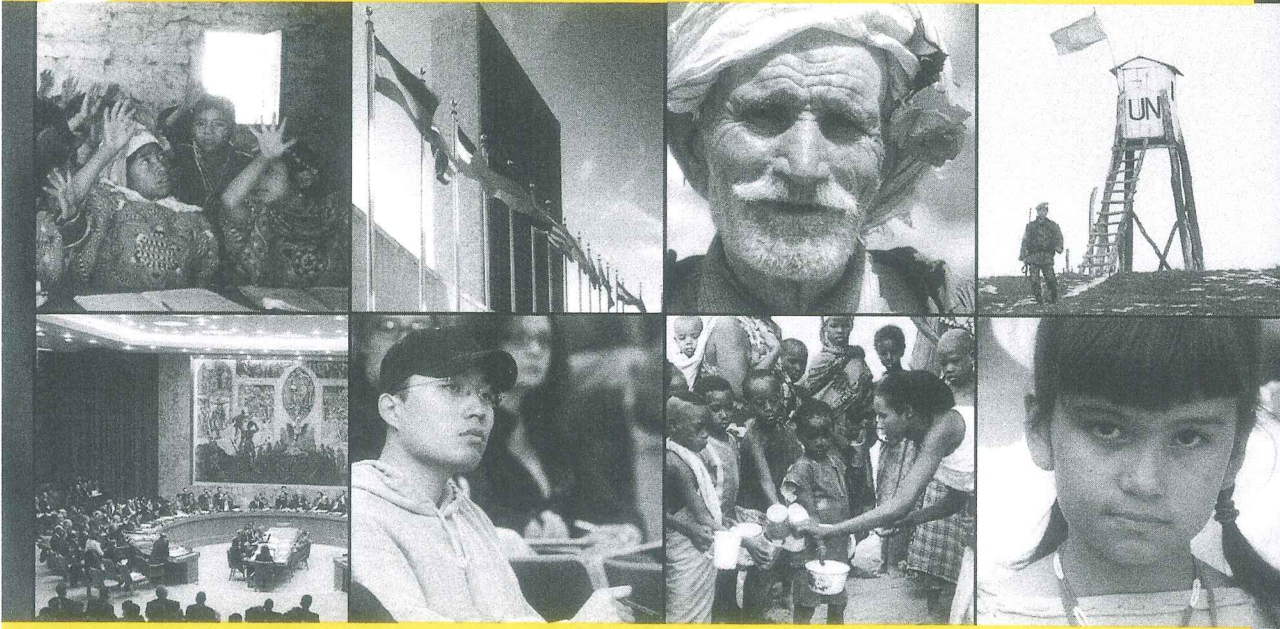


GLOBAL GOVERNANCE

A Review of Multilateralism



and International Organizations

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Reimagining Child Soldiers in International Law and Policy. By Mark A. Drumbl. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.

Despite the international community's considerable efforts to eradicate the problem of child soldiering, tens of thousands of persons younger than eighteen years old continue to play some role in armed conflicts—including those that produce mass atrocities. Why? One reason, Mark A. Drumbl argues in

Reimagining Child Soldiers in International Law and Policy, is because not all child soldiers fit the faultless passive victim image that he suggests has come to dominate international discourse. Yet that same image inspires the international law and policy responses to the problem of child soldiering: treaties forbid enlisting child soldiers, and adults who command them are subject to international prosecution for war crimes offenses.

Drumbl does not disagree that some child soldiers may, in fact, be faultless passive victims. But he argues that the image is a legal fiction that oversimplifies a much more complex reality. Some child soldiers are abducted or conscripted by threats into fighting at very young ages. On the other hand, significant numbers are older teenagers who have volunteered to fight so as to achieve various ends: to defend the state, to earn food and shelter, to pursue a vocation, to stave off boredom, or even to have the opportunity to dominate and be cruel. Some go to great lengths once in service to avoid killing; others torture, rape, and kill.

Drumbl proposes that we embrace this complex reality and reimagine child soldiers as circumscribed actors rather than helpless victims; that is, as diverse individuals who are constrained by poverty and other environmental factors, but who nevertheless are able to make choices. He advances a simple reason for recognizing a complex reality: to encourage a broader range of policy solutions—solutions that may have a better chance of ending the practice of child soldiering. All in all, this is a provocative and important book.

⊕ *Reviewed by Yvonne M. Dutton*