

Mass migration, on the sustained and massive scale that Western Europe is now continuing to experience, is creating tensions not just within but also between them. In particular, Western countries are already beginning to undertake 'migration interventionism' in the affairs of foreign states in order to curb the exodus of people, writes R T Howard.

Lying at the very heart of this new interventionism is the sheer scale of the current migrant crisis. The UNHCR estimates that there are around 65.6 million 'forcibly displaced' people in the world. Most of these are internally displaced within their own countries but around 22.5 million are refugees from their native lands.

Huge numbers of people have fled from countries ('of departure'), notably Syria, to start new lives in the West, risking their lives by undertaking often extremely hazardous journeys across the Mediterranean or overland through countries ('of transit') such as Turkey and Greece: In the first seven months of 2017 alone, 115,109 migrants succeeded in crossing the Mediterranean. And the total number of asylum applications to Western Europe jumped considerably between 2014-15, from 0.6 million to 1.4 million, falling slightly to 1.3 million in 2016, while many other migrants, unquantifiable in number, have illicitly reached Western territory without formally requesting asylum.

Other parts of the world, besides Western Europe, are also affected: In August and September 2017, for example, nearly half a million Rohingya people fled their homes to escape violence and persecution in their native Myanmar for the relative sanctuary of neighbouring states, notably Bangladesh, Thailand, Indonesia and Malaysia. Above all, in sub-Saharan Africa millions are fleeing poverty from the landlocked states of the Sahel and heading for the relative prosperity of West Africa: around one fifth of Côte d'Ivoire's population, for example, is comprised of people who were born elsewhere.

The risks of confronting an ongoing migrant flow on home soil will continue to tempt Western governments to forwardly intervene in foreign lands – either countries of departure or transit countries, such as Libya, that those migrants move through - in a bid to curb those flows. This, of course, is nothing new. One country always has an interest and motive to intervene in the affairs of another if it is being affected by a flow of refugees from that country. This was true, to

take one obvious example, of Western involvement in the Balkan Wars of the early-mid 1990s. But the advent of sustained mass migration, from so many different venues and across so many different routes and borders, is a new phenomenon that is prompting changes of strategic direction in Western capitals.

Such 'migration interventionism' could of course be entirely peaceful - such as the provision of foreign aid, for example, to specific programs and initiatives that are designed to reduce the level of migration. For instance, in April 2017 the UK government announced £1 billion in aid to go towards education, skills and jobs for Syrian refugees and their host countries.

But it could also take more ambitious, militaristic forms, such as troop deployments to stabilise foreign countries, or regions within them, that are experiencing, or could potentially experience, a significant outflow of population. This would not only reduce or eliminate any incentive for putative migrants to leave but also allow those foreign governments to deport and return existing migrants to a 'safe country'. Many international and domestic laws - Article 16a of German Basic Law is an example - prohibit the deportation of a refugee to a country that is not 'safe'. However, the legal and practical difficulties of deporting migrants may mean that 'migration interventionism' will, in the years ahead, be undertaken more as a preventive exercise- to prevent any possible outflow- than a reactive one.

The emergence of migration interventionism became clear at the Munich Security Conference in February 2017 when the then UK defence secretary, Sir Michael Fallon, justified the ongoing, if limited, British presence in Afghanistan on the grounds that the collapse of the country would lead to a massive refugee crisis. 'We here will feel the consequences, very directly', he claimed. 'There could be three to four million young Afghan men sent out by their villages to migrate westwards, and they are heading here'. This was a new justification for the allied presence in Afghanistan, which has previously been rationalised on a number of other grounds that have varied from combating 'terrorists' who presented a threat to the West, preventing the flow of narcotics and establishing 'democracy and human rights'.

It is possible that any future Chinese military intervention of North Korea, in a bid to resolve the ongoing deadlock of Kim Jong-un's nuclear provocation, would also be a form of 'migration interventionism'. Any conflict between North Korea and the US, and possibly even a heightened risk of such a conflict, would provoke a huge exodus of North Korean refugees north of the

border, overwhelming Chinese resources.

Countries of destination, or putative destination, can also establish a presence on foreign soil that is designed to process asylum claims. It was just such a proposal that the French president, Emmanuel Macron, appeared to make in the summer of 2017. On 27 July he argued that France could establish 'hotspots' in Libya, which since the overthrow of Colonel Gaddafi in 2011 has been a major departure point for millions of refugees seeking to flee to Europe. 'The idea', he reportedly claimed, 'is to create hotspots to avoid people taking crazy risks when they are not all eligible for asylum'. To do this, he proposed sending staff from Ofpra, the French office for the protection of refugees and stateless persons, to Italy, Libya, and perhaps Niger, 'to process asylum seekers as close as possible to the ground, in the safest third country, close to the country of origin'. Macron left open the possibility of dispatching and deploying a military force to guard French nationals undertaking this dangerous role: It would be inconceivable that a Western government would deploy its own nationals to a dangerous foreign land with providing a significant degree of military back-up.

Countries that are seeking to stem the migrant flow into their own territory are also increasingly diverting their existing military resources not just within departure states but also outside their borders. In the summer of 2015, for example, the EU began EUNAVFOR MED, a naval operation in the Mediterranean Sea that was intended to end people-smuggling from Libya by seizing or destroying boats that were used by the professional gangs involved. Under its mandate, this €12 million operation involved 'boarding, searching, seizing and diverting' smugglers' boats, and wherever possible to 'dispose' of those vessels.

'This important transition', as a EU official argued, 'will enable the EU naval operation against human smugglers and traffickers in the Mediterranean to conduct boarding, search, seizure and diversion on the high seas of vessels suspected of being used for human smuggling or trafficking, within international law'. Vessels, drones and aircraft drawn from at least ten member states formed part of what the EU's foreign policy chief, Federica Mogherini, called a 'holistic' approach to the migrant crisis.

Such operations raise the possibility of confrontation and clashes between the armed forces of recipient states and countries of departure and transit. When the Italian government sent two patrol ships close to the Libyan coast in August 2017, for example, General Khalifa Haftar, the

ruler of a large swathe of Libya, threatened to attack them if they entered Libyan waters to search and destroy refugee boats 'Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces, Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar, issues orders to the Libyan naval bases in Tobruk, Benghazi, Ras Lanuf and Tripoli to confront any marine unit that enters the Libyan waters without the permission of the army', a statement from the Libyan National Army proclaimed. His warning reflected a growing popular anger amongst Libyans against Italian interference in their domestic affairs.

The new migration phenomenon, in other words, is not just a humanitarian tragedy but also threatens to destabilise whole regions of the world in far-reaching ways. This means that it is particularly imperative for every country - in the developing as well as the developed world - not just to manage the flow of people but to tackle the causes of the migration problem at source. More attention needs to be focused on the phenomenon's roots causes, whether it is attributed to war, corruption and population growth. The ongoing situation in Myanmar, where discrimination against Rohingya remains institutionalised, also illustrates the dangers of injustice, which appeal to Western consciences.

More radical, drastic solutions will need to be considered. The consequences of inaction will be profound for all because the new age of 'Migration Wars' has already begun.

This is an amended extract from 'Migration Wars' published in the current edition of The National Interest. The original can be read at <http://nationalinterest.org/feature/migration-will-drive-the-next-wave-world-wars-23737>

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