Migration-Based Hybrid Warfare on Europe's Externalized Borders:

Case Studies on Morocco and Belarus in 2021

Keiran Mitchell

Department of Political Science, Yale University

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Professor Tyler Pratt

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Introduction

Two momentous events occurred in 2021 which have fundamentally changed the dynamics of international migration, security, and sovereignty. Both happened on opposite ends of the European Union's collectivized border. In Belarus, President Alexander Lukashenko encouraged migrants largely of Iraqi Kurdish origin to travel to Belarus and attempt to cross into Poland, Latvia, and Lithuania. This was in response to a sustained breakdown in relations with the EU. In Morocco, guards allowed at least 6000 migrants from sub-Saharan Africa to storm the gates at Ceuta (a Spanish enclave) in a single day in response to Spain treating the Sahrawi leader Brahim Ghali for COVID-19 (BBC, 2021). Both were entirely new instances of hybrid warfare between states through weaponized migrant networks, which I have named *migration-based hybrid warfare*. Belarus went so far as to procure migrants from other regions and promise them passage, itself not a traditional site of migrant throughput. Challenger states have now moved from simple threats of migrant influxes as detailed by Kelly Greenhill in *Weapons of Mass Migration* in response to trends of border externalization. This represents a monumental shift in international migration and security, the ramifications of which will continue to be felt for years to come.

By *migration-based hybrid warfare,* I mean the systematic use of migrants to overwhelm or evade a nation's borders in order to infringe upon its sovereignty. The sender state utilizes *migration-based hybrid warfare* because the target state finds immigration to be costly, either for reasons of state capacity or xenophobic population preferences. The sender state must also be confident that the target state has no capacity or will to wage war in retaliation. The aim is to destabilize the target state- or the international bodies like the European Union that it belongs to. Crucially, this tactic builds off the longstanding techniques of leveraging the flow of goods,

information, and capital, and people but weaponizes them in order to enact great costs on target nations. It is a new weapon in the arsenal of lesser powers.

This paper will use the examples of Belarus and Morocco as sender states as case studies which form a basis for my definition of *migration-based hybrid warfare*. Both case studies will feature in-depth process-tracing to tease out the catalyzing factors that have led to this development. In doing so, I will show the ways in which the interplay between international migration and foreign policy have fundamentally changed after the 2015 migrant crisis in Europe and the EU's continued border externalization policies, demonstrating how *migration-based hybrid warfare* has developed from simple coercion tactics. I will begin by ascertaining the theoretical basis of migration policy and security as it exists in the literature, and crucially how these two cases represent a departure from conventional theory. I will the assess each in depth, looking at the events themselves and the political context in every affected country, as well as in the European Union as a whole. This will be based on a wide variety of journalistic, policy-based, and academic sources. I will then finish by positing my own theoretical conjectures related to this new hybrid warfare within the limits of the currently small sample size that is available. Finally, my policy proposal will outline the way in which a radical opening of EU migration policy can deter the use of migrant networks in hybrid warfare and increase overall stability in the region.

Literature Review

The use of migrant channels to destabilize neighboring countries is not without precedent, though it has never taken the form of that which we currently see at play. Migrant routes and encampments have been used tactically on a significant scale as far back as the

Balkan War, when President Slobodan Milošević encouraged refugees to leave Kosovo to deter neighboring countries from supporting NATO and incurring further migration waves in the aftermath (Greenhill, 2010, ch.4). However, scholars argue, as did NATO at the time, that this was a secondary benefit to the primary goal of ethnic cleansing in the region, and not an end within itself (Hosmer, 2001; US Department of State, 1999; NATO, 2003). Even before such events, theorists were aware that large waves of migration can pose significant destabilizing risks to host nations in terms of territorial sovereignty, integration, national security, and overstretched state capacity. This makes the threat of migrant influx an effective deterrent. However, while the literature has come some way to explain the dynamics of migrant flows as national threats and as bargaining tools, there is no existing literature that explains when and why a challenger state acts upon its threats and encourages migrants to overwhelm the border. Coercion has become hybrid warfare. The phenomenon of weaponized migration currently in use is new, and in-depth case studies of Belarus and Morocco provide the opportunity to build upon the existing theory.

Writers like Sassen (1998) have explored the ways in which large flow migration represents a threat to certain factors of national sovereignty such as territorial integrity and national identity. The most pertinent aspect of these issues in the cases of Morocco and Belarus is that the countries they border (Poland, Latvia, Lithuania, and Spain) have strong anti-migrant preferences. Per Waever (1993), integration issues dominate national debate in Europe and many fear *societal insecurity*, internal instability. The countries concerned in this study have nurtured a self-image of white, Christian nationhood which is threatened by the integration of migrants which do not fit these descriptors. Again, this establishes why coercion would be effective, but it does not explain why a nation might move on to hybrid warfare.

Immigration reshapes national identities and state power. For instance, porous borders with populations straddling both sides also constitute the perfect mobilization network for non-state actors, as in the Democratic Republic of Congo with Rwandan Tutsi refugees (Lischer, 2003), in Palestinian camps in Lebanon in the 1970s (Dowty and Loescher, 1996), or even more recently throughout the Levant with Daesh. Such non-state actors can undermine the authority and monopoly on violence of states and, in the case of the PLO in Lebanon, actively challenge it. Migrants are a driving factor in the spreading instability of a region, with those fleeing war in neighboring countries exporting societal issues to others (Salehyan and Gleditsch, 2006). This drives much of the fear of large migrant groups in Europe's peripheral nations. Oyen (2015) has written about the contentious role of Chinese Americans at various points in US-China relations as well, given the group's sway on foreign policy issues. On the other hand, migrant groups can even foster increased integration within a region as is the case in the Arab speaking world, with Maghrebi and Levantine Arabs moving to the Gulf for work and fostering stronger Arab solidarity (Thiollet, 2011). This is all testament to the shear demographic and political power that migrants can wield. These groups can undermine the sovereignty of the nation state, influence foreign policy and import instability from their country of origin, which makes them, or rather the fear of them, an effective diplomatic weapon.

A final dimension of risk to large scale migration that has been well-documented is the direct risk to the state apparatus and the economy. Chami et al. (2008) noted that remittances also remove money from the host nation's economy and can cause a significant economic strain. Limited studies like that in Denmark have also demonstrated that migrants of certain skillsets from particular sending countries can take more from welfare than they contribute despite the net-positive economic gains that countries with large levels of migration have experienced (The

Economist, 2021). This incentivizes states to limit 'low-skilled' immigration through any means necessary, including concessions to other nations.

How these destabilizing effects inform international relations also has a strong theoretical basis, with many case studies applying the dimension of migration flows onto relations between isolated pairs of states. The most pertinent examples include Libya (Tsourapas, 2018), Turkey (Greenhill, 2016; Merlinger and Van Berlo, 2016) and Morocco (Brand, 2006). These cases explore the way that states gain concessions from certain members of the European Union by housing migrants intent on reaching Europe. Turkey is a standout example, in that the rhetoric of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan was explicit in asking for more incentives to limit migrant influx into Greece (Reuters, 2016). His overt coercion, as well as the EU's immediate concessions, are likely a contributing factor to current trend of *migration-based hybrid warfare.*

Tsourapas has noted that the dependence between sender and receiving state is mutual, however, as host nations can force concessions from sending countries provided that they equate to less than that which would be lost by the host nation withholding the remittances to the sender nation. For instance, this informed Donald Trump's decision to demand that the Mexican government pay for a border wall. Belarus does not rely on remittances, but Morocco does, with a sizeable portion of its citizens living abroad. This prompts the questions of when and why Morocco would be willing to risk such sanctions through hostility to the EU.

Greenhill has revolutionized the way in which we think about the migrants as bargaining tools between states, formalizing a theory for sender-led coercion termed *Coercive engineered migration.* This is the coercive use of migration networks to gain concessions from destination countries. Greenhill noted that migration-based coercion is extremely successful, with over half recorded instances succeeding between 1951 and 2010. She teased out the mechanisms of this

tactic, noting that challenger states exploit contentious immigration policy or limited state capacity in target states. Not all states are equally vulnerable to such a threat, as it requires a combination of limited state capacity and heterogeneity of opinions within the target polity. Liberal democracies are also particularly vulnerable, as policymaking is transparent and human rights are codified, making them hard to ignore. Commentators have already linked Belarus' current actions to the concept of *coercive engineered migration* for this reason (Walt, 2021; Terry, 2022), though they fail to identify the distinction between threatening migrant influxes and actually sending migrants to the border. They do not explain why and how this has escalated to hybrid warfare. Crucially, Greenhill's sample did not include instances of deliberate, provable action upon the threats of the sending states. This is where my research addresses the lacuna in the literature. The ways in which *migration-based hybrid warfare* represents a departure from *coercive engineered migration* is the topic of the following section.

Greenhill's coercion is reliant upon the concept of reputation (Smith, 1998; Guisinger and Smith, 2002; Fearon, 1994) which will also contribute to my theory of *migration-based hybrid warfare*. States signal their likely actions through consistent policy positions and moderation. This facilitates cooperation. Liberal democracies achieve this easier because their policy is contingent on mandates and public approval. However, this also locks liberal democracies into policies that are sometimes difficult to resolve, given the desire to maintain reputation. Migration policy is a prime example, as European states wish to signal that they are tough on migration while continuing to prioritize, or be seen to prioritize, human rights in their foreign policy. In an attempt to relieve such tensions, the bloc has moved towards a policy of border externalization (Casas et al, 2019). In what the media has dubbed "Fortress Europe", a reference to Nazi consolidation of the continent during the war, the EU's border practices extend

far beyond the border. The Rabat Process, for instance, encourages network management throughout Europe, the Maghreb, and West Africa to prevent migrants reaching Europe's southern shores. Shunting the responsibility of processing and detaining migrants fulfills the anti-migrant preferences of the population without outwardly being seen to curtail the migrants' rights, thereby avoiding significant domestic backlash when human rights obligations are not respected. However, the vast sums of money that the EU spends in its partnerships with neighboring countries to maintain these bilateral agreements strongly signals that this issue is uniquely delicate within the bloc. This rights-sovereignty tension is evidently part of the cause of EU nations being targeted by challenger states with *migration-based hybrid warfare*, as pursuing either goal incurs domestic backlash and a damage to reputation with relation to the other. Consistently backing down in cases of coercion with Belarus and Morocco historically has also signaled to these nations that they can go as far as hybrid warfare without significant backlash.

This paper further clarifies a specific form of hybrid warfare, *migration-based hybrid warfare,* given that the literature has focused on information and technology when discussing hybrid warfare. When Hoffman (2009) coined the term, he described the irregular tactics that states can employ to sow instability while remaining just under the legal threshold for military retaliation. They were categorized as unpredictable, with little indication of the timeframe with which such attacks could be seen to adhere to. The case studies of Morocco and Belarus clearly fit this definition. This is also not the first instance of migration flow manipulation being described in terms of hybrid warfare. Punda et al. (2019) speculated that this definition fit well with Russian interests in the outflow of Syrians to the EU in 2014 after it repeatedly escalated the war, though the analysis was limited to conjecture. In the cases of Morocco and Belarus, the motives and actions of the challenger nations were clearly stated, at least after the fact. This

makes them the first confirmed instances of *migration-based hybrid warfare* where the use of migrants was the primary goal.

Finally, an important distinction to make in this analysis is that the aims of a transitory state are not the same as those of a sending state. Belarus is a transitory state, albeit only because it has actively encouraged migrants to move through its territory for the purposes of *migration-based hybrid warfare*. Morocco is both, with 10% of Moroccans living abroad and many tens of thousands more migrants travelling from sub-Saharan Africa and using Morocco as a crossing (Adamson, 2006). A transitory state like Belarus has nothing to lose by allowing migration because these migrants do not come from their state. These migrants will more than likely constitute a burden on their own state capacity should they stay. They also have less to gain in a traditional sense because they will not benefit from diasporic diplomatic ties or remittances. Donnelly (2014) explores this aspect in the context of Mexico, itself both a sending state and a transitory state. Mexico stresses, much like many of Europe's neighbors, that the burden should be shared between the nations that are affected by these migration paths. This argument is often made by countries like Morocco and Turkey. With Morocco, it is unclear at which point its cost-benefit analysis swings in favor of *migration-based hybrid warfare*, as it relies heavily on remittances from the EU that could easily be stopped in retaliation. Greenhill does not effectively account for the ways in which countries use coercion depending on whether they are transitory or sending states. A comparison of Belarus and Morocco will go some way in explaining this, though more research with a larger sample size is needed. Therefore, the lacunae in migrant studies and international relations that this study seeks to address are four-fold: why have these coercive threats been acted upon for the first time in the current context, how does that change

the fallout of such tactics, how do sender nations and transitory nations use coercion differently, and how might this dynamic reoccur in the current global context?

Migration-Based Hybrid Warfare: A Subtle Departure from Coercion

Migration-based hybrid warfare shares the same reasons for its tactical efficacy as *coercive engineered migration* and the two display a degree of continuity. Morocco and Belarus have used *coercive engineered migration* in the past before engaging in *migration-based hybrid warfare* for instance. Both tactics succeed because they rely on divided polities and/or limited state capacities to destabilize target states. However, the degree of provocation that both tactics entail is different. Therefore, resolution of each crisis is also subtly different. When states make the transition to *migration-based hybrid warfare*, they have moved from blackmail to willful infringements on state sovereignty. Gripes in target nations about the abstract siphoning of state funds to pay off third states can be easier quelled than deep-seated nationalist fears of 'the other' walking across the border and accessing scarce welfare in instances of *migration-based hybrid warfare*.

What is more, while coercion can be negotiated to resolution by target states, in the case of *migration-based hybrid warfare* the target states must already utilize resources to process and/or repel the oncoming migrants. Liberal democracies in particular are often law-bound to allow due process to these migrants, which again drains additional resources. In cases of coercion, reputation can be largely maintained as nations can pay to export the rights abuses of migrants. Domestic approval is also largely maintained should the target state choose to concede to coercion and keep the issue of migration away from its borders and the watchful eyes of civil society. In *migration-based hybrid warfare* the target government must incur damage to

domestic approval whether or not they choose to welcome migrants, as at least some internal group will be displeased infringements on sovereignty or rights. These factors make the cost of *migration-based hybrid warfare* higher.

Belarus' altercation with Poland, Latvia, and Lithuania

The migration crisis between Belarus and the EU members Latvia, Lithuania and Poland took place from July to December 2021. It can be seen to merge seamlessly with the current war in Ukraine and the waves of migrants that have continued to cross into Poland at the time of writing in April 2022. However, limiting the temporal remit of this case study to the end of 2021 is intuitive given that crossings from Belarus by non-European migrants decreased dramatically in December of 2021 and migrants began to be repatriated from Minsk. It is likely that President Aleksandr Lukashenko was aware of Russia's pending plans to invade Ukraine and the influx of Ukrainian refugees into Poland which was to follow. Later, I will discuss the theoretical implications that this linkage has as part of larger pre-war planning. However, given that Ukrainian refugees were not part of Belarusian or Russian *coercive engineered migration* or *migration-based hybrid warfare*, this overlap should not affect my analysis.

To understand the events of July- December 2021, we must first briefly cover the various threats that President Aleksandr Lukashenko has made to open his borders throughout the years. Belarus' actions have previously been in line with the more traditional concept of *coercive engineered migration.* Lukashenko threatened to allow up to 50,000 migrants to cross into Poland in December of 2002 after the Czech Republic refused to invite Belarus to a NATO conference (RFE/RL, 2002; Shepherd, 2010; McLaughlin, 2004). This did not come to pass, as the EU drew up plans to strengthen its borders, including the founding of the FRONTEX agency

in 2004, which collectivized the responsibility to securitize the EU's external borders- at least in principle. It also sent money to the Belarusians for the upkeep of the Belarusian side.

Lukashenko then reused the same tactics in 2004 to gain extra concessions in payment for the upkeep of its border with the EU (McLaughlin, 2004). The EU decided instead to use €400 million to build up their own border defenses to deter this coercion (Greenhill, 2010; Haseborg, 2005). Relations between Belarus and the bloc then improved slightly after 2008 until the EU concerned itself with the pro-democracy protests of 2020, threatening sanctions should violent crackdowns from the government continue. Crucially, Lukashenko chose not to go through with his plans in these prior instances despite very limited concessions from the EU. This makes the events of 2021 a distinct breakaway from prior migration policy in Belarus.

The current crisis began around early July of 2021, with the earliest articles citing Lithuanian photographs of migrant crossings on July 2 (Chapple, 2021). Belarus had been in a state of turmoil for the past two years in particular, with ongoing protests, brutal crackdowns and high-profile defections at international sporting events (France 24, 2020; ITV News, 2021). The move from coercion to hybrid warfare was in the aftermath of grueling sanctions that the EU placed on Belarus due in part to undemocratic elections held the year prior. Lukashenko had also grounded the Ryanair Flight 4978 during a flight from Athens to Vilnius on May 23, 2021, to detain two opposition activists and was met with unanimous condemnation from the EU (Troianovski & Nechepurenko, 2021). On June 25, 2021, in response to the latest of these flagrant human rights abuses and undemocratic actions, the EU enacted sanctions targeted at the sectors of finance, telecoms, petroleum, and military items (The Council of the European Union, 2021). This was joined by similar initiatives from the US and the UK. In retaliation, Lukashenko enacted his prior plans and encouraged migrants to cross over to the EU, initially targeting

Lithuania and then targeting Poland in particular, with Latvia also experiencing many crossings throughout.

The migrants that came through to the EU were mostly Iraqi Kurds, though they were joined by large numbers of Iraqi Arabs, Syrians, and Yemenis (Arraf and Khaleel, 2021). This is not typically a popular means of entry into Europe for migrants from any region, with most common pathways entering via Mediterranean nations. For instance, Lithuania reported 1,700 crossings by mid-July 2021 compared with 81 by that point in the prior year (RFE/RL, 2021). Therefore, it is blatantly obvious that the Belarusian state played a key role in encouraging migrants to detour to the eastern European border. Published FRONTEX videos had confirmed by late July that Belarusian border guards were escorting migrants to the border (Henley et al, 2021) though their involvement went much deeper. Belarussian actors were found to have facilitated the activity of smugglers. Lithuanian intelligence found that they advertised cheap package holidays with visas for as little as $20 USD in the airport, while men dressed in camouflage- presumably soldiers- were advising migrants on how to cross the border in the neighboring woods (Antonenko, 2021). The state tourism bureau housed these migrants in state-owned hotels in Minsk before they were escorted and literally pushed past the Belarusian fences at the border. Some migrants later interviewed had scarred faces from the barbed wire. Attack dogs would be stationed behind the line to prevent any escape (Hajnowka and Vulliamy, 2021). By early August, demand for the Belarusian government's services was such that airlines commenced direct daily flights from Sulaymaniyah, Erbil and Basra in Iraq to Minsk, which the EU quickly pressured Iraq to stop. However, Belarusians then reconfigured the route to facilitate arrivals from Afghanistan (Henley et al, 2021), which continued through to December.

Initial reactions from all three member states of the EU were all comparable. They amassed their armies at the border to deter crossers and began testing the viability of a border fence or wall. By late August, groups of Iraqi and Afghan migrants were trapped in large groups at the Polish and Latvian border. They could not move forwards or backwards due to the presence of the Belarusian army behind them and the Polish and Latvian armies in front of them. While the EU forces attempted to send aid into no man's land, the European Court of Human Rights ruled that they were not obliged to accept them into their countries and their being technically on the Belarusian side of the border made aid provision difficult (Davies, 2021). Four migrants had died of hypothermia on the Polish border by mid-September as Poland began building a border fence, denying access to journalists and NGOs to the region (Henley and Rankin, 2021). Migration paths had been funneled by and large to the Polish border by this point, and the Polish government reacted with a force of 17,000 soldiers (Hajnowka and Vulliamy, 2021). Finally, Belarusian media released images of soldiers escorting over 1,000 migrants to the Polish border in November which the Polish held back using teargas, a military weapon, on civilians (Roth, 2021). This was the last large group that made media headlines. Turkey, a major international hub for flight exchange, prevented people from Syria, Yemen, or Iraq to fly to Minsk in November thanks to EU diplomacy (Roth and O'Carroll, 2021) and the influx began to die down.

By late November, Iraqi officials reported that citizens had begun requesting voluntary repatriation as it became increasingly aware that Poland's armies were not going to let migrants through. Nevertheless, up to 20,000 were still amassed along the border (Rankin and Roth, 2021). As the flow stemmed, the European Commission conveniently remembered its human rights obligations and suggested that the three EU members bordering Belarus be allowed to

process asylum seekers in 16 weeks, up from the four that EU law stipulated. New sanctions were also placed on Belarusian individuals linked to the smuggling of migrants (Roth, 3 December 2021). This was an attempt to incentivize the national governments to allow the remaining migrants to cross, given that they were dying in the cold. In reality, it was carte blanche for the national governments to treat the migrants as they wished and the few migrants that were allowed through were housed in dire conditions in warehouses. By the end of the year as the crisis came to a halt, the Missing Migrants Project reported 22 migrants presumed deaths, though this number is likely to be higher. Diplomatic and journalistic attention had then swung to Belarus' implication in tensions between Russia and Ukraine.

As an authoritarian country with little media access or transparency, Belarus' long-term goals after this crisis are unclear. It has been posited that Lukashenko is antagonizing the EU in attempts to begin dialogue and lessen reliance upon Russia. Lukashenko had agreed to an eventual political union with Russia in hopes that he might be its eventual leader (Higgins, 2022). Since the rise of Putin, this scenario has become impossible and stronger ties with the EU and the West might prevent his removal by the Russians and their eventual union. Equally, this might be no more than a ploy to gain favor with the Russians. Russia has been attempting to destabilize the European bloc for years, but it does not have the necessary presence at the EU's borders that Belarus does. This means Belarus can more successfully enact tactics like *migration-based hybrid warfare* that Russia cannot, despite suspicion of Russia's attempts in the Syrian conflict.

Alternatively, Belarus' actions may have simply been more short-term, with long-term goals that are irrelevant to its current actions. It may have simply wished to create a better position from which to bargain against the sanctions it experienced. Wilson (2021) believes that

the events of 2021 constitute the latest in a line of recent attempts by Lukashenko to try out a 'madman' theory of international relations, so as to discourage the EU from continuing to pressure his regime. Lukashenko conveyed these sentiments himself early in the crisis, stating that while he was not trying blackmail anyone, the EU had put him in such circumstances that he was forced to react (Henley et al, 2021). Presumably, Belarus would maneuver differently after the crisis was resolved.

Of course, Belarus coordinates closely with Russia on foreign policy. It is not unreasonable to assume that an attempt to overwhelm Poland with migrants would shore up resentment towards border crossings in the run up to the Ukrainian invasion of 2022. We know that the policy was a failure in this respect, as Polish people have embraced Ukrainian refugees on the basis of shared culture and race in a way that other migrant groups have not been. However, the likelihood of this scenario is difficult to verify given President Vladimir Putin's constant calls for dialogue between the EU and Belarus during the crisis (Mirovalev, 2021; France 24, November 13, 2021) and the lack of time that has passed since Russia's initial invasion.

The prescience with which Belarus has moved from traditional coercion to a sophisticated system of hybrid warfare is what makes this case study particularly useful for understanding the distinction between the two concepts. There are many factors to consider why this development took place, but the answer is inextricably linked to the events of 2015 and their aftermaths. As the cracks formed in the Schengen zone and the viability of FRONTEX to protect it from outside migrants was called into question, it provoked a deep-seated ideological debate around migrant rights, the right to refuge, as well as the issues of the 'Safe Country Concept' and burden sharing. Peripheral, poorer nations were tasked with settling the ever-increasing influxes

as nations like Sweden and Germany encouraged them to come. Many of the other richer

countries such as the United Kingdom and the Netherlands in the economic core of the northwest

cited the principle of settlement in the first safe country – which is nowhere to be found in the

1957 Refugee Convention- to shirk burden sharing. This deeply divided the European Union and

was a large motivating factor in the UK leaving the EU. It signaled to bordering states that the

EU structure has little tolerance for migrant influx before divisions crop up and solidarity is

strained. The exit of the UK from the European Union as a result, and the following brief

hysteria surrounding the speculated FREXIT (France-exit) and NEXIT (Netherlands-exit)

indicated to Belarus and to the rest of the world that this issue could break the union.

In light of this blatant weak spot, the European Union, and Poland in particular, has

attempted to signal that coercion, or rather hybrid warfare will not work. It has sacrificed its

commitment to human rights and the rights of refugees in the process. Refusing to allow

migrants to cross into Poland but instead die in a no man's land over the course of a winter is a

somewhat logical method to discourage Belarus from using the same tactics in the future. It

satisfies the xenophobic preferences of the Polish electorate so there is little domestic backlash-

but it hurts reputation outside of Poland, as well as EU reputation as human rights defenders. The

European Union already has issues with the Polish government and its commitment to 'European

values', human rights and liberal democracy. Their reluctance to force Poland to keep to its

asylum commitments, or to share the burden of the influx with Latvia, Lithuania and Poland

amongst the other 24 member nations is complete policy failure that reinforces to other

peripheral nations where the EU's weak spots lie. The principled stance to refuse to help build

any sort of border wall or deterrent, instead focusing on FRONTEX technological upgrades

(Henley et al, 2021) does little to change the outcome if border nations are willing to fund their

own border walls. The EU, or some cohort of the larger members bilaterally, could absorb the shock of the influx rather than allowing the nations most effected to demonstrate just how politically destabilizing it is.

This makes the hybrid warfare tactic more effective in the current climate than attempts at coercion. Physically pushing migrants to the border rather than vaguely threatening their eventual arrival provides little maneuvering room for the target nation, especially if it is a liberal democracy. There is no scenario in which it does not provoke internal discord, either through admitting undesirable migrants or through blatant human rights abuses at the border. Lukashenko likely risked the extreme retaliation from the EU because it had few other options, plus his planned involvement in the invasion of Ukraine meant that he was already predestined for severe backlash and had little to lose.

Morocco and Spain

The instance of Morocco allowing migrants to enter Ceuta on 18 May 2021 is different to Belarus and the eastern EU in many respects, not least in the fact that it only lasted for a day. However, it still points to a developing trend in the tactics of Europe's peripheral authoritarian states. Reports vary between the 6,000- 10,000 migrants that crossed from Morocco to Ceuta, 1,500 of which were unattended minors, due to encouragement of the Moroccan border guards. Small groups of migrants started to cross at midnight and carried on throughout the day. Guards were even filmed waving migrants through gates to no man's land without providing checks (Faus and Landauro, 2021). In the aftermath, Rabat recalled its ambassadors for consultations and the Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez cancelled engagements in Paris to personally deal with the altercation (BBC, 2021). The Spanish sent a further 200 soldiers and 200 police

officials to bolster the 1,100 strong border force already present. These forces were caught beating migrants back into the sea with batons (MAP news, 2021). Margaritas Schinas, Vice President of the European Commission, also committed all the resources of the EU, including FRONTEX, to shore up Spain's borders (Cinco Días, 2021). The Spanish retained some 700 minors and returned the rest to Morocco, before returning these remaining minors in August of the same year after reaching an agreement with Morocco.

This crisis was sparked because Spain had confirmed on 23 April 2021 that they had admitted Western Saharan dissident Brahim Ghali from Algeria under an assumed name for treatment for COVID-19 (McDowall and Graff, 2021). The Moroccan Foreign Minister Nasser Bourita affirmed that this was the motive for instigating the overwhelming of Ceuta's borders, claiming the true source of the crisis was the Spanish harboring a Polisario separatist militia leader (France 24, May 20, 2021). The Spanish had already stressed that this was a purely humanitarian response without political motive, however Spain has been one of the biggest challengers to its claim to the Western Sahara.

For context, Spain left the Western Sahara region in 1976 partly due to Moroccan encroachments into the territory, though they had promised the native Sahrawis self-determination. This likelihood became impossible given the lack of state capacity that the Western Sahara had inherited from the Spanish. Mauritania and Morocco swept in to claim the region and while Mauritania was eventually driven out, Morocco has administered it ever since. The Sahrawi people opposed the occupation and formed the militant Polisario group, of which Brahim Ghali is a leader. As the former colonial administrator and arguably the responsible party for failing to stop Morocco's invasion, Spain is sympathetic to the Sahrawi cause. It takes in Sahrawi refugees, blocks Moroccan attempts at further annexation, and its domestic media cover

the plight of the Sahrawis exiled in Spain or in Algerian refugee camps. Morocco likely felt emboldened to act more decisively at these slights against its claims to the region by Donald Trump's decision to recognize Moroccan sovereignty over the Western Sahara just before he left office in December 2020.

The hybrid attack worked in Morocco's favor in the end. By March of 2022, after 10 months of talks between Rabat and Madrid, it appears Spain had conceded. President Sanchez announced official backing to the autonomous solution for the Western Sahara that Morocco had presented to the UN in 2007. This breaks with 46 years of official neutrality on the issue and *de facto* support for the Sahrawis. The autonomous solution provides the Western Sahara with internal autonomy while it becomes the sovereign territory of Morocco. As Spain is the former colonial power, this was seen as a diplomatic win for Rabat that inched Morocco closer to *de jure* control and international recognition. In return, Spain had secured promises from Morocco that the events of May 2021 would not be repeated (Peregil and Gonzalez, 2022). By April 2022, the two nations had rekindled their working relationship, with President Sanchez meeting with King Mohamed VI to announce the opening of a customs office in the other Spanish enclave of Melilla (Gonzalez and Peregil, 2022).

Spain and the EU fared well in the media in the immediate aftermath of the crisis. They had kept unattended minors and sent back adults, assuaging most of the xenophobic tendencies of the polity while reassuring it that it was acting in a moral capacity. Crucially, not much was made of the videos showing guards batting migrants into the sea. The EU also threw all its might behind Spain's efforts at securing the border, saying nothing of the refugee rights enshrined in EU law. However, when it became clear that the Moroccans had moved an inch and the Spanish had moved a mile to reach consensus, public opinion was not so forgiving. Spain had its hands

tied, as its land and sea borders with Morocco are a contested site and an international hub of illicit trade. Breakdown in relations with Morocco could have disastrous consequences. The hybrid attack had sown discord and created considerable leverage for Morocco to negotiate over the status of the Western Sahara.

Morocco and Spain have largely had a smooth working relationship over migration issues, as the small stretch of the Mediterranean Sea and the land borders to Spanish enclaves have always been particularly porous- and very popular with smugglers and traffickers of all ilk. They require a working relationship for the securitization of both countries. However, this is not the first time the Morocco has turned a blind eye to their commitments to border security. in August 2014, King Mohammed VI's yacht was intercepted by the Spanish Guard off the coast of Ceuta after they mistook him for a smuggler. This reportedly incensed the King, and as many as 1,200 migrants made the crossing to Andalusia days later. In 2017, Ceuta experienced an influx of 854 migrants from February 17 to February 21. This was seemingly in relation to a European Court of Justice ruling the prior December that agricultural accords between the EU and Morocco cannot apply to produce from the Western Sahara (Hedgecoe, 2017). Furthermore, in 2018, Spanish officials suspected the Moroccans of relaxing border checks in the run up to important negotiations with Brussels over fisheries (Harris et al, 2018). What separates the above instances from the instance in May 2021 is the size of the influx and the degree to which the Moroccan state was culpable. State negligence fits well into Greenhill's model of *coercive engineered migration* but is far from Moroccan guards blatantly demonstrating to migrants where the gates to no man's land are, as was the case in May 2021. That is not to say that the state did not play a more active role in the prior instances, but their prudence to hide such a role

speaks to the escalation that proven *migration-led hybrid warfare* would represent. Morocco's actions in 2021 thus represent a clear break from their prior interactions with Spain.

The other important factor to note while considering why Morocco might risk such economically crippling sanctions on its hefty remittances is the role of the Western Sahara in propping up the incumbent regime. 6.5% of the Moroccan GDP came from remittances in 2020 and this has previously reached heights of 8.5% in 2006 (World Bank, 2020), a significant amount of which will have been sent from the EU. This either means that Morocco was unshakingly confident that it would not face such sanctions, perhaps due to its invaluable partnership with the US, or that 6.5% of the GDP was perceived to be a smaller loss than the symbolic slight to its claim to the Western Sahara. The Western Sahara is indelibly tied into the modern concept of Moroccan-ness and has been since the Green March that King Hassan II facilitated in November 1975 to rally nationalism in the face of economic slump and occupy the region. Thousands of Moroccans marched into the area singing songs praising the King and affirming Moroccan possession of the lands. An exaggerated Moroccan response to a Polisario being treated in Spain thus indicates to the international community, and to Spain in particular, that this is not an issue upon which Morocco is willing to concede.

A lack of a robust retaliation on the part of the EU or Spain only serves to reinforce that Morocco's partnership makes its actions irreproachable. Its promises to not allow such actions to reoccur count for nothing when the regime has learned how effective the tactic is. We might see Morocco's blatant use of hybrid warfare tactics as both a signaling device that demonstrates to the Spanish that the issue of the Western Sahara is one the Moroccans are willing to risk war for, and also the result of repeated instances of *coercive engineered migration* being met with acquiescence. Like with the case of Belarus, it comes after the EU has demonstrated its particular

weakness to issues of migration, and the Spanish occurred significant domestic backlash to settle the crisis by recognizing Morocco's plans for its occupied territories.

Implications

Why use this technique of hybrid warfare and why now? Solidifying a theory of *migration-based hybrid warfare* is not possible given the limited sample size, and it appears that the tactic has been used by each of the above countries for entirely different circumstances. Morocco was defending the gains it had made in its claims to the Western Sahara while Belarus was reprimanding the EU for the sanctions that had been placed on it. Nevertheless, there are certain conjectures about why *migration-based hybrid warfare* is used that can be made from the two instances documented above:

- The regime must be confident that the target nation will not react with war. Belarus can act with relative impunity in this respect due to its relationship with Russia. Morocco can also because Spain relies on its cooperation for multiple issues of security. The EU also effectively communicated its reluctance to retaliate on a large scale after multiple instances of *coercive engineered migration.*

- C*oercive engineered migration* is not sufficient given the circumstances. In Belarus' case, it had already attempted to coerce the EU twice before for smaller diplomatic slights, so threatening did not constitute a proportionate escalation in relations. For Morocco, it had also used *coercive engineered migration* repeatedly, and had to signal a much more severe stance in the case of the Western Sahara.

Interestingly enough, this new form of hybrid warfare has only yet occurred on Europe's borders. As I briefly touched on before, this is likely due to the various policy failures of the EU

during the 2015 migration crisis signaling just how divisive the migration issue is. However, the use of *migration-based hybrid warfare* rather than *coercive engineered migration* in the aftermath is likely linked to the rapid externalization of borders that the EU pursued. Shirking the responsibilities of border security to neighboring nations effectively institutionalized coercion and so challenger states had to act upon their threats to gain concessions. This points to the distinct weaknesses that the EU faces with regards to its immigration policy, though it does not preclude other economic areas that are destinations for immigration to experience the same threat. As the largest case to date came via a nation that does not typically experience large numbers of migrants passing through, we can expect this phenomenon to be recreated across the world. Challenger states can now reroute migration networks at will to exert pressure and rich liberal democracies are particularly susceptible to the risk.

Policy Proposals

It is evident that *migration-based hybrid warfare* will remain a persistent issue so long as the European Union tries to pursue the opposing goals of human rights/ refugee protection and migrant deterrence. The fact of the matter is that the two cannot continue to coexist. The consensus in Brussels, as in Madrid, Warsaw, Vilnius, and Riga, is that a zero-tolerance approach to border policing, the so-called 'Fortress Europe', will deter the use of migrant flows in hybrid warfare. Border externalization can export human rights abuses to third nations while the select few that make it to the bloc can benefit from the full range of man's universal rights. The logic is that this should then keep the peace domestically, but it was proven ineffective in 2015 and it will remain ineffective no matter how many upgrades are made to the EU's frontier technology. Arguably, the more money the EU is willing to waste on an improved FRONTEX

force and partnerships with other nations, the more it signals to the world that migration is a particular weakness to the European polity. Its borders will always be porous to a certain degree, given that they cover large flat plains to the east and the relatively calm navigable Mediterranean Sea to the south. A radical alternative approach is required.

If we were to take a constructivist approach to the issue at hand, we might conclude that internal issues of xenophobia, racism and simple in-group dynamics are the root cause of the issue. The concept of the Schengen Zone, where all are free to move as they please, has contributed to hardening the concept of 'the other' in the post-communist east and the post-colonial south that does not deserve this same right. As long as there is broad-based global economic inequality, people will want to move to the rich nations of Europe. Europe's neighbors will leverage this fact in the knowledge that migration is politically sensitive. However, these insular beliefs are arguably easier to change than the global economic system. For instance, Europe itself has moved from a collection of waring principalities to a pseudo-state with a burgeoning European civic identity. The institution of the EU is built on the lofty concepts of free movement of labor and capital; a constructivist project in building a united polity as much as it is a neoliberal dream. In its individual nations too, the concept of French-ness or German-ness are surpassing descriptions of heritage to become broader concepts of citizenship. Just as the specter of the 'Polish Plumber' moving in from the EU's expanded territories to steal jobs and undercut wages has subsided, so too can the myth of the 'Muslim peril' or the 'Great Replacement' with effective integration strategies.

When we take as a given the fluidity of a polity's prejudices and work to reshape them, we can reconfigure the geopolitical and economic makeup of the continent. A borderless Europe becomes possible. Of course, challenger states could still utilize *migration-based hybrid warfare*

with the intention of overwhelming state capacity, but the European Union constitutes the third largest economy in the world (Eurostat, 2017). Thus, it is uniquely positioned to initiate a radical solution of near-universal unconditional access to the region as a means of solving the geopolitical issues that migration poses. It has the resources otherwise limited to the world's superpowers to effectively process and integrate whoever tries to move inside its borders should it wish.

This need not be a utopian project based on ideals alone, as a borderless Europe confers two major concrete benefits: economic prosperity, and freedom from *migration-based hybrid warfare* and coercion. An open and accessible Europe which focuses its immigration forces solely on security risks could effectively nullify the threat of *migration-based hybrid warfare*. This would signal to all the nations that border the EU that it cannot be coerced. Similar destination countries could enact similar policies as the risk of *migration-based hybrid warfare* inevitably arises. It would also solve issues such as the security risk of undocumented migrants with records of all entry and exit into the bloc and it would stem the currently lucrative smuggling trade. What is more, economic work from Clemens (2011) and Kennan (2013) also proves that free labor movement is overwhelmingly beneficial so long as capital investment keeps pace with migration inflow. Largescale migration would bring prosperity the entire bloc.

Around 640 million people want to leave their country of birth according to a 2011 Gallup survey, and almost 109 million or 17% would choose an EU nation to settle in. The EU has the resources to develop the processing infrastructure required, and to effectively spread the burden of arrivals across states. Questions of integration and polity preferences can be effectively tackled with long-term economic benefits and certain limited citizenship preferences with regards to access to public services. Migrants could have to prove inhabitance in a given area for

a number of years before they can access welfare for instance. It is an idea that is already in use in many nations.

Of course, reframing concepts of Europeanness and convincing Europeans of the benefits to security and the economy of such large-scale immigration would be no small task. My argument is more so that it would be easier to facilitate the arrival of migrants and assuage the concerns of the polity than to allow Europe's internal xenophobic preferences to fuel the continued use of *migration-based hybrid warfare* on its borders. Better to acclimatize to migrants now than suffer sporadic shocks via hybrid warfare. Shoring up the security of the continent requires a complete political shift. Well-engineered mechanisms to share skilled migrants across nations, as well as the resources to provide for larger polities, can offset the initial economic burden that some communities have already felt due to the shocks of European integration in the late 20th century. Injecting the marketplace with massive funds for capital can also ensure that the EU makes the most of the economic opportunity of large-scale migration.

This argument may well feel inconsistent and unrealistic, but it is no less so than Europe's current approach. Europe's borders have always been porous, and the phenomenon of *migration-based hybrid warfare* is sure to increase as long as challenger states read the reluctance of Europeans to integrate migrants and refugees. Europe cannot claim to be a bastion of human rights and protector of the liberal world order while conveniently choosing when to open its borders unquestioningly, as in the case for Ukrainians in 2022, or to close them as a deterrent as in the case for migrants from the MENA region and Sub-Saharan Africa. With the number of migrants increasing international due to a growing list of destabilizing factors, the cost of employing such hybrid tactics is decreasing, even in nations that are not typically seen as transitory nations. The only solution is to send a clear message that Europe can and will

seamlessly integrate any number of migrants that move to its borders. That is the only way it can

iron out the inconsistencies in its current approach and regain control of its relationships with its

neighbors.

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