in, is, in my opinion, a dimension of conflict that is of our era, particularly as it came extensively with the Mozambique conflict in the late ‘80s,7 came available because of massive availability or proliferation of small arms that also helped at the end of the Cold War.8

We didn’t destroy all those weapons. We sold them off, and they are readily available, but it came, in my opinion, as an introduction of not a social economic problem in conflicts but, in fact, as a new weapons system.

And so I argue that, in fact, we have seen the introduction of a new weapons system that is the primary weapons system in many conflicts around the world. So it is not just your drummer boy of the nineteenth century or your press gang youth on naval ships in also the nineteenth century. It is not, sort of in extreme scenarios, the

6. See Roméo Dallaire with Jessica Dee Humphreys, They Fight Like Soldiers, They Die Like Children: The Global Quest to Eradicate the Use of Child Soldiers 12, 180 (2010); Aimable Twagilimana, Historical Dictionary of Rwanda 34 (2007).


Hitler youths who were used at the end of the World War II campaign—and we have seen them used in different scenarios. And we saw Cambodia and so on, but we are talking about children, youth, being used as the primary weapons system that adults are using to conduct their conflict and their campaigns.

And as such, I have looked at child soldiers and the work we are doing as, in fact, how do you not pick up the pieces afterwards, that is to say, how do you demobilize them and how do you rehabilitate them and how do you reintegrate them as such, and I will come back to that.

But look at how do you stop them from being used? How do you neutralize this weapons system in the conflict? How do you make child soldiers, now child pirates, a liability to the adults so that they won’t recruit them, and they won’t use them, and how, as you are facing them in these conflicts, that you look at them as a security problem and as such your security forces working with NGOs and development people, are able to bring together solutions in trying to neutralize them without slaughtering them for the doctrines of all forces out there.

And when I started my work when I was at the Kennedy School in 2004, we did an extensive survey of all military forces, developed countries and non-developed countries and their doctrine in regards to child soldiers, and nobody had anything except my good friends the U.S. Marine Corps.

And what they had was one slide in one course in regards to if they are deployed as a force and should they by chance meet up with child soldiers or youths armed as part of the belligerent forces, that they should do everything to avoid confrontation. That was the doctrine.

Well, how do you do that when the primary enemy force is child soldiers. And how do you end up doing anything else that, ultimately, in trying to prevent their effectiveness, trying also to protect yourself and your mission and, ultimately, using the fundamental law of self-defense in blowing them away? And so that’s what is out there. That’s what was out there.

And in so doing, it has not, in my opinion, attenuated the use of children. It has simply tried to attenuate the impact of the use of children subsequently, meaning that the emphasis up until we started to treat this as a weapons system and, ultimately, how do we prevent them from being recruited in the first place, that the emphasis being on demobilizing them, rehabilitating them, reintegrating them simply did nothing to reduce the scale or the numbers; it simply found ways of hopefully picking up the pieces and attempting to bring them back to certain normalcy.

But even there we saw that that did not necessarily achieve the aim because what is more precious than a child soldier in many of these conflicts? It is a child soldier veteran. The re-recruitment of
child soldiers in the piracy scenario, we are trying to pick up the metrics of how many times these kids are going back into the process, and an experienced child soldier is worth a fortune.

And so we are into the children who are being moved between countries, as we saw a number of Sierra Leone ex-child soldiers found themselves all of a sudden in Côte d’Ivoire fighting. A number from Liberia also ended up in Côte d’Ivoire. We have seen some who have even been moved into the Mali operations not that long ago.

And so re-recruitment is a concern because they are very effective. They have experience, and they are worth their weight in gold to those who use them. But then, as you bring your attention to preventing re-recruitment, of course, there is one angle that has not been touched on, and this is the child soldier leader.

So far we spent a lot of time discussing that adults are actually giving the orders and running these youths in whatever operations they are doing, but there are a number, a significant number, of child soldier leaders.

This is the 14, 15 year-old going on 25, who has already been in operations for three years, who has commanded up to 50 kids, who youths older than him show deference to him or her, and in so doing has gained this incredible experience, and also this strength of presence in the individual’s own ability to lead. The empowerment it has that they cannot simply be demobilized and thrown in with the rest of the kids, to go back to grade one with the rest of them, as he is 14 and 15, and learn Dick and Jane when this kid has been running operations for the last couple of years.

And so what happens to them? They become very rapidly disenchanted with the opportunities and what they are getting, the treatment they are getting. They don’t have any of the advantages

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9. See Child Soldiers Int’l, Child Soldiers Global Report 2008 – Côte d’Ivoire (2008), available at http://www.refworld.org/docid/486cb0f72.html (“A migrant population of thousands of young fighters, including child soldiers, crossing the borders between Liberia, Guinea, Sierra Leone and Côte d’Ivoire, saw conflict mainly as an economic opportunity. Many had first been forcibly recruited as children in one conflict, and then had willingly crossed borders to take up arms in another conflict, often with a different armed group.”).


11. See Alyson Rowe, Sierra Leone Launches Program to Stop Child Soldier Recruitment, THOMSON REUTERS FOUND. (Mar. 7, 2013), http://www.trust.org/item/?map=sierra-leone-launches-program-to-stop-child-soldier-recruitment (“Sierra Leonean troops are confronting child soldiers on the front lines when they join peacekeeping missions in countries such as Somalia, and Mali where about 6,500 Sierra Leonean troops were deployed in January.”).
that they did have even as leaders, and so they go and influence those same other kids and haul them right back into the field.

And you have the source of a continuum of the conflict by continuing to keep this system going, and ultimately, if the conflict is over, there is nothing that prevents them from going to banditry and God knows whether there are other means.

And so why have we not looked at this child soldier-leader and built a program as we do in our schools, in our high schools? We have high schools, a number of them, who have in their model, leadership, leaders of tomorrow and so on. Right outside this building it is “influencing the leaders,” right?

So why not create these types of schools in a conflict zone? Take Sierra Leone with the thousands that were used, there may have been maybe 300 to 400 at most of child soldier leaders. Why not create a school, give them a four-year program, re-indoctrinate them to become leaders for the nation, to maximize that extraordinary potential that they have already been exercising and shift it to moving the country forward instead of leaving it fester there and, ultimately, haul the whole system back down, and all those investments and rehabilitation, reintegration are for naught.

And so the question is, how do we handle this scenario of the child soldier, the piracy situation? And I am very much looking at not just the child pirate who is being blown away on the water, but I am very much looking at the child pirate on land, where they are being recruited, where they are being trained, where they are being influenced, where the families are engaged or not, and where they are being influenced.

I am looking at that side as I am looking at other conflict zones, as we recently have come back from the Eastern Congo, the Kivu, the Ituri, Northern Congo, the South Sudan, and the Central African Republic where, with the U.S. forces out of Africa, we are in there looking at how they are handling Kony, and how they are handling that whole concept of use of children.12

And one of the angles that caught us quite by surprise, as we were doing our assessment on the ground and meeting with commanders and brow beating some of these rebel commanders into near insulting scenarios, where I remember taking on one very

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pretentious commander, a Mau Mau, to whom I asked, “Well, do you have child soldiers?”

“No, no. We don’t recruit child soldiers.”

“Do you have girls amongst your organization, young girls who are used as porters or whatever?”

“Oh, no, no. We don’t use girls.” Knowing full well that 40 percent of all child soldiers are girls.13 And when I was in Sierra Leone in 2001, I was demobilizing ten boys for every girl because girls are far more useful than boys.

They are not only out front doing exactly what the boys are doing and very capably doing that, but in those male-dominated societies, they are also running all the bivouacs and all of the logistics and are the sex slaves and bush wives of the commanders.

So they are far, far more precious to these guys than the boys are. But in going into the field and meeting this commander, and so at the end of this discussion with this commander, who said he didn’t have them, and then we showed him that we saw some of his forces that were youth he was using in the Kivu area against the ex-Rwandan extremists, and we said you are using, look at that, and then he would sort of acknowledge it.

But then as an ex-commander, I turned to him, and I said, “How is it that you need kids to fight your fight? How is it that you can’t recruit adults to fight your fight? How is it that you can actually consider yourself a commander by having children, youth do your fighting for you?”

And by brow beating and insulting, you have two options that end up at the end of that. One, you get your head blown off, or the other one, that you might have influenced him enough to bring him down from his pretentious position, insulted enough to maybe undermine his command, and if you are lucky, then, again, you may be able to sneak out, and hopefully he is not being replaced by somebody who continues to recruit them.

So in the realm of this world of use of children, the essence in my belief in regards to so what do we do, do we keep it going? It is not necessarily, and I would argue—and this is very risky for me being the first recipient of the Cleveland Nobel Peace Prize and not being a lawyer—to tell a whole room of legal people that maybe your answer ain’t enough.

And I think that was raised also earlier on, and that it is just not enough. Because what have we seen so extensively, if we don’t account for all the NGO work done in demobilization, rehabilitation, and so on, what else have we seen?

We have seen a lot of work done at the U.N. with special representatives on war-affected children. We have seen the naming and shaming of countries. We have seen going into countries and holding some of the national bodies accountable, and we have seen a lot of that, but we haven’t really seen the forces that are deployable and being deployed, actually influencing the battle, actually influencing the scenario; meaning, there are over a hundred thousand peacekeepers now deployed around the world in conflict zones where extensive use of the child soldier does exist.

And so what are they getting as training? How are they being prepared to face child soldiers? How are they looking at that problem? What are the mandates that these missions are getting regarding child soldiers? What are, in fact, the concepts of operations that the military have to use, that the police are to use? How much are they working with the NGOs that are there locally, who have an enormous amount of information in regards to solving not the social economic problem, although it is a component of it, but this security problem.

And that’s where we are still horrifically deficient in the training of those forces to be more proactive, to be able to anticipate facing it, to discern where the recruitment is going on, and how do you actually assist in preventing that recruitment? And how do you attenuate the impact of these child soldiers in the conflict zone by bringing together these multidisciplinary structures or multidisciplinary structures of military, of police, the security side, the NGO side, the diplomats, the politicians, both the national ones and the foreign ones that are deployed like the U.N. ones, in making the eradication of the use of children in the conflict of this weapons system a primary focus of the mandate?

We have gone through mandates way back, and only recently are we starting to see words that speak of child soldiers, even though the child soldiers are the dominant forces being deployed by often the non-state actors.

And so I would argue that, as we are trying to attrit the recruitment and use of child soldiers, and are collecting more and more research information and more and more metrics, there is still a predominance of anecdotal information. The NGO world is so powerful in its anecdotal information, but you don’t get policy changes from anecdotal. You need solid metrics, and that’s why we brought this whole program into a university context, where we will get that intellectual rigor.

We will get that peer review of the data. So one of the things is go and find out exactly what they are doing, how they are doing it,
and how we can actually curtail it. So how do we counteract this weapons system? How do we neutralize it?

I spent four years as the head of the Army Capital Acquisition Program, bought billions of dollars-worth of equipment. It was really simple compared to this because it was easy to identify what the counter measure would have to be to face another weapons system.

It was a tank. It is a ninety-tank system, which might be another tank, it might be, God knows, another missile, but at least you could do that.

What is the counter measure to a child soldier that is other than simply killing, destroying? Not to say that with extremists, even though I am of firm belief in the rights-based concepts of solutioning and evolving in the international sphere, I do accept the fact that with extremists we may find ourselves having to kill or destroy some children to achieve the mission.

And when you go around some of these extreme non-state actors and look at the ones that they have got around them and how their brains have been literally fried, how they are nonexistent as human—they are humanoids—and the fanaticism around them, you will never get at that adult leadership without having to get through those kids. So with extremists, yeah, maybe we will have to.

However, there are many other means of countermeasures. So one is getting hard data in countermeasures and then getting that data into policy and into mandates and then, ultimately, into operational concepts that can be used multidisciplinary by missions, by countries, by alliances, be it the African Union or any of the sub-regions of Africa, or others into the field.

The second part of it is training, and I add education, particularly for the officer corps. Training and education are the security forces particularly, both the national ones, the ones coming in, in order to know what this threat is, and discern and build the doctrinal basis needed to counteract it without you having to use extreme force.

And that training is extraordinarily rewarding because there is none going on. And when we go as we have now been mandated for a five-year program by the President of Sierra Leone, to retrain his whole army, retrain all his police force, retrain his prison guards, who have children in their prisons—they don’t know how to handle them.

We are even mandated to go into the education system and to educate the youth on how to prevent being recruited—that you don’t want to be a child soldier, that it is not a big ego trip, and it is not empowerment, but it is, in fact, a probable sign of being destroyed.

Well, that’s to us the way to go about it, is moving that education and training into those nations where we have seen and seem to see that there is a cultural or facility maybe to use children and to make that abhorrent.
And so I end by saying that my ultimate aim is to eradicate the use of youths as weapons of conflict, of war, piracy, drug wars in the favelas.

When I was in Rio, I saw as much fighting and as much conflict with those kids in those favelas and those slums in Rio that I saw in Africa, and so what we are doing there, we know we are going to be able to transfer into some of those drug war scenarios, be it Colombia, be it in Brazil, and other places.

And I will indicate that I believe that we can even push it to another level in our own gang wars. We have been working with police and how they are handling the gang wars in North America and Europe and whether there is stuff we can extract from that, but there is a fear.

As an example, closer to home, the aboriginal community, as an example in our country, is the fastest growing community in the country. They are massively disenfranchised.

What they have now that they didn’t have before is the social communications media to be able to coalesce. Why they have never been effective is that they have never been able to get together. They now have that tool. There is enough of them educated and enough weapons around this continent—and I say continent because we are just as bad or nearly—enough of these weapons are available for them to become a force that could become a security problem.

We have already had an insurrection in Canada in 1990.14 There is nothing that would prevent it as we see their demands not being met.

And so, ladies and gentlemen, we have an ability to ultimately stop the use of a weapons system and neutralize it and make it a liability. The question is, do we want to look at it that way, or do we want to continue to find ways of simply picking up those pieces afterwards and hope, hope that maybe the social economic side of the house will ultimately pick up, and that there will not be a scenario in which insecurity and the implosion of the nation and the vulnerability of the nation would make the requirement for recruiting children necessary in either state or non-state actors, and I believe we can achieve it.

14. See Shawn Atleo, Oka, 20 Years Later: The Issues Remain, THE GLOBE & MAIL (July 12, 2010), http://www.theglobeandmail.com/globe-debate/oka-20-years-later-the-issues-remain/article1386915/ (“The historic resistance began as a peaceful vigil by the Mohawk citizens of Kanehsatake who were protesting against a plan by the municipality of Oka to enlarge a golf course on their ancestral territory. On July 11, 1990, the peaceful vigil took a drastic turn when the Quebec provincial police attacked the protesters, leading to a 78-day standoff between Mohawks, the Quebec police and, ultimately, the Canadian military.”).
It might take thirty years. So what? What’s thirty years if we can eliminate that from the world of conflict?

Thank you very much.
Global Security and Public Corruption

Emile van der Does de Willebois & Jean-Pierre Brun

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Cox Center Award Speech

Amb. Stephen J. Rapp

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Katyn Issue Addendum

Witold Wasilewski

The Birth and Persistence of the Katyn Lie

Alexander Guryanov

Current Status of the “Katyn Case” in Russia

Karol Karaki

The Crime of Genocide Committed Against the Poles by the USSR Before and During World War II: An International Legal Study