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Claude A. Lambert

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Commentary and Reply

On “Military Force and Mass Migration in Europe”

Claude A. Lambert

This commentary responds to Matthew N. Metzger and John M. Lorenzen’s article “Military Force and Mass Migration in Europe” published in the Autumn 2017 issue of Parameters (vol. 47, no.3).

In “Military Force and Mass Migration in Europe,” Matthew N. Metzger and John M. Lorenzen convincingly articulated the seriousness of Europe’s migration problem and its potential to destabilize US allies and partners in the region. They proposed solid recommendations for addressing the consequential challenges of mass migration but only briefly touched upon potential actions and activities to conduct before an orchestrated crisis begins.

Specifically, the authors did not highlight coercive engineered migration, which is a potential problem in the European theater. As Kelly M. Greenhill explains, “Those cross-border population movements that are deliberately created or manipulated in order to induce political, military and/or economic concessions from a target state or states” have been historically underrecognized, and their threat is underappreciated (*Strategic Insights* 9, no. 1 [Spring–Summer 2010]: 116–17). In short, coercive engineered migration can be considered a tool for operating in the gray zone—that awkward and uncomfortable space between traditional conceptions of war and peace.

In the European theater, Russia expertly uses unconventional warfare, or gray zone techniques, to deal with states and regions on the periphery of its federation, and it seems they are leveraging coercive engineered migration techniques to great effect. During and after Russia’s violent annexation of Crimea, for example, there were reports of ethnic Russians moving into the peninsula. As of January 2017, upwards of 150,000 people have moved to Crimea, mainly from Russia, but also from other Eurasian states. At the same time, roughly 150,000 former residents, out of a total population of 2.3 million people, have left Crimea. This sudden and sizable demographic shift, driven mainly by migration, seems to be solidifying Russia’s control of the peninsula.

In particular, liberal democracies are predominantly vulnerable to such events because, as Greenhill states, they have “codified commitments to human rights and refugee protection through” the Geneva Convention. International human rights and humanitarian laws establish “normative standards” for judging actions, obligating “states to meet the responsibilities” (*Weapons of Mass Destruction*, 136).

Thus, the migration threat seems to present a larger dilemma to US allies and partners in Europe than criminal or terrorist organizations embedding themselves in, or recruiting from, vulnerable or migrant

Major Claude A. Lambert is an active duty US Army strategist.

populations. So, how can the US, its allies, and its partners seize the initiative, strengthen NATO's security posture and get "left" to counter this threat? What military capabilities might augment or complement the other elements of national power to identify and deter this phenomena?

Lastly, in addition to the authors' recommendation of "establishing a planning team focused on studying the problem of mass migration in Europe," intelligence and systems analysis resources would be needed to adequately assess the likelihood of a coercive engineered migration event (*Parameters*, 61). Rational strategic approaches to the problem require a common, compelling, and adaptive operating picture to orient and counter the threat quickly. Additionally, this viewpoint cannot be insular; it must account for the widest perspectives from the intelligence community as well as US agencies, allies, and partners since such migration is often concealed or "embedded within mass migrations strategically engineered for dispossessive, exportive, or militarized reasons" (*Strategic Insights*, 117). As the authors' rightly note, dealing with this complex challenge requires all of the elements of national power—particularly if an event is engineered by a revisionist actor to exploit their interests while obscuring their designs, methods, and intentions.

The Author Replies

Matthew N. Metzler

I greatly appreciate the interest and response of the reader concerning our recent article on the mass migration crisis in Europe and its impact to the security posture of our NATO allies. The reader correctly identified coercive engineered migration as a possible cause for at least some number of the spike in migrant activity that has recently plagued Europe. During initial research, I spent considerable time exploring this possibility, but a respected academic advisor steered us away from making this a central point of our argument. To be fair, Europe's spike in migrant activity from the Middle East and North Africa region involves a wide range of complex international factors, some of which may include coercive engineered migration from one or more nation-states; however, the degree of influence or the involvement of any particular nation-state is often difficult to quantify with any level of certainty.

The reader will note that we referenced Greenhill's academic concept of international actors employing "weapons of mass migration" against their enemies. Our research identified convincing evidence that terror groups were using the migration crisis to purposefully gain entry into Europe for strategic purposes. There is less convincing data that Russia (or any other nation-state) has played a direct or indirect role in orchestrating or leveraging the migration crisis. However, we do not rule out this possibility and invite the reader to join us on a potential future article that explores this concept further.