

Michael Wessels

Terrorism, Youth, and Post-Conflict Reconstruction

Terrorism is woven into the fabric of contemporary wars, and youth are often the perpetrators. In addition, cycles of violence are often perpetuated by the failure following a ceasefire to meet the human needs of youth and to address the issues and causes that had led youth into terrorism. This presentation will analyze how factors such as ideology, religious fervor, social identity, hopelessness, threats to meaning, and socialization into systems of violence lead young people into engagement in terrorism. It examines how post-conflict reconstruction efforts can assist in peacebuilding through the constructive engagement of youth. Using the case of Iraq as an example, it also analyzes how flawed reconstruction processes can create colonial images and systems that foment terrorism.

Michael Wessels, PhD. is Professor of Psychology at Randolph-Macon College and Psychosocial Advisor for Christian Children's Fund. He has served as President of the Division of Peace Psychology of the American Psychological Association and of Psychologists for Social Responsibility. His research on children and armed conflict examines child soldiers, psychosocial assistance in emergencies, and post-conflict reconstruction for peace. He regularly advises U. N. agencies, donors, and governments on policies regarding child protection and well-being. In countries such as Angola, Sierra Leone, East Timor, Kosova, and Afghanistan, he helps to develop community-based, culturally grounded programs that assist children, families, and communities affected by armed conflict.