



Refugees walk from Syria into Akçakale, Sanliurfa Province, southeastern Turkey, 14 June 2015 after breaking through a border fence. The mass displacement of Syrians came as Kurdish fighters announced they were making headway toward the city of Tal Abyad, a stronghold of the Islamic State near the Turkish border. (Photo by Lefteris Pitarakis, Associated Press)

Migration as a Weapon in Theory and in Practice

Dr. Kelly M. Greenhill

Editor's note: This article is adapted in part from Weapons of Mass Migration: Forced Displacement, Coercion and Foreign Policy by Kelly M. Greenhill. © 2010 by Cornell University. It is used by permission of the publisher, Cornell University Press.

In late March 2016, ambassadors from the twenty-eight European Union (EU) member states concluded what was supposed to be a secret deal to curtail further in-migration with leaders of eight

countries in the Horn of Africa. They were responding to mounting fears and anxiety within the EU about the migration crisis that brought more than one million people to Europe in 2015 alone. In exchange for a promise to help stanch unregulated flows of people to Europe, the EU agreed to provide the African countries with about \$50 million in monetary and in-kind aid and equipment over the following three years.¹

This deal followed closely on the heels of far more broadly publicized migration deal between the EU

and Turkey, which was concluded, as one observer put it, “with EU policymakers’ backs seemingly against the wall, and in an atmosphere of palpable panic.”² In exchange for permitting Greece to return to Turkey all irregular migrants arriving after 20 March 2016, the EU agreed to assist the regime of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan in meeting the mounting burden of hosting approximately three million refugees via provision of more than €6 billion in aid and increased resettlement of Syrian refugees residing in Turkey.³ The EU also agreed to accelerate visa liberalization for Turkish nationals and to “reenergize” previously moribund talks on Turkish EU membership, both of which Turkey had been seeking for years without success.⁴ Conclusion of the EU–Turkey deal followed a series of threats by Turkish officials that effectively amounted to, “We’re tired of waiting. Either concede to our array of demands or face the migration-related consequences of failing to do so.”⁵

Although widely popular with some segments of society within EU member states, both migration deals have been widely criticized as inhumane, immoral, and possibly illegal, particularly in light of creeping authoritarianism within Turkey and the fact that parties to the Horn of Africa deal include despots such as Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir, a leader who has been indicted by the International Criminal Court on charges that he directed a campaign of genocide, ethnic cleansing, and other crimes against humanity during the country’s Darfur conflict.⁶

Arguably more important, however, is that in addition to lambasting these deals on their own terms, critics have expressed concerns about what precedents might be set by these seemingly Faustian bargains and what these deals may portend for the future of refugee protection more generally. Concerns about the future security and stability of the regimes that host refugees are indisputably valid, especially given recent developments in this regard

in Australia, in certain EU member states, and beyond.⁷ However, future-focused claims about the precedents that might be set by these “new” migration deals are curiously and potentially dangerously ahistorical. This is because in point of fact the exploitation of refugees and

migrants, which we might politely refer to as foreign-policy bargaining chips—and less politely, as coercive weapons—is neither new nor novel. Moreover, neither is target state vulnerability to this unconventional brand of nonmilitary coercion, a fact that carries significant operational and policy implications.

Mass Migration as a Weapon

Indeed, as illustrated in detail in my 2010 book, *Weapons of Mass Migration: Forced Displacement, Coercion and Foreign Policy*, using displaced people as nonmilitary instruments of state-level coercion has long been a common feature of international politics.⁸ In fact,

this frequently asymmetric brand of coercion—i.e., *coercive engineered migration* (CEM)—has been attempted at least seventy-five times since the advent of the 1951 *Refugee Convention* alone; that is at least one per year on average.⁹ In that time, CEM has been undertaken by dozens of discrete state and nonstate challengers against at least as many disparate targets and, by extension, against an equally large number of victimized groups of displaced people.

Sometimes the coercive weaponization of population movements has simply comprised threats to generate outflows, such as former Libyan leader Mu’ammarr Gaddhafi’s recurrent, colorful, and rather dramatic promises to “turn Europe black” if the EU failed to meet his demands. Gaddhafi used this tool with varying degrees of success in 2004, 2006, 2008, and 2010, before fatally overplaying his hand in 2011. Although the EU/NATO intervention in Libya that year was not primarily driven by this unique brand of coercion, Gaddhafi aggressively employed it against the interveners. He used

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it first as an instrument of deterrence in the form of threats against EU officials in the earliest days of the uprising, and later as an instrument of compulsion against nearby NATO member states, after the bombing campaign had commenced and the civil war had erupted.¹⁰

In other instances, coercion has entailed forcing large numbers of victims across borders, as then Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic did in the spring of 1999 in an attempt first to deter and then to compel NATO to stop its bombing campaign during the Kosovo War. Former German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer later admitted his regret in not taking Milosevic seriously when he said he “could empty Kosovo in a week.” Thus, while NATO was seeking to compel Milosevic to cease his offensive against the Kosovars through the use of air strikes, Milosevic was engaged in his own intensive game of countercoercion against NATO and its allies. However, displaced people, rather than bombs, were his political and military weapons of choice.¹¹ Although details remain somewhat sketchy at this point, evidence suggests the Syrian regime employed this tool as an instrument of deterrence against one or more of its neighbors at the start of the ongoing civil war.¹²

On still other occasions, coercers have merely opened (and later closed) borders that are normally sealed. One such example is former Cuban President Fidel Castro, who used this tool against the United States on at least three occasions: in 1965, 1994, and, most famously, during the Mariel boat lift of 1980.¹³ In still other cases, coercion has been effected by exploiting and manipulating outflows created by others, whether intentionally or inadvertently. This was the case in the late 1970s when a group of Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) states threatened to push Indochinese boat people out to sea, where they would likely drown, if the group’s demands were not met. The aforementioned case of Turkey is another clear example.

Success or Failure of Coercive Engineered Migration

Operationally speaking, CEM is a “coercion by punishment” strategy. Challengers aim to create domestic conflict, public dissatisfaction, or both, within the target state in an attempt to convince its leadership to concede to the challenger’s demands rather than incur the anticipated (domestic or international)

political costs of resistance.¹⁴ As is the case with terrorism and strategic bombing—also coercion by punishment strategies—the principal targets (namely, states) tend not to be synonymous with the principal victims (the displaced themselves).

There are two distinct but not mutually exclusive pathways by which CEM can be effected using punishment strategies; loosely speaking, they might be thought of as “capacity swamping” and “political agitating.” Simply put, swamping focuses on manipulating the *ability* of targets to accept, accommodate, and assimilate a given group of migrants or refugees, while agitating focuses on manipulating the *willingness* of targets to do so. In both swamping and agitating, coercion is effectively a dynamic, two-level game in which target responses on the international level to threats issued or actions taken by challengers tend to be driven by simultaneous (or subsequent) actions taken by actors within the target state.¹⁵ Somewhat paradoxically, evidence suggests the *objective dangers* posed to targets tend to be greater in the case of swamping, but the *probability of coercive success* tends to be greater in the case of agitating.

In the developing world, coercive attempts most often focus on swamping and comprise threats to severely tax or overwhelm a target’s physical or economic capacity to cope with an influx—thereby effectively debilitating it—if it fails to concede to the coercer’s demands.¹⁶ Challengers anticipate that, in locations where ethnic tensions may already be elevated and where the

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extension of central government control may be compromised even at the best of times, where essential resources are limited and consensus on the legitimacy of the political regime is shaky at best, a large influx can present a real and persuasive threat. For instance, in early 2014, Russia threatened to expel many of its Central Asian guest workers if those states supported the United Nations resolution condemning the annexation of Crimea.¹⁷ (Support of said resolution was not forthcoming.)

Capacity swamping can also be an effective strategy in the developed world, or “the West,” broadly defined. This is particularly true if the incipient crisis is large and sudden, since even highly industrialized states need time to gear up to effectively deal with disasters, be they natural or manmade, as the ongoing European migration crisis dramatically illustrates.¹⁸ That said, advanced industrial societies tend to have greater resources they can bring to bear in a crisis, making it much more difficult—if not impossible—to overwhelm their physical ability to cope with such an exigency.

In the developed world, therefore, political agitating often supplants capacity swamping as the linchpin of coercion. Challengers on the international level seek to influence target behavior on the domestic level by engaging in a kind of norms-enhanced political blackmail that relies on *exploiting* and *exacerbating* what Robert Putnam has called the “heterogeneity” of political and social interests within polities.¹⁹ Exploitation of heterogeneity within Western states is possible because population influxes, such as those created in migration and refugee crises, tend to engender diverse and highly divisive responses within the societies expected to bear the brunt of their consequences, as electoral campaign rhetoric both at home and abroad makes clear. As Marc Rosenblum puts it, “efforts to bend immigration policy to the national interest compete with pluralistic policy demands originating at the party, subnational (local and state), and sector- or class-specific levels.”²⁰ Like immigration and refugee policy more generally, real and threatened migration crises tend to split societies into (at least) two mutually exclusive and often highly mobilized groups: the pro-refugee/migrant camp and the anti-refugee/migrant camp.

What it means to be pro- or anti-refugee/migrant will perforce vary across targets and across crises. Depending on circumstances, pro-refugee/migrant camps may call for relatively limited, short-term

responses, such as accepting financial responsibility for settling the migrant or refugee group in a third country, or far more significant—even permanent—commitments, like offering asylum or citizenship. Conversely, anti-refugee/migrant groups may demand that requests for financial assistance be rejected or, more radically, that migrants be interdicted, refugees refused asylum, or even, in extreme cases, forcibly repatriated.

The bottom line is that because targets cannot simultaneously satisfy demands both to accept and reject a given group of migrants or refugees, leaders facing highly mobilized and highly polarized interests on both sides of the divide can find themselves on the horns of a real dilemma in which it is impossible to satisfy the demands of one camp without alienating the other. Thus, it is not heterogeneity per se that makes targets vulnerable. Instead, strategies of political agitation can succeed because these two competing groups tend to have mutually incompatible interests that they may be highly committed to defending, and target leaderships may have compelling political, legal, or moral reasons to avoid conflicting with either group.

Under such conditions, leaders may face strong domestic incentives to concede to coercers’ international-level demands—particularly if doing so can make real or potential migration crises cease or disappear, thereby freeing target leaderships from the proverbial trap between a rock and a hard place. As Marco Scalvini aptly put it in the middle of the 2011 Libyan crisis, after Gadhafi had once more threatened to “turn Europe black,” “the anxiety over a refugee invasion from Africa reveals the contradictions present in Europe today, where, on the one hand, the moral imperative of universal emancipation is proclaimed, but on the other, policies and practice continue the trend of refusing a safe haven to the very refugees they have helped to create.”²¹

In short, challengers aim to influence targets by what is, in traditional coercion, known as *force majeure*—a choice dictated by overwhelming circumstances. Targets of course always have a choice, but one that is skewed if they believe the consequences of noncompliance will be a denial of future choices.²² Thus, coercers seek to narrow a target’s range of domestic policy responses to an outflow such that concession begins to appear more attractive, at least relative to the possibility that the future will hold fewer, still less-auspicious choices. This is not to suggest that concession is cost-free, only that, in the face of a

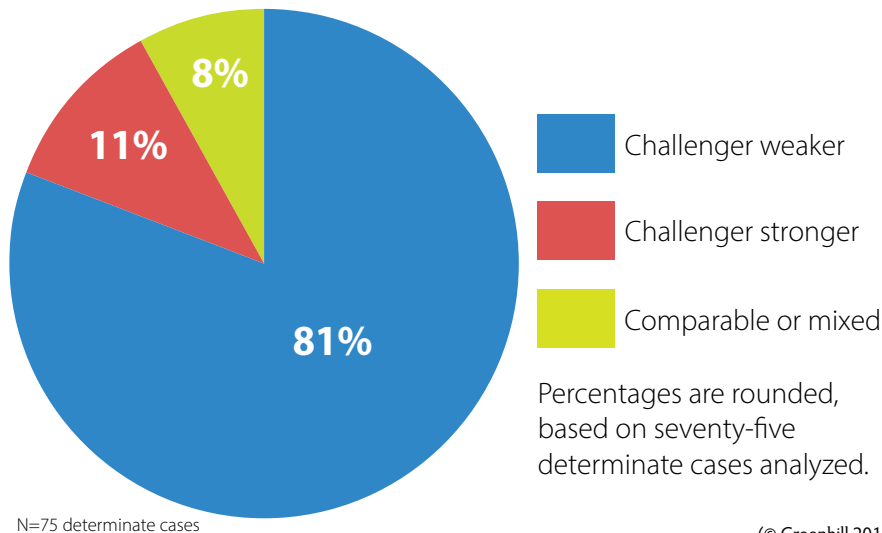


Figure 1. Relative Power of Challengers and Target States

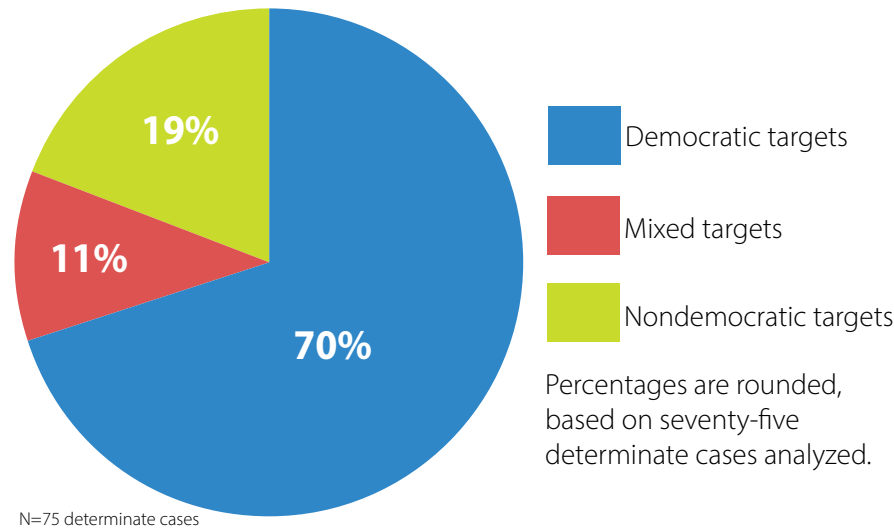


Figure 2. Target States by Regime Type

threatened or mounting crisis, the anticipation of future pain and mounting costs has to be weighed against the costs and opportunities associated with ending the crisis immediately by conceding to the challenger's demands.

As the aforementioned examples might suggest, this kind of coercion is most often employed by the relatively weak (in terms of power and capabilities) against the relatively strong, as figure 1 indicates.

Of the seventy-five cases analyzed, the vast majority of targets of CEM have been liberal democracies, while

the vast majority of coercers have not only been weak but also disproportionately illiberal, as figure 2 illustrates. Why we have likely witnessed this distribution of coercers and targets is explored in detail in the section that follows.

In sum, in traditional military coercion, the aim is to achieve political goals “on the cheap.” In CEM, by contrast, the general aim for weak actors is to achieve political goals that would be utterly unattainable through military means or, in a more limited number of cases, for powerful actors to achieve aims wherein the use of military force would be too costly or potentially escalatory, and hence, dangerous.²³

For instance, the idea that states such as Cuba, Haiti, and Mexico could successfully coerce their neighbor, the United States, with the threat of military force is absurd. But doing so via the tacit or explicit threat of demographic bombs is a different story. Indeed, Castro successfully coerced the United States to the negotiating table three times using this tool, most famously during the 1980 Mariel boatlift, but also in 1965 and, most significantly, in 1994–1995. Some have argued that the current Castro regime is

even now gearing up again as the country moves towards normalization with the United States.²⁴

Coercive Engineered Migration as an Attractive (Asymmetric) Means of Influence

Research on negotiating strategies of the (relatively) weak has revealed that weak state and nonstate actors often view crisis generation as a necessary precursor to negotiations with their more powerful counterparts,

who tend to be reluctant to yield concessions and even to negotiate with weaker challengers absent crisis-generating incentives.²⁵ As Thomas Schelling put it, “If I say, ‘Row, or I’ll tip the boat over and drown us both,’ you’ll say you don’t believe me. But if I rock the boat so that it may tip over, you’ll be more impressed ... To make it work, I must really put the boat in jeopardy; just saying that I may turn us both over is unconvincing.”²⁶

Crisis generation offers relatively weak actors a tried-and-true strategy for both overcoming powerful actors’ reluctance to negotiate and leveling the playing field. It is one of the few areas in which weak, and even internationally illegitimate, actors may possess relative strength vis-à-vis more powerful target states, and certainly—in the case of migration crises—also vis-à-vis their

even weaker domestic victims.²⁷ After intentionally generating crises, weak actors can offer to make them disappear in exchange for military, financial, or political payoffs. Indeed, international negotiators routinely report recognizable patterns of “drama and catastrophe” when dealing with particular international actors.²⁸

In the face of such catastrophes, overlapping bargaining space may develop rapidly where before there was none. Indeed, strong actors who were previously unwilling to even talk to, much less negotiate with, their weaker counterparts will often abruptly temper or reverse positions in the face of clear and present crises. As one migration scholar bluntly put it, “Sending

nations can sometimes structure emigration so that receiving states are very likely to respond with inconsistent administrative action,” which can then be used as a

lever against those who had “in effect brushed [them] off” previously.²⁹

Consequently, migration crisis generation can help enhance weak actors’ credibility, increase the potency of their threats, and improve their coercive capabilities in several different ways.³⁰ For one thing, under certain conditions, migration crises may permit weak challengers to inflict punishment upon targets disproportionate to the costs of compliance. Although targets may be understandably reluctant to concede before an event occurs, quite often demands that were unacceptable at the outset may begin to appear nominal compared with the costs of managing sustained, large-scale outflows into the indefinite future, as the EU, like many targets before it, is in the process of discovering as of this writing. Consider that,

unlike a bombing sortie, which may be profoundly damaging but is perforce finite, a migration crisis can be, as noted above, “a gift that keeps on giving.”

Therefore, not only are the reputational barriers to resorting to such norms-violating tactics lower, but the bargaining advantages of doing so are also far greater.

In addition, because in-kind retaliation is rarely an option for targets—and alternate responses may also be problematic—coercers using CEM may achieve a kind of escalation dominance over potential targets.³¹ For instance, launching a war to counter outflows may be an option in certain circumstances, but often the expected costs associated with escalation to that level



Mu'ammar Gaddafi attends the 12th African Union Summit 2 February 2009 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Gaddafi frequently threatened to use Libya as a conduit for massive illegal immigration into Europe as leverage for attaining policy goals. (Photo by Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Jesse B. Awalt, U.S. Navy)

far exceed the expected costs of conceding in whole or in part. For instance, as disconcerting as West German leaders found the periodic inflows of large numbers of Eastern bloc refugees, neither they nor their NATO allies were ever going to be willing to risk starting World War III by taking retaliatory military action against East Germany.³² Likewise, if a coercer is already internationally isolated, the methods short of war that powerful states may employ in response may be slow-acting—e.g., sanctions—and thus inappropriate as a method of counter-coercion during a crisis. And, war itself can be a risky option. Conflicts are costly, and their outcomes are uncertain.³³

Simply put, in traditional military coercion, potential adversaries tend to be deterred from even attempting coercion unless they possess superior military capabilities that can protect them from retaliation. However, in the case of CEM, coercers are frequently undeterred by their targets' military superiority, because retaliation is only rarely a politically feasible option. This is because targets generally value the issues at hand less than do the coercers, who tend to be highly dissatisfied with the status quo and more resolved than their targets. This makes sense in that coercers are often fighting for their very political survival, whereas for targets the issues at hand tend to be of more limited importance.³⁴

Moreover, compared with more conventional military operations, catalyzing out-migrations is usually relatively cheap, particularly as the number of troops required is frequently small, and the manpower necessary to effect population displacement need not be highly trained or well equipped.³⁵ Inducing mass migration does not rely on direct combat, but rather on the expectations associated with the demonstrative capacity of the violence that can be brought to bear. Sometimes no force need be used at all; the fear of future violence may be sufficient to cause people to flee.³⁶

Furthermore, because of the widespread belief that liberal democracies possess particular characteristics that make them and their leaders behave differently than those in other regime types, "fellow liberals benefit from a presumption of amity; nonliberals suffer from a presumption of enmity."³⁷ Hence, illiberal actors—already viewed with suspicion and contempt by the most powerful members of the international community—have little left to lose

should they choose to abrogate the norms associated with the generation of migration crises. In short, nondemocratic, "illegitimate" states and nonstate actors face a double whammy: few are strong enough to impel their strong counterparts to take them seriously under normal conditions, and still fewer are likely to be trusted to negotiate in an above the board manner. Therefore, not only are the reputational barriers to resorting to such norms-violating tactics lower, but the bargaining advantages of doing so are far greater. Hence, this kind of coercion can be an attractive method of influence for those with limited resources and few other options at their disposal. Consequently, it is unsurprising that the vast majority of would-be coercers have been weaker in capabilities terms than their targets.

In terms of the obvious exceptions—namely, those cases where strong or democratic actors have employed this tool—coercers' goals have usually been the achievement of political goals at lower cost than they could possibly have been achieved through military means. While John F. Kennedy's administration was understandably reluctant to use force to influence Soviet behavior vis-à-vis Berlin in the early 1960s, U.S. officials—at the very least—entertained the idea of using CEM to "encourage" greater cooperation from Moscow.³⁸ And, more recently, Iran's episodic threats to expel Afghan refugees to influence Afghan government behavior have surely appeared less problematical and potentially less costly than engaging in overt military operations in furtherance of the same political goals.³⁹

Coercers' Objectives and Rates of Success

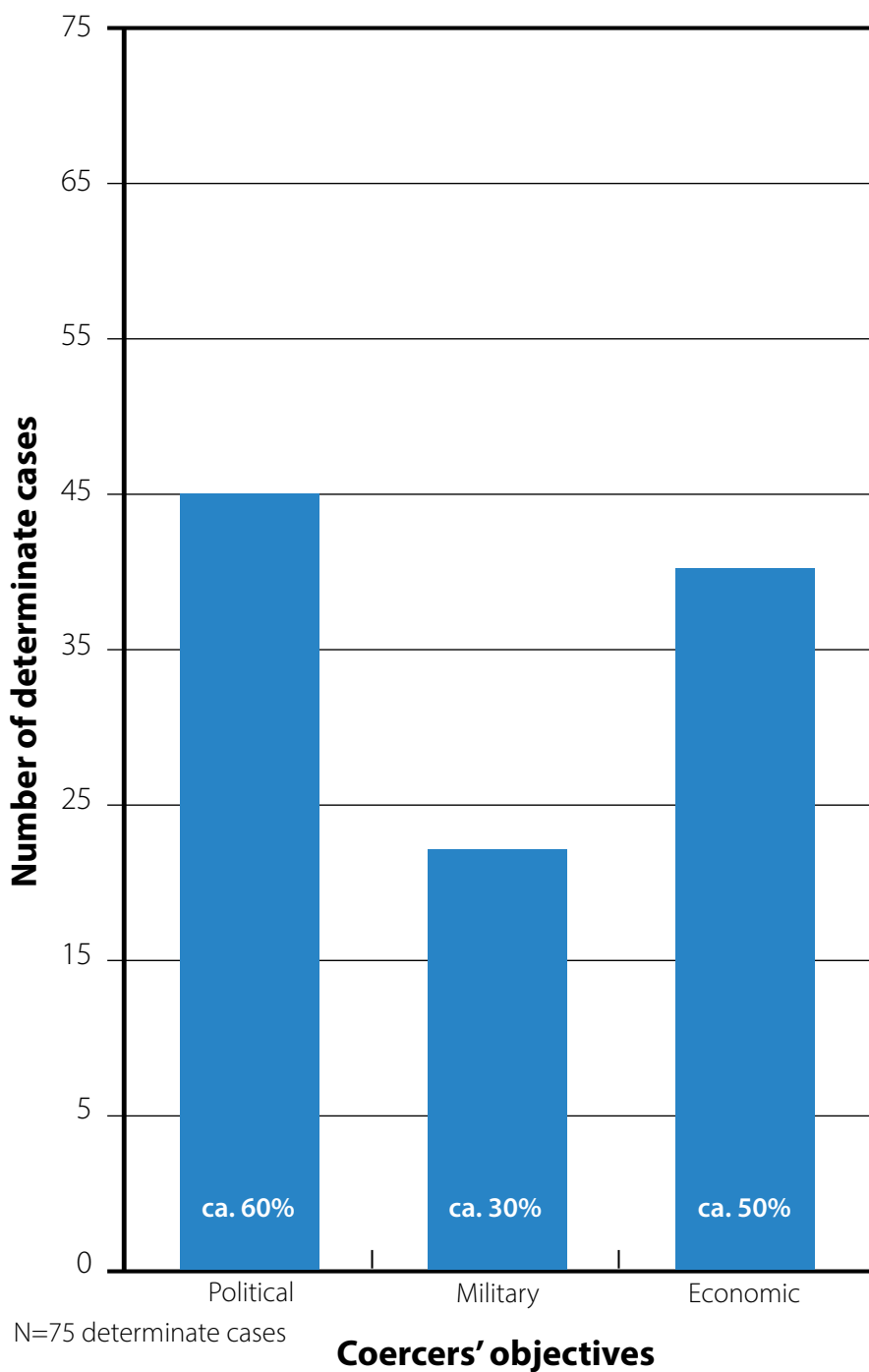
As is the case with traditional military coercion, challengers' demands have been highly varied in scope, content, and magnitude. As the discussion above suggests, demands have been both concrete and symbolic and have comprised entreaties to undertake actions or to cease undertaking them (compellence) as well as to eschew taking them at all (deterrence). Demands have run the gamut from the simple provision of financial aid, to the termination of insurgent funding, to full-scale military intervention, and even to regime change. Broadly speaking, we can usefully divide these myriad objectives into three key (and nonmutually

exclusive) categories: political goals, military goals, and economic goals. As figure 3 indicates, more than 60 percent of seventy-five coercive attempts have been driven by political objectives, about 30 percent by military objectives, and approximately 50 percent by economic objectives. That the sum of these three sets of objectives is greater than 100 percent makes clear that numerous coercers have sought multiple, often disparate objectives.

Moreover, in their coercive attempts, challengers have also been relatively successful on their own terms and in comparison to their more powerful counterparts.⁴⁰ Success in this context is defined as persuading a target to change a previously articulated policy, stopping or reversing an action already undertaken, or disbursing side payments, in line with a challenger's demands; in other words, most of a challenger's demands were met. A case is coded as a "success" if most or all of the challenger's known objectives were achieved and as a "partial success" if the challenger achieved a significant fraction, but not all, of its aims. If few or none of the challenger's objectives were achieved—or were achieved for what appear to be exogenous reasons—the case is coded as a "failure." Finally, a case is coded as "indeterminate" if the challenger achieved at least some of its objectives, but causality is unclear; if there is insufficient evidence to conclude that coercion was in the end attempted; or if threats were issued, but a crisis never materialized, and it remains unclear whether or not

the challenger's demands were met. (Indeterminate cases are excluded from aggregate assessments of coercive success and failure.)

Overall, challengers have achieved at least some of their objectives about 74 percent of the time. If one imposes a stricter measure of success and excludes partial



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Figure 3. Distribution of Coercers' Objectives

successes, coercers have gotten more or less everything they reportedly sought 57 percent of the time.⁴¹ While rather more modest, this more restrictive rate is comparable to some of the best-case estimates of deterrence success (ca. 57 percent), and substantially greater than best estimates of the success of economic sanctions (ca. 33 percent) or U.S. coercive diplomacy efforts (between 19 and 37.5 percent).⁴²

Disaggregating CEM into exercises of compellence and deterrence reveals that the vast majority of the seventy-five to eighty-six heretofore-documented cases of CEM have been exercises in compellence; the remaining cases have comprised exercises combining crisis deterrence and compellence and crisis deterrence alone.⁴³ While deterrence attempts are in the aggregate successful at rates akin to U.S. coercive diplomacy (40 percent partial plus complete success; 20 percent complete success), compellence-only attempts have on average yielded rates significantly higher than CEM as a whole (78 percent partial plus complete success; 63 percent complete success).

Target Defenses and Evasive Actions

The previous discussion notwithstanding, however, migration-driven coercion is no superweapon. The political and military risks associated with its employment can be enormously high, even fatal, as, for instance, Gaddafi discovered when he fatally overplayed his hand in 2011 after a series of successful uses of CEM throughout the 2000s.⁴⁴ The reputational costs of weaponizing innocent people to effect state-level coercion can also be great, as can be the international opprobrium incurred following such uses. Thus, it is hardly surprising that the vast majority of documented coercers have been highly committed but relatively weak (relative to their targets) illiberal actors. Even so, it is rarely a weapon of first resort for several distinct reasons.

First, challengers may ultimately catalyze larger crises than they anticipate or desire, and massive outflows can destabilize both states of origin and destination.⁴⁵ Fears of just such a collapse, for instance, led to the construction of the Berlin Wall in the early 1960s.⁴⁶

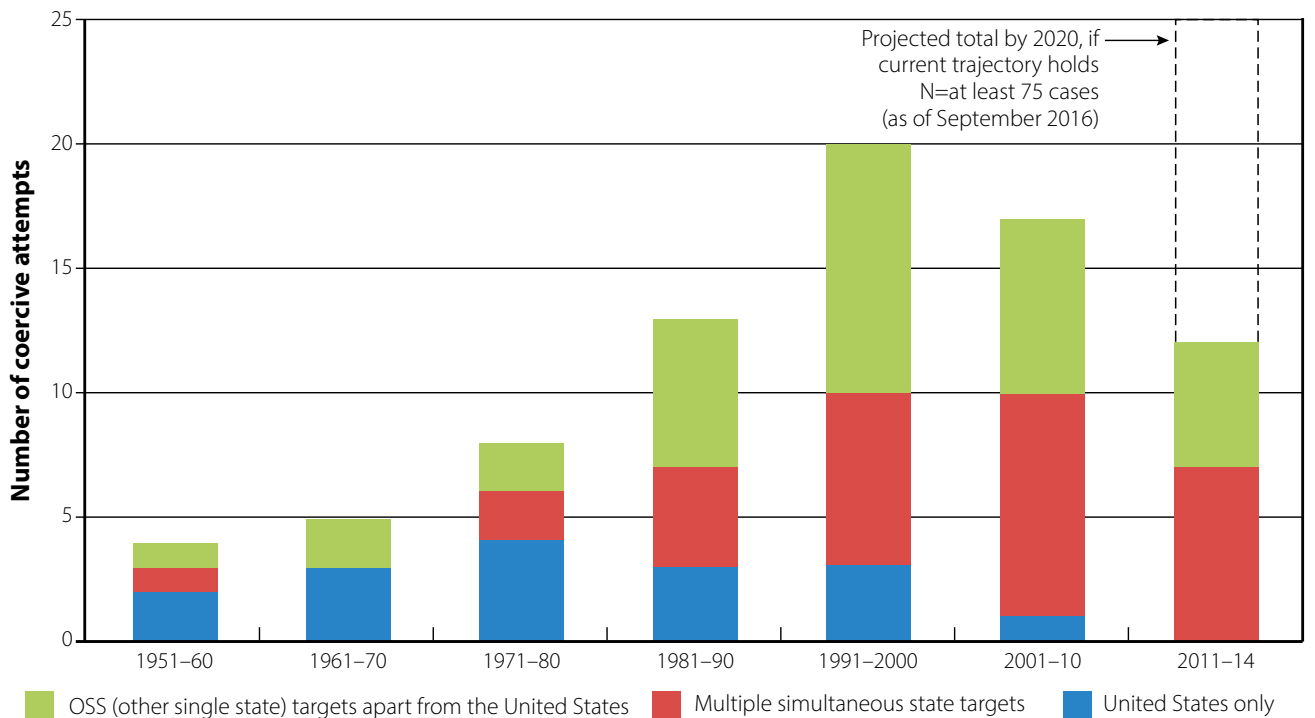
Second, once a crisis has been initiated, challengers often lose (some degree of) control over it, in no small part because engineered migration-related “cleansing” operations may be carried out by irregulars, or even bands of thugs, who lack discipline and whose

objectives may not be synonymous with those who instigated an outflow. Likewise, migrants and refugees of course have agency, and once they find themselves outside the sending state, they are frequently capable of autonomous actions. For example, they might move in different directions and do so in smaller or larger numbers than the challenger desires. When this happens, an outflow can become more like an unguided missile than a smart bomb, thus making coercing a particular target more difficult.

Third, as Schelling has argued, “the ideal compellent action would be one that, once initiated, causes minimal harm if compliance is forthcoming and great harm if compliance is not forthcoming.”⁴⁷ However, while migration and refugee movements, once initiated, can be stopped, under certain conditions, they can be difficult to undo. As such, threats of further escalation can be quite persuasive, but promises of minimal harm in the face of compliance can be difficult to keep, potentially reducing the value of concession for targets.

Fourth, the potential for blowback can be great, and the intended consequences thereof quite costly. For instance, not only did the U.S.-instigated mass migration of North Vietnamese southward following the First Indochina War fail to achieve its stated objective of deterring Ho Chi Minh from pushing for reunification elections, but it also inadvertently further weakened the sitting regime in South Vietnam while simultaneously increasing U.S. commitment to propping it up.⁴⁸

Moreover, coercion is not a one-sided game, and targets are not without recourse. Although, due to their generally liberal democratic nature, the majority of targets are constrained from responding in kind by launching flows of their own. However, many do find ways to fight back and to resist, sometimes successfully. Three responses in particular warrant mention. First, under certain conditions, targets can “externalize,” outsource, or simply pass on the visible (and politically costly) consequences of migration crises to others, thereby skirting successful coercion by persuading third parties to warehouse, host, or even assimilate the unwanted group.⁴⁹ Transferring responsibility is not always an option, however, particularly if the displaced are already inside the target state or if other potential host or asylum states themselves fear the destabilizing consequences of an influx. Second, some target governments manage



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Figure 4. Change over Time in Target Distribution and Frequency

to navigate the political shoals represented by their constituents’ mutually incompatible interests, either by assuaging one or another camp through the use of side payments or by changing mobilized actors’ minds about the undesirability of a given migrant or refugee group through issue redefinition. In other words, leaders may succeed in shifting domestic perceptions of the expected costs or benefits associated with a particular influx.⁵⁰ Third, targets may successfully threaten to launch—or actually do launch—military action to forestall or stop outflows at the source. Indeed, sometimes they even use the threat of hypothetical outflows to justify military actions they wish to take for other reasons. Sometimes targets simply convincingly threaten other actions that convince challengers to back down or end an outflow. When evasion succeeds, coercion will fail, or at least be less successful than challengers may have hoped.

Coercion can also fail because of missteps by challengers, some of which may also be successfully manipulated by targets. For instance, although such cases appear to be relatively unusual, attempted migration-driven coercion may unify the target’s population, rather than polarize it. Similarly, if a group of migrants or

refugees—previously viewed with skepticism or hostility—is effectively recast as the victim of gross human rights abuses and worthy of protection, mobilized opposition may evaporate, and with it, the possibility of successful coercion.⁵¹ This is a key point, which reinforces the fact of the dynamic nature of this coercive, two-level game. More broadly, whenever there are significant downward shifts in the level of mobilization of (and degree of polarization between) pro- or anti-refugee camps over time, coercion is likely to fail.

Nevertheless, as we have now seen, migration-driven coercive attempts occur on average at least once a year, and, on average, they are relatively successful when undertaken, particularly against liberal democratic targets. This is particularly true in the domain of compellence, which comprises the vast majority of cases of CEM. At the same time, as figure 4 suggests, even if the United States’ relative popularity as a target is currently ebbing, overall the average number of cases per year may be creeping upward (although these apparent trends may not endure). In sum, while not a tool of first resort, under the right circumstances, CEM can grant the last word to those who employ it.

Conclusions

Coercion is generally understood to refer to the practice of inducing or preventing changes in political behavior using threats, intimidation, or some other form of pressure—most commonly, military force. Coercion-driven migrations, or coercive engineered migrations, by extension, are those real or threatened cross-border population movements that are deliberately created or manipulated as instruments of deterrence or compellence in order to prevent or induce changes in political behavior, or to extract political, military, and economic concessions from a target state or states. As the above discussion should make clear, CEMs are generally used as a means to achieve objectives in other policy arenas *and* to counter threats by adversaries to inflict costs and punishment using means other than migration.

Conventional wisdom suggests this kind of coercion is rare at best; indeed, some observers erroneously appear to believe Turkey in 2016 was the first time we have seen it in action. Yet, not only is this kind of coercion attempted far more frequently than the accepted wisdom would suggest, but it also tends to succeed far more often than capabilities-based theories would predict, especially in the realm of compellence, its most common manifestation. Thus, a greater appreciation for the frequency of its employment, the actors who resort to it and why, and what potential targets can do to protect themselves and the true victims of this kind of coercion—the displaced themselves—is imperative, from both policy and field operational standpoints. Such an imperative is particularly acute at a time when more people than ever have been forcibly displaced—65.3 million around the world as of this writing, a figure that enterprising, capable, and opportunistic coercers are likely to push higher.⁵²

If there is a silver lining in this account, it is that while many observers have underappreciated the significance of this kind of coercion, thankfully the same cannot necessarily be said for target states, particularly those that have been targeted multiple times. For example, U.S. national intelligence estimates have long included warnings of U.S. vulnerability to this kind of coercion and have recommended taking steps to guard against future predation. Similarly, Australia shut down its so-called “Pacific Solution,” at least for a time, in no small part to guard itself against future coercive attempts by the tiny island of

Nauru.⁵³ Likewise, in 2003 alone, the EU committed to spending €400 million to increase border security, at least in part to deter future migration-driven coercion, and some have argued that Gaddhafi was deposed in no small part to prevent further recidivism by the North African nation. (However, it has since become clear that getting rid of Gaddhafi did not destroy Libyan incentives to target the EU, and indeed the Europeans have been targeted by *both* competing government entities in Libya subsequent to Gaddhafi’s ouster.)⁵⁴

As far as China and its sometimes volatile next-door neighbor go, in 2006, the Chinese constructed a fence along part of its border with North Korea to impede cross-border movements. In 2014, the Chinese produced a (now-leaked) military plan for dealing with potential migration-related fallout in the event of a threatened or actual collapse.⁵⁵ Additionally, some states, including China, the United States, and Italy, regularly conduct military exercises designed to leave them better prepared to respond to potential massive influxes across their borders.⁵⁶

In the case of the United States and Cuba, the normalization of relations may materially reduce the probability of future coercive attempts, but the situation at present remains very much in flux. How things will develop in the months and years to come is an open question, and some argue low-intensity nods towards coercion are underway even as this piece goes to press.⁵⁷

Further, the political and national security implications of strategically engineered migrations extend far beyond the politically charged realms of immigration, asylum, and border security policy—and not simply because coercers’ objectives extend to domains far beyond migration. Indeed, it has been suggested that the unspontaneous “flood of refugees from East to West Germany in 1989 ... helped to bring down the Berlin Wall, expedited the unification of the two German states, and generated the most significant transformation in international relations since World War II.”⁵⁸ In the here and now, some have suggested, the ongoing European migration crisis may presage or even catalyze the collapse of the EU.⁵⁹

Migration and refugee flows have likewise been identified as one of the most significant causes of armed conflict in the post-Cold War period. In the

last decade alone, we have witnessed the consequences of CEM in arenas as significant and diverse as economic sanctions and arms embargoes, ethnic conflict, military intervention, both intra- and inter-state war,

nuclear proliferation, and regime change. While for many this is a phenomenon that has been hiding in plain sight, its consequences and implications have been anything but invisible. ■

Notes

1. Ben Rawlence, "Refugees Shouldn't Be Bargaining Chips," *New York Times*, 17 May 2016, accessed 6 October 2016, <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/17/opinion/refugees-shouldnt-be-bargaining-chips.html>.
2. Elizabeth Collett, "The Paradox of the EU-Turkey Deal," Migration Policy Institute.org website, March 2016, accessed 3 October 2016, <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/news/paradox-eu-turkey-refugee-deal>.
3. "EU-Turkey Statement," The European Council website, 18 March 2016, accessed 3 October 2016, <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2016/03/18-eu-turkey-statement/>.
4. Duncan Robinson and Alex Barker, "EU and Turkey Agree Deal to Return Migrants," *Financial Times*, 18 March 2016, accessed 3 October 2016, <https://www.ft.com/content/94314ec0-eca7-11e5-9fca-fb0f946fd1f0>.
5. Agence France-Presse, "Turkish President Threatens to Send Millions of Syrian Refugees to EU," *The Guardian* online, 11 February 2016, accessed 3 October 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/feb/12/turkish-president-threatens-to-send-millions-of-syrian-refugees-to-eu>; Agence France-Presse, "Turkey Threatens to Back Out of EU Migrant Deal over Visas," *France24.com*, 19 April 2016, accessed 3 October 2016, <http://www.france24.com/en/20160419-turkey-migrant-deal-eu-visa-free-travel>; Kelly M. Greenhill, "Open Arms Behind Barred Doors: Fear, Hypocrisy and Policy Schizophrenia in the European Migration Crisis," *European Law Journal* 22, no. 3 (May 2016): 279–94.
6. Selena Sykes, "EU Does Secret Deal with Suspected War Criminal in Desperate Bid to Stop Migrants," *Express* online, 15 May 2016, accessed 3 October 2016, <http://www.express.co.uk/news/world/670550EU-secret-deal-war-criminal-sudan-migrant-crisis-Africa>.
7. "Australia Asylum: Why is it Controversial?" BBC News website, 3 August 2016, accessed 3 October 2016, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-28189608>; Greenhill, "Open Arms Behind Barred Doors," 279–81.
8. Kelly M. Greenhill, *Weapons of Mass Migration: Forced Displacement, Coercion and Foreign Policy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010).
9. This makes coercive engineered migration (CEM) significantly less common than interstate territorial disputes (ca. five cases/year), but markedly more prevalent than both civil wars (ca. 0.7 cases/year) and extended intermediate deterrence crises (ca. 0.6 cases/year). Seventy-five of eighty-six migration cases since 1951 were determined to be CEM.
10. See Greenhill, "Migration as a Coercive Weapon: New Evidence from the Middle East" (forthcoming).
11. Greenhill, *Weapons of Mass Migration*, chap. 3.
12. Michael Weiss, "Breaking: Syrian State Documents 'Show Assad Orchestrated Nakba Day Raids on Golan Heights,'" *Telegraph*, 13 June 2011; Rick Gladstone and Damien Cave, "Torrent of Syrian Refugees Strains Aid Effort and Region," *New York Times*, 24 August 2012, accessed 6 October 2016, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/08/25/world/middleeast/refugee-numbers-swell-as-fighting-in-syria-intensifies.html>; David D. Kirkpatrick, "Syrian Army Attacks Village Near Jordanian Border," *New York Times*, 6 September 2012, accessed 6 October 2016, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/09/07/world/middleeast/Syria.html>.
13. Greenhill, *Weapons of Mass Migration*, chap. 2.
14. Robert Pape, *Bombing to Win: Air Power and Coercion in War* (Cornell University Press, 1996), 21. "The hope is that the government will concede or the population will revolt."
15. Robert Putnam, "Diplomacy and Domestic Politics: The Logic of Two-level Games," *International Organization* 42, no. 3 (1988): 427–60.
16. Karen Jacobsen, "Factors Influencing the Policy Responses of Host Governments to Mass Refugee Influxes," *International Migration Review* 30, no. 3 (1996): 655–68.
17. "Russian Pundit Examines Central Asian Response to Crimea Annexation," BBC Worldwide Monitoring, 17 April 2014.
18. Consider, for instance, the United States' tragically underwhelming initial response to Hurricane Katrina.
19. Putnam, "Diplomacy and Domestic Politics."
20. Marc R. Rosenblum, "Immigration and U.S. National Interests," in *Immigration Policy and Security: U.S., European and Commonwealth Perspectives*, eds. Terry E. Givens, Gary P. Freeman, and David L. Leal (Abingdon-on-Thames, UK: Routledge, 2008), 15.
21. Marco Scalvini, "Humanitarian Wars and Rejected Refugees," OpenDemocracy website, 17 April 2011, accessed 3 October 2016, <http://www.opendemocracy.net/marco-scalvini/humanitarian-wars-and-rejected-refugees>.
22. Lawrence Freedman, "Strategic Coercion," in *Strategic Coercion: Concepts and Cases*, ed. Lawrence Freedman (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1998), 29.
23. For example, while John F. Kennedy's administration was understandably reluctant to use force to influence Soviet behavior vis-à-vis Berlin in the early 1960s, U.S. officials—at the very least—entertained the idea of using CEM to "encourage" greater cooperation from Moscow. See the partially declassified "(Secret) U.S. Department of State (DOS) Telegram, From U.S. Embassy Berlin (Deputy Commandant Allen Lightner) to U.S. Secretary of State, 'Refugee Problem May Deter Soviets from Going Ahead with Treaty,'" 24 July 1961, No. 87, Control No. 15686; and "(Secret) Memo 'Discontent in East Germany,'" 18 July 1961, 3. Both are available through the Digital National Security Archive (subscription service).
24. Ian Smith, "Raul Castro is Launching a 'Weapon of Mass Migration' Against the U.S.," *National Review* online, 28 January 2016, accessed 3 October 2016, [continued next page]

<http://www.nationalreview.com/article/430385/cuban-refugee-crisis-fabricated-win-sanctions-repeal>.

25. For an examination of an analogous phenomenon in the nuclear arena, see Scott Snyder, *Negotiating on the Edge: North Korean Negotiating Behavior* (Washington, DC: U.S. Institute of Peace, 1999), especially chap. 3.

26. Thomas Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960), 196.

27. Mark Habeeb, *Power and Tactics in International Negotiation: How Weak Nations Bargain with Strong Nations* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988).

28. *Ibid.*; Snyder, *Negotiating on the Edge*, 43, 71.

29. Christopher Mitchell, "Implications," in *Western Hemisphere Immigration and United States Foreign Policy*, ed. Christopher Mitchell (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992).

30. This can be particularly important because powerful actors tend to dismiss weaker actors' threats for two distinct reasons. First, they frequently have trouble believing their weaker counterparts would initiate crises or conflicts they seem destined to lose, based on relative capabilities. This tendency may be further exacerbated by the fact that targets may also underestimate the magnitude of the threats facing weak challengers when the issues at stake seem trivial to them, thus leading them to further discount the probability of crisis initiation. Second, because the majority of targets would not themselves initiate migration crises, they tend to dismiss threats to do so as "irrational" or "crazy" and, consequently, also incredible.

31. Daniel Byman and Matthew Waxman, *The Dynamics of Coercion* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2002).

32. Valur Ingimundarson, "Cold War Misperceptions: The Communist and Western Responses to the East German Refugee Crisis in 1953," *Journal of Contemporary History* 29 (1994): 463–81; D. G. Pruitt, *Negotiating Behavior* (New York, Academic Press, 1981).

33. Indeed, targets who engage in foreign-imposed regime change often inadvertently create conditions even more conducive to the employment of CEM after they have intervened to change the incumbent regime, as U.S. involvement in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Libya in recent years makes clear.

34. *Ibid.*, 6–7.

35. John Mueller, "The Banality of Ethnic War," *International Security* 25, no. 1 (Summer 2000): 42–70. The use of regular troops is often not even necessary to effect population displacement; it can also be done with paramilitary "shock troops" and even bands of thugs, as the 1990s wars of imperial dissolution in the Balkans demonstrate.

36. James Gow, "Coercive Cadences: The Yugoslav War of Dissolution," in Freedman, *Strategic Coercion*, chap. 11.

37. Michael W. Doyle, "Liberalism and World Politics," *American Political Science Review* 80, no. 4 (1986): 1151–69; Bruce Russett, "Why Democratic Peace?" in *Debating the Democratic Peace*, ed. Michael Brown (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996), 93.

38. DOS Telegram No. 87, Control No. 15686, and "(Secret) Memo 'Discontent in East Germany.'"

39. "Iran Threatens to Expel Afghan Refugees if Kabul Ratifies U.S. Strategic Partnership," *Telegraph*, 12 May 2012, accessed 4 October 2016, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/afghanistan/9256602/Iran-threatens-to-expel-Afghan-refugees-if-Kabul-ratifies-US-strategic-partnership>.

[html](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/afghanistan/9256602/Iran-threatens-to-expel-Afghan-refugees-if-Kabul-ratifies-US-strategic-partnership). Fazel Hadi Muslimyar, speaker of the Afghan Senate, reported that the Iranian ambassador to Afghanistan threatened to expel Afghans if Kabul signed the partnership treaty with the United States.

40. Greenhill, *Weapons of Mass Migration*; for post-publication cases and data, see Greenhill, "When Virtues Become Vulnerabilities: The Achilles' Heel of Migration Social Policy," in *Handbook of Migration and Social Policy*, eds. Gary Freeman and Nikola Mirilovic (Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar, 2016); Kelly M. Greenhill, "Demographic Bombing: People as Weapons in Syria and Beyond," *Foreign Affairs* online, 17 December 2015, accessed 6 October 2016, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2015-12-17/demographic-bombing>.

41. Greenhill, "When Virtues Become Vices."

42. Paul K. Huth, "Deterrence and International Conflict: Empirical Findings and Theoretical Debates," *Annual Review of Political Science* 2 (1999): 25–48; Gary Clyde Hufbauer et al., *Economic Sanctions Reconsidered*, 3rd ed. (Washington, DC: Peterson Institute, 2008).

43. It is of course also possible that if general deterrence succeeds and nothing happens, there still may be a large number of as yet unidentified cases of CEM-driven deterrence. It is well known, for instance, that Chinese fears of both the direct and indirect anticipated costs and potentially destabilizing effects of a mass migration of North Koreans into China has long deterred the Chinese from exerting greater pressure on the Hermit Kingdom on a variety of military and nonmilitary fronts, including its nuclear weapons and ballistic missile programs and its occasional regional acts of aggression. How many other such cases might invisibly exist (or have existed previously) is an open question.

44. Greenhill, "Migration as a Coercive Weapon."

45. While just such an outcome will be a good thing if the challenger is, for instance, a nongovernmental organization trying to bring down a dictatorship, it is a highly undesirable outcome in most cases.

46. "The Construction of the Berlin Wall," Berlin website, accessed 4 October 2016, www.berlin.de/mauer/en/history/construction-of-the-berlin-wall.

47. Thomas Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1966), 89.

48. Ronald B. Frankum Jr., *Operation Passage to Freedom: The United States Navy in Vietnam, 1954-1955* (Lubbock, TX: Texas Tech University Press, 2007), 207.

49. *Ibid.* However, attempting to "pass the buck" can also backfire by inadvertently permitting further—and more successful—coercion by enterprising opportunists.

50. H. Richard Friman, "Side-Payments Versus Security Cards: Domestic Bargaining Tactics in International Economic Negotiations," *International Organization* 47, no. 3 (1993): 387–409.

51. Of course, the converse is also true, should coercers aim to galvanize action within the pro-camp. That said, most research suggests that changing the prevailing frame in policy debates is a difficult task.

52. Adrian Edwards, "Global Forced Displacement Hits Record High," United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees website, 20 June 2016, accessed 4 October 2016, <http://www.unhcr.org/news/latest/2016/6/5763b65a4/global-forced-displacement-hits-record-high.html>.

53. Greenhill, *Weapons of Mass Migration*, appendix.

54. Colin Freeman, "Libya Warns it Could Flood Europe with Migrants if EU Does Not Recognize New Self-declared Government," *Telegraph*, 2 November 2015, accessed 4 October 2016, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/africaandindianocean/libya/11970313/Libya-warns-it-could-flood-Europe-with-migrants-if-EU-does-not-recognise-new-Islamist-government.html>.

55. For information on the Pacific Solution's demise, see Connie Levett, "Pacific Solution Cost \$1 Billion," *Sydney Morning Herald*, 25 August 2007; for information on the European Union and Belarus, see Volker ter Haseborg, "Radioactive Refuge: Offering Asylum in Chernobyl's No Man's Land," *Der Spiegel*, 14 October 2005; for information on the Chinese border fence and North Korea, see Norimitsu Onishi, "Tension, Desperation: The China-North Korean Border," *New York Times*, 22 October 2006; for information on the military contingency plan, see Martin Sieff, "China's North Korea Collapse Plan is Credible, Analysts Say," *Asia-Pacific Defense Forum*, 15 May 2014.

56. James Brooke, "North Korea Lashes Out at Neighbors and U.S.," *New York Times*, 19 August 2003; Sam Dillon, "US Tests Border Plan in Event of Mexico Crisis," *New York Times*, 8 December 1995, accessed 6 October 2016, <http://www.nytimes.com/1995/12/08/us/us-tests-border-plan-in-event-of-mexico-crisis.html>; personal conversations with U.S. military officials, U.S. Southern Command, Miami, Florida, in April 2000, (with follow-up discussions in 2016); and conversations with personnel from Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, Massachusetts, in October and November 2001.

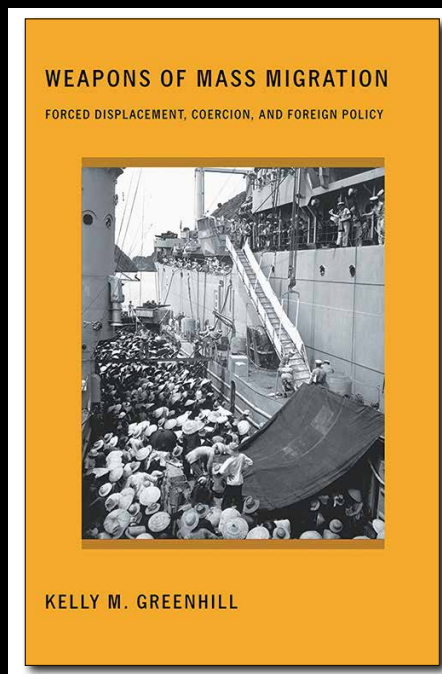
57. Smith, "Raul Castro is Launching."

58. Gil Loescher, "Refugee Movements and International Security," Adelphi Paper 268, (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1992), 3.

59. "Tusk Gives EU Two Months to 'Save Schengen,'" EuroNews website, 19 January 2016, accessed 4 October 2016, <http://www.euronews.com/2016/01/19/tusk-gives-the-eu-two-months-to-save-schengen>; "Schengen to Fail in Months if Migration Crisis not 'Under Control,' says Tusk," Deutsche Welle website, 19 January 2016, accessed 4 October 2016, <http://www.dw.com/en/schengen-to-fail-in-months-if-migration-crisis-not-under-control-says-tusk/a-18989697>.

Military Review

WE RECOMMEND



In *Weapons of Mass Migration: Forced Displacement, Coercion and Foreign Policy*, Professor Kelly M. Greenhill offers the first systematic examination of mass migration used as an asymmetric brand of state-against-state coercion. She examines who employs, and who has employed, this policy tool, to what ends, and when and why it works. Coercers aim to affect target states' behavior by exploiting the existence of competing political interests and groups. She asserts that this "coercion by punishment" strategy can be effected in two ways: the first relies on straightforward threats to overwhelm a target's capacity to accommodate a refugee or migrant influx; the second relies on a kind of norms-enhanced political blackmail that exploits the existence of legal and normative commitments to those fleeing violence, persecution, or privation. The theory is illustrated in a variety of case studies from Europe, East Asia, and North America. To help policy makers in potential target nations better respond to this kind of unconventional predation, *Weapons of Mass Migration* also offers practicable policy recommendations for scholars, government officials, and anyone concerned about the true victims of this kind of coercion—the displaced themselves.