

MILITARY RESPONSES TO THE GLOBAL MIGRATION CRISIS: A GLIMPSE OF THINGS TO COME

Paul J. Smith

International migration has emerged in the late twentieth century as one of the most challenging humanitarian dilemmas facing the world community. Millions of individuals, spurred by poverty, joblessness and other motivations, are crossing national borders annually to search for employment opportunities, higher wages or simply a better life. Millions of others are forced involuntarily from their home regions or countries by war, famine, environmental degradation and other factors. Today, more than 125 million people around the world can be classified as international migrants, with about 15 to 25 million of those falling under the more legally defined category of refugee. The total number of international migrants continues to grow by about 3 million people per year.¹

The recent surge in international migration has evoked varied and often contradictory responses from governments around the world. On the one hand, many countries have welcomed legal immigrants and refugees, even if reluctantly at first. On the other hand, fewer governments have been willing to accept an influx of illegal or undocumented immigrants who have arrived individually, in small groups or as part of mass uncontrolled movements. For many nations, the influx of illegal immigrants has evoked alarm, xenophobia and, in some cases, dramatic legal responses. A growing number of countries have enacted restrictive laws and regulations designed both to deter illegal entrants and to reassert control over their borders. Other countries have reinforced civilian border patrol agencies with extra personnel and advanced detection equipment, such as motion sensors and infrared cameras. Still other governments have built fences or formidable walls along their borders designed to deter or impede potential immigrants and refugees.

In the past, governments may have turned to civilian border police or similar agencies to manage mass migration or refugee movements. Today an

Paul Smith is Research Fellow with the Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies in Hawaii where he specializes in Chinese politics and transnational security issues. He is a member of the Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia-Pacific (CSAP) Working Group on Transnational Crime. Paul Smith holds a B.A. from Washington and Lee University, an M.A. from the University of London and a J.D. from the University of Hawaii. The views expressed in this essay are the author's own and do not represent the official position of the U.S. Department of Defense or the United States Government.

increasing number of states are relying on military force to accomplish these goals. Some countries are deploying troops on their borders to patrol for illegal immigrants, while others use their military forces to help manage or house large numbers of migrants and refugees.

The increased reliance on military force to manage migration or refugee emergencies suggests a fundamental change in how countries will likely use their armed forces in the decades ahead. More importantly, the increased use of military force to deal with migrants marks a dramatic shift in how many countries view the challenge of international migration, treating it less as a political problem than a military concern.

This paper will first address the new trends in migration flows. It will then examine how states characterize rising migration rates as a national security threat. Third, it will illustrate how governments around the world are increasingly using the military to address migration issues. Finally, this paper will discuss whether force is the best or only viable option for dealing with migration matters.

THE POST COLD WAR SURGE IN INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION

International migration is not a modern phenomenon. Throughout ancient and modern history, civilizations have been created, influenced and in some cases transformed completely by the migration of peoples. The reasons that cause people to migrate today are often the same ones that have caused mass movements of individuals for thousands of years: lack of jobs, scarcity of resources, low wages and persecution.

What distinguishes migration trends today from the movements mentioned above, however, is the confluence of social, economic, demographic and technological factors that drive current population flows. Growing disparities in wealth, combined with rapid population growth in less developed countries, have dramatically increased the scale of international migration in the last 25 years. The communications revolution has allowed information about economic or social opportunities in distant lands to be disseminated throughout the world. Advances in transportation have made travel more affordable and accessible. Other factors, such as the presence of ethnic diaspora communities and cultural networks across the globe, have also served as catalysts for migration.

Additionally, the end of the Cold War in 1989 and the political realignments that accompanied this change have generated even greater pressures for international migration. The former Soviet Union, once known for its tight immigration and emigration controls, has emerged as a virtual gateway for massive, unregulated, international migration. Facilitated in part by the growth of a large and sophisticated migrant trafficking industry, thousands of third-country migrants have transited the region on their way to the West in recent years. Russian officials report that their country hosts between 2 and 2.5 million illegal immigrants from thirty-three countries, most of which are on their way to Western Europe.²

Similarly, other parts of the world have witnessed substantial surges in migration attributable to the end of the Cold War. In late 1989, more than 1.3 million immigrants from East Germany and the former Soviet Union headed for Western Europe in search of opportunities and a better life.³ Two years later, more than 20,000 Albanians completed a mass exodus to Italy, where many were ultimately turned back.⁴ Moreover, the dissolution of Yugoslavia in the early 1990s generated hundreds of thousands of refugees, many of whom fled to Germany.⁵ Across the Atlantic Ocean, thousands of migrants from Haiti and Cuba boarded rickety boats in 1994 and set sail for the United States.⁶ Meanwhile, in the People's Republic of China, the introduction of economic reforms since the late 1970s and its attendant political and economic liberalization spurred the undocumented emigration of tens of thousands of Chinese, mostly to countries in Asia, Western Europe and North America.⁷

INTERNATION MIGRATION AS A POST-COLD WAR SECURITY CONCERN

From a practical perspective, it seems logical for countries to turn to their military forces to manage international migration flows. Large-scale refugee movements require a massive logistical response if the host nation wants to prevent possible violence and chaos. Military forces have organizational and logistical capabilities that are often unmatched by other government agencies, even those agencies that work with immigrants directly. Military units are capable of establishing a controlled and organized response to an emergency, by establishing a large migrant camp for example, within a matter of days or even hours. Moreover, professional military forces often have their own medical, legal and social services personnel who are accustomed to handling chaotic and unpredictable situations. They often have linguists who can provide essential language translation services and who can assist immigration authorities in completing refugee screenings. In addition, military forces can be effective in interdiction operations, which in some respects parallel combat patrols for which soldiers are often trained. Finally, military forces are often proficient in the use of advanced detection equipment, such as night vision equipment, that is frequently used in migration operations.

Yet logistical advantages provide only a partial explanation as to why countries are increasingly inclined to deploy military forces for international migration missions. As the scale of international migration has grown around the world, many countries have begun to characterize the phenomenon as a serious security concern.

The question then arises: Why is international migration seen as a security threat and, moreover, is this perception justified? One scholar has suggested at least five scenarios that may prompt governments to characterize international migration as a security concern.⁸

The first reason governments view migration as a security concern is because refugees and immigrants agitate in a host country against the regime in the source country, as many Cuban refugees have done in their campaign against Fidel Castro's government. Under this scenario, a host country's decision

to grant asylum to another country's citizens is viewed by the source country as an antagonistic or even hostile act. The Chinese government, for instance, viewed the American decision in 1990 to grant asylum to Chinese students, following the 1989 crackdown at Tiananmen Square, as interference in China's internal affairs. Moreover, in their zeal to protest or campaign against the police forces or governments of their homelands, many immigrant groups can create foreign policy complications for their host government and even sour relations between the host and source countries.

Second, host governments may view immigrants as a political risk. An example might be the Kuwait government's perception, especially following the Gulf War in 1990-1991, that Palestinians living within its borders posed a security risk. Illegal immigrants from China are a similar source of anxiety for Taiwan. Taiwanese authorities are concerned that illegal immigrants from mainland China could pose a threat to the island by engaging in espionage or other subversive activities. Prior to the island's 1996 presidential election, Taiwanese authorities rounded up 250 illegal immigrants from China to ease fears that they might attempt to undermine the elections.⁹

A third scenario explaining why migration is perceived as a security threat occurs when a government believes immigrants and refugees threaten the host country's cultural identity. Local residents may fear that large numbers of immigrants might overwhelm them demographically and undermine their political and cultural dominance as well as threaten their national identity.¹⁰ In Western Europe, fears about the cultural and political impact of immigration have helped fuel the rise of rightist, xenophobic political parties. Similarly, many East Asian countries do not consider themselves immigration countries and sometimes view the presence of foreign workers as a cultural and social threat.¹¹

The fourth scenario arises when governments perceive migrants or refugees as a social or economic burden because of their alleged criminality or welfare dependency. In Russia, for instance, fears of Chinese migrants' "invasion" of the Far East are exacerbated by allegations that Chinese "harbor a criminal network which traffics arms, drugs and illegal migrants, trade in false documents and handle huge sums of tax-elusive money."¹² In South Africa, immigrants are blamed for posing an enormous financial burden on the country because of their health, education and housing needs.¹³

The final scenario is when a host country uses migrants as hostages against a source country. Libya, for instance, threatened to expel migrant workers whose home country voted for U.N. sanctions against it.¹⁴ A corollary to this argument is the use of migrants by source countries as a political weapon against a host country. Cuba's decision to allow and even encourage the mass migration of thousands of its nationals in 1994 was largely seen as an attempt to pressure the United States government into negotiations with the Cuban government. Similarly, in the early 1980s, many Southeast Asian countries accused Vietnam of purposely orchestrating mass emigration in order to embarrass its neighbors.¹⁵ Source countries may use their "migration card"—threaten to allow migration or even instigate it—as a bargaining chip in international

negotiations over trade, foreign aid or other policy objectives. In these situations, the source state "possesses considerable leverage in the bargaining process."¹⁶

In more recent years, another factor that causes international migration to be viewed as a security concern has been the role of media coverage—the so-called "CNN effect." Today, many mass migration events or refugee crises are captured on film and broadcast live. When large numbers of Haitians and Cubans boarded small boats in 1994 and headed toward the United States on the high seas, their collective plights were broadcast daily across American television screens. When the human smuggling vessel *Golden Venture* ran aground on a beach near New York City in 1993, the incident received widespread televised media coverage. Although the actual number of illegal migrants from China was relatively small, especially when compared to illegal migration from Latin America, Americans nevertheless feared that the country was being overwhelmed by large numbers of illegal migrants from China. The national angst surrounding the *Golden Venture* incident probably contributed to President Clinton's decision to turn to his National Security Council and other similar security agencies to deal with the problem, instead of relying solely on the more relevant agency for immigration matters, the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS).

Finally, political and legal considerations can also influence a government's tendency to label international migration a security concern. In the United States, for example, the Posse Comitatus Act prohibits military forces from engaging in law enforcement activities. However, in practice the United States can suspend the prohibitions of Posse Comitatus under certain limited circumstances, such as during a national emergency or in the face of some threat to national security.¹⁷ Before the mid-1980s, U.S. officials characterized drug trafficking as a law enforcement or criminal law matter; however, in the mid-1980s, President Reagan declared it a national security threat, which was subsequently confirmed by Presidents Bush and Clinton. This declaration helped pave the way for extensive involvement of military forces in anti-narcotics law enforcement activities.¹⁸ Similarly, characterizing illegal immigration or mass migration as a national security concern may also help pave the way for military involvement in immigration matters in the future. Examples of this trend are prevalent across the globe.

Government leaders in Europe have nervously eyed possible mass migration from countries along the southern Mediterranean as a threat that could jeopardize Western Europe's security and stability.¹⁹ Similarly, American officials have characterized mass migration as a security concern. When Peter Tamoff, a senior State Department official, testified before Congress in 1995, he asserted that "the unregulated threat from whatever source of large numbers of people entering [the United States] illegally does represent a threat to the national security."²⁰ Furthermore, the head of the U.S. Coast Guard expressed similar sentiments when he stated that "illegal migration remains a major threat to [America's] national security."²¹

A growing number of non-Western countries throughout the world are also concluding that illegal migration constitutes a significant security concern.

In 1995, the deputy head of Russia's Federal Migration Service (FMS), Vladimir Volokh, asserted that the scale of illegal migration into his country had reached a point where it "puts national security at risk."²² Russian officials have specifically identified illegal immigration into the Russian Far East from China and, to a lesser extent, North and South Korea, as a threat to Russia's national security. Latvian leaders have characterized illegal immigration to be an issue of "vital importance for the security of Latvia."²³ Military officials in the Czech Republic likewise view immigration as a security threat. In 1997, the Czech Republic's Interior Minister, Jan Ruml, warned that illegal immigrants could undermine the "social and political situation" in the country.²⁴ A former Hungarian minister in charge of the country's secret services asserted that "all kinds of migration," including war refugees and economic migrants, posed a security risk to Hungary.²⁵

In the Middle East, officials from the United Arab Emirates (UAE) have described illegal immigration as one of the most serious threats to their country's national security. They once asserted that illegal immigration, along with drug smuggling, could "do far more to destabilize society in the long term than the dangers posed by either Iran or Iraq."²⁶

Similar trends have emerged in Africa. When tens of thousands of refugees from Rwanda and Burundi flooded into neighboring Tanzania in 1995, the acting Tanzanian foreign minister, Samuel Sitta, declared the refugee flow a "serious cause of insecurity and a potential source of conflict with the country's neighbors."²⁷ In South Africa, military analysts once stated that illegal immigration and refugees were the most "immediate threats"²⁸ faced by the post-apartheid army.

This same trend can also be seen in some Asian and Latin American countries. In Thailand, authorities have asserted on numerous occasions that large numbers of illegal immigrants in their country threaten national security. Malaysian officials have warned that the presence of a large illegal foreign population similarly constitutes a "threat to the nation's security."²⁹ Meanwhile, in Latin America, the Conference of American Armies—comprised of representatives of North, Central and South America—listed immigration as a potential security issue at a meeting held in 1995.³⁰

MILITARY RESPONSES TO INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION

The dramatic rise in the number of international migrants since the end of the Cold War has often evoked alarm and, in some countries, a powerful backlash—even if only a small degree of immigration occurred in the early stages.

In Europe and the former Soviet Union, many countries—particularly those in southern and eastern Europe—have deployed military troops to deter illegal immigration. In 1997 Lithuania deployed 90 army troops along its border with Belarus to assist state border police in their efforts to stop an influx of illegal immigrants. The Lithuanian Defense Ministry stated that the army's assistance would continue as long the country's Ministry of Internal Affairs required it.³¹ In Austria, officials began to station military troops in the province

of Burgenland along the Austro-Hungarian border in the early 1990s to prevent illegal emigration from neighboring Hungary and other Eastern European countries. In a pattern prevalent in many other countries in the region, the Austrian government deployed troops to assist regular border guards in their patrols against undocumented immigrants.³² In 1994, Greece's defense minister announced that he would transfer troops from city centers to the Greek-Albanian border to stop illegal emigration from Albania, a move that he insisted was designed solely to protect Greece's border and not to threaten any neighbor.³³ More recently, Greece deployed army patrols along its northern border with Turkey. In early 1998, one of these patrols arrested 66 illegal immigrants as they were being smuggled into Greece.³⁴ In 1995, when the Italian government faced an influx of illegal immigrants arriving on its southern Adriatic coast from Albania, it deployed an army contingent—reportedly about 1,000 troops—along its southern coast and backed it with motorized vehicles and military helicopters.³⁵ Four years later, the Italian government stated that it would consider a “full-scale military intervention” to stop migrant trafficking from Albania if the Albanian government requested it.³⁶

In Africa, too, recent examples suggest an increased reliance on military force to manage illegal migration and refugee flows. Tanzania deployed military troops in early 1995 to turn back thousands of Rwandan and Burundian refugees attempting to enter its territory. In one particularly dramatic incident, Tanzanian troops repulsed a group of 250 refugees who had attempted to cross the Gasenyi River. The troops in this case actually fired their weapons, apparently as warning shots since no deaths or injuries were reported. Initially, Burundian authorities interpreted the incident as a possible attack by Tanzanian forces, but the Tanzanian defense minister later assured his Burundian counterpart that the troops were deployed solely to prevent the influx of refugees.³⁷ Like Tanzania, South Africa has also deployed military troops to intercept illegal immigrants along its border with both Zimbabwe and Mozambique. During the first five months of 1995, South African troops apprehended more than 10,000 Mozambicans who were attempting to cross the border illegally into South Africa.³⁸ More recently, the South African government reported that army patrols had arrested more than 8,000 illegal immigrants in the first nine months of 1998.³⁹

Incidents in Asia have also reflected this emerging trend in dealing with migrant peoples. When North Korean leader Kim Il-Sung died in 1994, China reportedly dispatched an undisclosed number of army troops along the Sino-Korean border to deter North Korean refugees from entering China.⁴⁰ Similarly, Malaysia, which has long viewed illegal immigration as a national security problem, recently deployed troops on its border with Thailand and along selected coastal regions to prevent illegal immigration and smuggling. In 1996, following the Malaysian Defense Ministry's announcement that the armed forces would be deployed to “combat the entry of illegal immigrants,” the country's inspector-general of police announced that the military troops would be given limited police powers that would allow soldiers to detain illegal immigrants at the border.⁴¹ In Thailand, moreover, immigration authorities have reportedly

requested assistance from the Thai military to stem illegal immigration from neighboring Burma (Myanmar).⁴²

Similar examples can be found in several Latin American and Caribbean countries as well. When the Dominican Republic feared that the 1994 U.S. invasion of its neighbor, Haiti, would spark a flood of refugees into its territory, it also turned to its military forces. Responding to the alleged refugee threat, the Dominican secretary of the army ordered 15,000 military troops to guard the Haitian-Dominican border in order to "control such possible immigration [of Haitians]."⁴³ Several months later, a similar scenario occurred in Guatemala. When fighting erupted between Mexican government forces and the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) in the southern state of Chiapas in 1995, Guatemala ordered 8,000 army troops—lined up along the 800-kilometer border with Mexico—to deter the illegal entry of Mexicans attempting to flee the unrest.⁴⁴

In addition to using army or ground forces, some countries are also deploying naval or air force units to track or intercept international migrants. In 1997 Italy deployed its navy along its coastlines to block thousands of migrants from Albania who were being ferried to Italy by human traffickers. At the height of the anti-immigrant operation, the Italian government had deployed four surface ships and an unspecified number of hydrofoils and maritime patrol aircraft in the Adriatic.⁴⁵ In a similar case, the Philippine government in late 1995 ordered its naval forces to patrol its southern coast for illegal immigrants. The action followed the arrest of 39 Chinese fishermen who had allegedly attempted to enter the Philippines illegally.⁴⁶ Three years later, in 1998, the economic crisis in Indonesia sparked a mass exodus of thousands of migrants and refugees to Malaysia. The Malaysian government consequently deployed its navy to block the Indonesians from reaching Malaysian shores. Accusing Indonesian immigrants of "trespassing into Malaysian waters," Malaysia's top naval official stated in April of the same year that the navy would strengthen its efforts to prevent the illegal entry of any Indonesian national.⁴⁷

In some rare cases, countries have deployed aviation units to detect illegal immigrants. In early 1997, Japan's Air Self-Defense Force (ASDF) dispatched several units to search for illegal Chinese immigrants who were allegedly en route to Japan aboard human smuggling ships. A few months later, Japan's navy began deploying P-3C anti-submarine planes to conduct patrol sorties to detect boats carrying illegal immigrants from China. The Japanese decision to deploy both air force and naval units stemmed from a dramatic upsurge in Chinese human smuggling during the early part of 1997 in which over 581 Chinese nationals were arrested by Japanese authorities.⁴⁸

Some countries, even if they are not actively deploying troops on their borders, are drawing up contingency plans to deal with illegal immigration, mass migration or refugee emergencies that might require a military response. In several countries, such as Malaysia and the United States, political leaders are calling for increased military deployments or patrols to counter illegal immigration.⁴⁹ U.S. officials, moreover, reportedly finished a major contingency plan in 1994 code-named "Operation Distant Shore," which was designed to

respond to any potential mass exodus from Cuba or any other Caribbean country. The contingency plan involves 37 federal agencies, including the Department of Defense, and would probably require, among other things, that military units assist in interdicting migrants at sea.⁵⁰ A year after the existence of this plan was reported, evidence emerged that the U.S. government was preparing a similar contingency plan to address possible mass migration from Mexico.⁵¹ As part of this plan, the Pentagon would establish migrant holding camps for illegal immigrants, with the ultimate purpose of deterring other migrants from entering the United States.

Like the United States, Japan is also preparing for the possibility of a mass refugee emergency in the event of conflict on the Korean peninsula or elsewhere in East Asia. Under this scenario, Japan's Self-Defense Forces, as defined in the *Guidelines for Japan-U.S. Defense Cooperation*, would likely play a major role in both interdicting and resettling refugees from Korea or elsewhere. Specifically, the *Guidelines* state that "when there is a flow of refugees into Japanese territory, Japan will decide how to respond and will have primary responsibility for dealing with the flow."⁵² Referring to the provisions of the *Guidelines*, one Japanese military expert stated that a refugee crisis would create unique security challenges for Japan and that consequently, "there is a need for the SDF [Self-Defense Forces] to operate actively."⁵³

Finally, some countries have countered mass or illegal migration by sending their military forces directly to the source country. For example, when the Albanian government dissolved in 1997 following the collapse of several financial Ponzi schemes, a large number of Albanians migrated en masse to Italy. Alarmed by the sudden influx, Italy organized "Operation Alba," an international effort that deployed troops in Albania to restore political and social order in the country. Although the effort was portrayed primarily as a Western European attempt to reestablish civil order in Albania, few could deny the underlying anti-immigration motives that colored the mission.⁵⁴ Similarly, the outflow of thousands of Haitian refugees in 1994 prompted a subsequent U.S. military intervention into that Caribbean nation, ostensibly to replace a corrupt government with a democratically elected president. However, as President Clinton stated, one of the key motivations behind the U.S. military response in Haiti was a desire to put an end to unregulated immigration flows.⁵⁵

RELiance ON THE MILITARY TO REPATRIATE MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES

Apart from relying on military forces to deter or intercept international migrants, many governments are deploying military forces to care for migrants once they have reached the host country. In the United States, one of the most dramatic examples of these types of missions occurred as part of the 1994 migration crisis that took place in the Caribbean region. Faced with an influx of tens of thousands of Cubans and Haitians, the U.S. government deployed thousands of naval and Coast Guard forces to intercept and rescue refugees at sea and then transport them to refugee camps in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. Later, as the refugee camp in Guantanamo Bay became overcrowded, the Pentagon established "Joint

Task Force Safe Haven," which, among other things, established four temporary migrant camps and other facilities able to accommodate 2,500 Cuban migrants in Panama. American forces also established "Joint Task Force Distant Haven" in Suriname, which oversaw the establishment of a 2,500-person capacity migrant camp to care for Haitian migrants, although this camp was never used because of successful U.S. military operations in Haiti and the subsequent decline in migration.⁵⁶ Approximately 7,000 American troops were involved in assembling camps in both Panama and Suriname, at a cost of roughly U.S.\$50 million (not including salaries). In both the Cuban and Haitian migration missions, the U.S. Department of Defense spent more than U.S.\$370 million operating safe haven camps from August 1994 through September 1995 and deployed more than 8,000 American support personnel for refugee care missions.⁵⁷

Several governments are also deploying their military forces to repatriate migrants and refugees to their home countries. When Malaysian officials sought to repatriate Vietnamese refugees back to Vietnam in 1996, for instance, they dispatched their navy to assist in the operations. During a period of several weeks, Malaysia forcibly repatriated more than 700 Vietnamese aboard naval ships. At one point, Malaysian authorities stationed navy divers alongside docked ships to prevent Vietnamese refugees from jumping into the water and attempting to escape. Not all of the Vietnamese were forcibly repatriated by navy ships, however; some of the Vietnamese signed up for the United Nations' voluntary repatriation program and were able to return to Vietnam by air. A year after the Vietnamese refugee operation, Malaysia's defense minister announced that the navy would be available "when the need arises" to deport any illegal immigrant, on the advice of the country's National Security Council.⁵⁸

The U.S. government has relied on military troops to carry out migrant repatriation operations. Following the U.S. intervention in Haiti in 1994, American officials determined that Haitian migrants being housed in U.S.-operated refugee camps in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, could no longer remain there and would have to be repatriated. Although most Haitians returned to their home country voluntarily, a few of the migrants had apparently rejected U.S. offers of voluntary repatriation and other incentives—such as U.S.\$80 in cash and offers of temporary employment in a U.S.-funded Haitian public works program—in hopes of eventually gaining political asylum in the United States.⁵⁹ Fearing that these Haitians would not choose to return home of their own accord, the American government ordered U.S. Marines and Coast Guard units to send them back to their homeland forcibly.

Similarly, in the Pacific region, American forces have participated in at least three major repatriation operations. In 1993, more than 200 U.S. Army troops assisted in "Operation Provide Refuge," which facilitated the repatriation of more than 500 Chinese migrants from Kwajalein, in the Marshall Islands, back to the People's Republic of China. The Chinese nationals had attempted to reach the United States aboard the human smuggling vessel *Eastwood* before being intercepted by the U.S. Coast Guard. Two years later, United States Pacific Command Units organized "Joint Task Force Prompt Return," which repatriated

another 147 Chinese migrants intercepted aboard the human smuggling vessel *Jung Sheng No. 8*. U.S. troops in this operation established a migrant camp on Wake Island where Chinese migrants were provided housing, food, medical care and social activities. This operation served as a precedent for a similar mission held more than a year later known as "Operation Marathon Pacific." This exercise, also conducted on Wake Island, repatriated more than 113 migrants from the People's Republic of China who had been intercepted near Bermuda aboard the human smuggling vessel *Xing Da*.

In very rare cases, a country will use its military to repatriate its own nationals who are working abroad. One such case occurred in early 1997 when Indonesia deployed its navy to repatriate its own nationals who were working illegally in neighboring Malaysia. Between 1,000 and 1,200 Indonesian nationals boarded the Indonesian naval ship in Malaysia and were transported back home. An Indonesian official insisted that this was the "first and only occasion" that its navy would be used to repatriate its own nationals.⁶⁰ However, that pledge would later prove premature when, following the exodus of thousands of Indonesians to Malaysia in early 1998, Indonesia sent another naval transportation ship to Malaysia once again to repatriate more than 1,700 of its nationals.⁶¹

INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION AND THE MILITARY: AN APPROPRIATE COMBINATION?

Many traditional military planners are less than enthusiastic at the prospect of military troops being used in the essentially "police" or civilian humanitarian roles that immigration operations entail. Moreover, for many military leaders, the use of military assets to counter illegal immigration or large-scale refugee flows is inconsistent with the military's traditional fighting role. An American writer has observed that the sentiment held among most U.S. military officers is that "the purpose of the U.S. military is to fight and win the nation's wars. Military officers trained to have that mindset will inevitably find humanitarian operations to be a secondary activity."⁶² In the 1994-1995 Cuban refugee crisis, some American defense officials were reportedly upset at using so many U.S. soldiers for the "distinctly non-military purpose of caring for Cuban refugees."⁶³ As a result the Pentagon drew up plans to relieve military troops from refugee care by hiring civilians instead.

One reason some military professionals oppose the use of the armed forces in immigration control is the potentially negative impact such missions might have on the military's traditional war-fighting ability. Military leaders generally place a great deal of emphasis on preparedness or readiness, and non-war fighting missions are often viewed as distractions that do little to promote soldiering skills. Moreover, these missions can be financially burdensome, particularly during times, as in recent years, when military budgets around the world are facing austerity pressures. In particular, refugee care missions involving the establishment and maintenance of "tent cities" can be particularly costly due to the extensive and unique logistical demands that these missions require.

Another reason military leaders resist the idea of using troops in immigration operations is the possibility that such operations could provoke political controversy and potential backlash against the military. In most countries, immigration questions and policies are controversial and often emotional. Military professionals often would prefer to stay out of—or above—politics. However, when a government decides to involve its military in immigration matters, it often sets up the military for criticism from immigration and refugee advocacy groups. When Italy chose to deploy its army along its Adriatic coastline in 1995, for example, some immigrant associations and other political groups strongly condemned the move. One political party stated that “the government decision to send the army to Puglia to defend Italy from the invasion of illegal immigrants only fans xenophobia and racism.”⁶⁴ In the United States, a country that strongly identifies with its immigrant history and tradition, the issue of military patrols against illegal immigration is especially sensitive. At his confirmation hearing, former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General John Shalikashvili was asked by a U.S. Senator if he could envision a role for military forces to patrol the U.S.-Mexican border for illegal immigrants. “My first thoughts that come to mind,” he responded, “is that it would, to me, fundamentally affect how I thought of this country if military forces were there guarding its borders.”⁶⁵ The implications of the general’s reply were clear: the United States would be betraying its values and its ideals if it resorted to a military response to its long tradition of welcoming immigrants and refugees.

One way governments try to skirt the political controversy of immigration operations is to label them as humanitarian operations. The humanitarian label often conveys some degree of benevolence or altruism on the part of the acting nation and, in some cases, can help that government muster political support—both domestically and internationally—for its actions. For instance, Italy’s ability to obtain United Nations’ backing for “Operation Alba” hinged on its ability to portray the mission as humanitarian and not as an immigration-prevention operation, as it was perceived by some Albanians. Similarly, the United States has characterized a number of its immigrant-repatriation missions as humanitarian when military forces were, in effect, used as instruments to enforce the nation’s immigration laws. These missions are performed in a humanitarian manner to prevent an even greater humanitarian crisis, such as the possibility of refugee boats capsizing or sinking during their voyage. But the label “humanitarian” should not obscure the fact that humanitarian motives are sometimes co-mingled with anti-immigration or immigration enforcement objectives in these types of operations.

Another factor contributing to the political sensitivities of using military forces in international migration operations is the risk of unplanned or misdirected violence. In general, military troops, in contrast to police agents or border guards, are trained for violent combat or combat-support tasks. Few military academies, schools and basic training regimens around the world provide adequate training on how to deal with the unique problems associated with migration and refugee flows. Thus when young, zealous soldiers who have been trained for traditional warfare suddenly confront an influx of would-be

immigrants, a major concern is that they may act in accordance with their military training and, perhaps, respond too aggressively.

A similar concern exists in the case of naval patrols deployed to intercept refugee ships. In late March 1997 an Italian naval boat collided with an Albanian refugee boat thought to be carrying more than 110 people in the Strait of Otranto. The refugee ship sank quickly after the collision, resulting in more than 70 drownings. According to an account of the incident broadcast by Albanian media, the Italian frigate first blocked the path of the refugee vessel, then approached the Albanian vessel from the rear and "struck it first at [mid-ship] and then with another blow in the forward section."⁶⁶ Shortly after the incident, Albanian officials accused the Italian navy of purposely ramming the refugee boat. While Italy immediately denied the charge, the incident reflected unfavorably on the Italians. The Italian frigate involved in the incident had been part of a group of Italian naval interdiction patrols that began in March, after more than 13,000 Albanians had fled to Italy in a mass exodus.

The case in support of military involvement in migration issues asserts that the presence of military forces in such emergencies has helped prevent or mitigate violence and, in some situations, has saved lives. Days before the Italian navy vessel described above rammed into an Albanian refugee ship, another Italian naval vessel rescued a sinking Albanian refugee ship that was carrying more than 350 refugees.⁶⁷ Similarly, a U.S. marine involved in "Joint Operation Prompt Return" noted that the presence of military forces on Wake Island, which he described as "the show of force," helped prevent violence by ethnic Chinese human smugglers against the migrants whom they were smuggling and particularly against migrants who had cooperated with American authorities.⁶⁸

Additionally, military forces are often better equipped to handle or control riots that may erupt in refugee or migrant camps. When migrants who live in the camps perceive that they have little chance of gaining political asylum in their desired destination country, their mood can become desperate, especially if they remain in these camps for an extended period of time. This was probably a major factor that sparked the 1994 riots in Panama when more than 1,500 Cuban nationals rioted against the American forces that were tasked to run and manage the refugee camps. Almost immediately after the riots began, the Pentagon deployed two army battalions and an air force security police squadron to the region to reinforce the roughly 2,000 troops already guarding the camps. U.S. troops confiscated all objects, including baseball bats, metal tubing from cots, etc., that could be used as weapons. In addition, heavily armed soldiers, including members of the U.S. Army's elite Ranger Units, patrolled the fenced camps. The fact that the Pentagon was able to deploy extra troops in a timely manner is probably the reason that the riots did not result in deaths, although they did leave 240 American troops and 32 Cubans injured.⁶⁹

QUESTION FOR THE FUTURE

As the scale of international migration grows around the world—driven by such factors as population growth, unemployment in source countries and rising economic disparities between nations—many governments are likely to continue classifying migration as a national security concern and deploying military forces in both interdiction and repatriation operations. The fact that military forces generally can provide a quick and efficient response to situations that can often be logistically challenging partially explains this growing trend. On the other hand, the increased involvement of military forces may reflect a growing concern that international migration, and particularly illegal migration, has reached a level that truly constitutes a major security concern. For many military planners, however, this trend may not be particularly welcome. Nevertheless, evidence indicates that international migration operations are likely to be a major concern for military forces in the twenty-first century.

From a legal and moral perspective, the apparently inexorable trend of increasing involvement of military forces in international migration events leaves certain troubling questions unanswered: has international migration become so serious as to necessitate a military response? Is military force an appropriate means by which nations can respond to migration and refugee flows? What happens to legitimate asylum-seekers who find themselves “repulsed” by military force back to their homeland? For example, one commentator noted that during Italy’s naval patrols against Albanian migrants in 1997, any legitimate asylum-seeker would have had almost no chance to be screened for international refugee status. These questions are difficult and uncomfortable, but the level of discomfort will certainly rise if government leaders around the world do not address these matters honestly and proactively. ■

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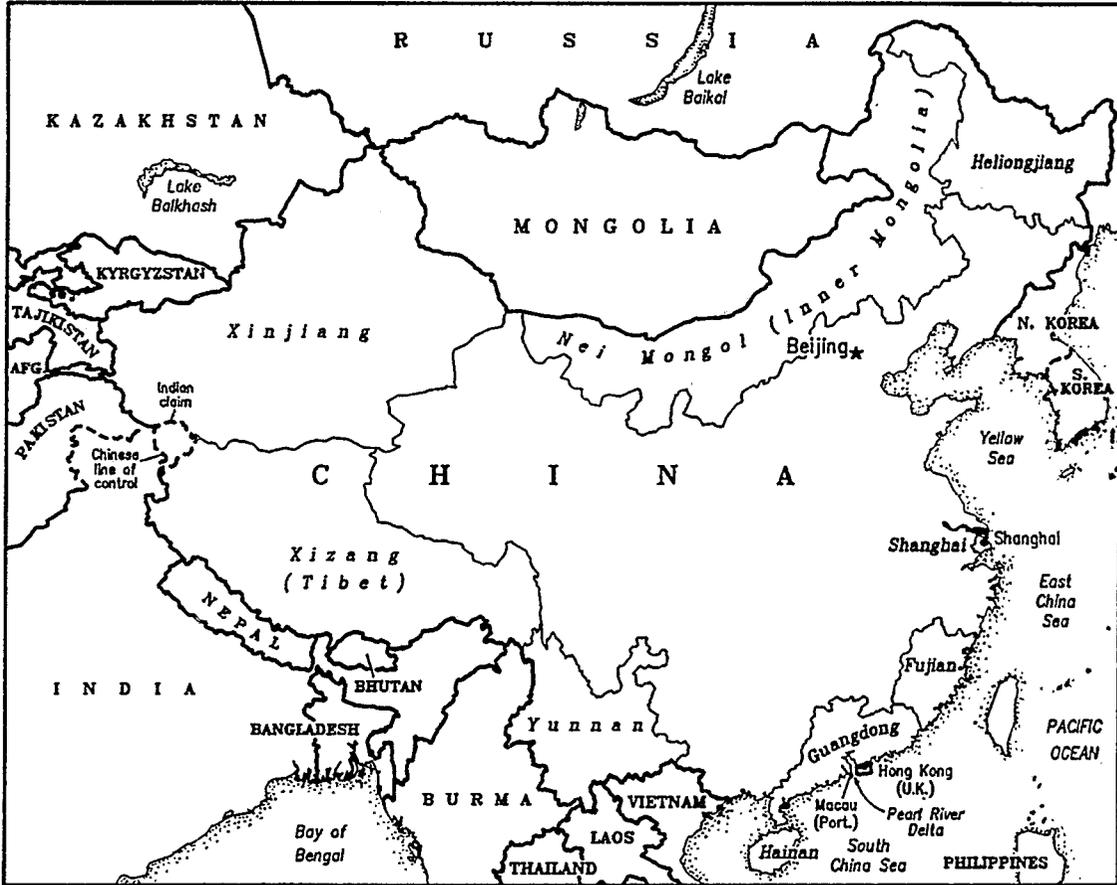
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China: Selected Provinces



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