



18 June 2014 – Forget about bows, arrows and shotguns – now children talk barrel bombs and drones.

In regions like North Waziristan Agency, in Pakistan, children have been living with armed conflict their whole lives. They have witnessed military operations, Taliban attacks and drone strikes. Many children have known only war, and the long-term effects of what they are experiencing worries mental health professionals.

As children play in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) in the northwest, cops-and-robbers is now soldiers-and-Taliban. In the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) province, around 10 children divide into two groups, one acting as the military, the other as the Taliban.

### **Who are the “good guys”?**

Most children want to be on the side of the Taliban. Four children with sticks, pretending to be soldiers, try to find the Taliban, who fan out to hide. The Taliban always outnumber the soldiers. They ambush the soldiers, and the children throw dust into the air to imitate explosions, and then capture the soldiers.

As an aeroplane takes off from Bacha Khan International Airport in Peshawar, capital of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) province, children living in a nearby camp for internally displaced persons

rush to their shelters, shouting, “Jet! Jet!” “In Tirah [valley], in Khyber Agency, it was very normal that when a jet appeared in the skies it meant to bomb [the area], so for our children every flying machine making a loud noise means bomber jets”, Habib Afridi, 37, [told IRIN](#) .

Inspired by videos produced by militants, children pretend to be suicide bombers or fighters. Their discussions revolve around the Taliban's latest activities, their attacks and killings. “What I have seen is that there are much deeper and stronger impacts of war on children... Thousands of children [have] lost their childhood,” said Dr Mian Iftikhar Hussain, who has been treating psychiatric patients for nearly three decades.

### **No fun, No Games, No Children**

During the offensive to retake the Swat valley from Taliban militants in 2009, the Pakistani military claimed to have stumbled on a training camp for child suicide bombers and recovered some 200 children prepared to carry out suicide missions. Children as young as 12 have appeared in propaganda videos released by the Taliban, beheading prisoners.

“The situation is so chaotic that nobody cares about these children and the future of this region,” he said. “If proper attention is not given to these children, they will definitely go on to a life of crime, if they don't become lethal assets for terror networks” said Dr. Hussain.

Source: [IRIN News](#)