

REFUGEES FROM UKRAINE. IS THERE A CASE FOR STRATEGIC ENGINEERED DISPLACEMENT?

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Abstract: *The purpose of this paper is to provide a framework for analyzing the current refugee flow from Ukraine in a manner that goes beyond statistics or humanitarian law towards intentionality and strategic games. The author will use Kelly M. Greenhill's model of strategic engineered migration to investigate the case of refugees from Ukraine in order to assess the potential intention of Russia to use large masses of displaced people, caused by the illegal and unprovoked war, to achieve some hidden goals apart from the stated ones. The paper is built, first of all, on analyzing the theoretical framework focused on the types of strategic engineered migration, the evolution of the refugee flow, the humanitarian crisis and the implications for transit and destination countries. Also, there will be comparisons with the Russian intervention in the Syrian civil war and the case of the crisis caused by Belarus on its borders with Latvia, Lithuania and Poland as illustrative for the use of refugees and migrants by a state actor in order to achieve specific political goals. In the last section, the author will investigate the opportunity to translate the case of war refugees into the model initially dedicated to the broader issue of migration, and, finally, will use it to the present case of refugees from Ukraine.*

Keywords: *refugees from Ukraine; strategic engineered migration; war; Russian Federation; Syria; European public opinion.*

Introduction

Year of 2021 brought into attention *the instrumentalization of migration* (European Council 2021) or, in other terms, *the strategic engineered migration* (Greenhill 2008). This paper aims at answering to answer the question if the 2022 case of refugees from Ukraine falls under this context¹. Even if the 2021 Belarusian case was the central and most visible element of this phenomenon, the strategic engineered migration is not new. Kelly M. Greenhill identified documented occurrences since 1953 when the June Uprising triggered over 300,000 persons to move from Eastern Germany to Western Germany and this massive displacement was seen by Western Chancellor, Konrad Adenauer, as both an attempt of the East and USSR to change the demographic composition of the Federal Germany and an opportunity to obtain American political and economic assistance (Greenhill, *Weapons of mass migration: forced displacement, coercion, and foreign policy* 2010, 285-286). In this case, both the challenger and the target were democracies and the outcome was a partial success, since Adenauer received some financial aid to deal with the so-called migration crisis and the desired political support (Greenhill 2010, 33, 286).

The last year crisis triggered by Belarusian leader, Aleksandr Lukashenko, could be another case of strategic engineered migration or, in EU terms, instrumentalization of migration. Throughout one year and a trimester, EU has adopted five packages of sanctions against Belarus in response to suspicions of fraud in the 2020 presidential elections and use of force against peaceful protesters, members of opposition and journalists (most of all the arrest of Roman Protasevich). Following the EU meeting in May 24, 2021, in Lisbon, aimed at

¹ This approach develops the analyzes elaborated by the author in the series Strategic Colloquium (No. 1, 3, 5, 7, 9/2022) and in the 2021 Strategic Evaluation (in process of publication) under auspices of the Center for Defence and Security Strategic Studies.

debating new sanctions against Belarus in response to the hijacking of Ryanair flight in which Roman Protasevich was, Lukashenko threatened to cease blocking the flow of migrants and drug trafficking to EU countries (Evans 2021). This statement is similar with those of Türkiye's President, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who used the same rhetoric on migrants and refugees seeking to reach EU countries with the purpose to receive both funds for the management of refugee camps on Turkish territory, as well as Union support for its role in the conflict in Syria (Timur și Nordland 2016) (Mortimer 2019) (Deutsche Welle 2020). To materialize the threats, Lukashenko created artificial pressure on the borders with Latvia, Lithuania and Poland (second part of 2021) facilitating the transport of mainly Iraqis, Afghans, and Syrians to Belarus and further to the EU neighboring countries. According to K. M. Greenhill, this might be a classic case of transforming migrants and refugees in weapons by coercive engineering as Lukashenko probably aimed to persuade EU to drop sanctions and recognize him as the legitimate leader of Belarus, but also might be a case of exportive engineered migration which is aimed at placing the target actor in an embarrassing situation or to destabilize it in response to criticism and actions against the Lukashenko regime (Greenhill 2021).

The case of Ukrainian refugees is even more challenging to study since it could be a case of coercive, dispossessive, exportive, or even militarized engineered migration. In the following we will analyze each of these types of strategic engineered migration in order to determine whether or not what is happening now in Ukraine could be considered a case for transforming refugees into weapons. The premise of this paper is that Russia's *modus operandi* in recent conflicts (e.g. Syria) consists, among other, in its armed forces repeatedly targeting civilians and civilian infrastructure, causing significant human and material losses and forcing citizens to flee their homes, with the aim of affecting the morale of the local population and armed forces, and also the countries facing the massive influx of refugees.

To this end, there is a need to clarify the theoretical and methodological framework including the difference between refugees and migrants, and the model of K. M. Greenhill and other related concepts. The second objective of this paper will investigate the opportunity to include the case of refugees into a model initially dedicated to the broader issue of migration, as its author did, and, finally, to use the resulted model to the present case of Ukrainian refugees.

1. A model for analyzing the case of refugees

Even if K. M. Greenhill refers both to refugees and migrants in her model of strategic engineered migration, still there are some important differences in defining the two basic concepts – refugees and migrants/migration. First of all, through the lens of international law, refugees hold a particular status different from migrants and given by the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol (UNHCR 2022a). They are defined as “persons outside their countries of origin who are in need of international protection because of feared persecution, or a serious threat to their life, physical integrity or freedom in their country of origin as a result of persecution, armed conflict, violence or serious public disorder” (UNHCR 2022b). Instead, the concept of migrant is not defined by the international law and has are many definitions based on various criteria, but the main characteristic is the fact that those people choose to move across international borders “exclusively for other reasons, such as to improve their conditions by pursuing work or education opportunities, or to reunite with family” (UNHCR 2022b).

Second, referring to refugees and migration from a sociological point of view, refugees are a demographic event while migration is a demographic phenomenon. A demographic event marks major transitions in the life course of a population and a mass of

demographic events in a short period of time create a demographic phenomenon. A classic example for the couple of demographic events – phenomena is immigration – migration (Rotariu 1998, 160), but adding the characteristic of forced displacement, that couple becomes refugees – global forced migration. Global forced migration is a phenomenon including both refugees and asylum seekers, but also another category of people who are internationally displaced due “to other situations of violence, severe climate-related events, trafficking, as well as a range of potentially overlapping causes” (US Senate 2020, 5).

Greenhill’s model of analysis suggests four types of engineered migration reunited under the name of strategic engineered migration (Greenhill 2008, 8). It is defined as “those in- or out-migrations that are deliberately induced or manipulated by state or non-state actors, in ways designed to augment, reduce, or change the composition of the population residing within a particular territory, for political or military ends” (Greenhill 2008, 7). The instruments used in this type of migration vary from opening the otherwise closed borders to threats with or without the use of military force. Strategic engineered migration includes four distinct and non-mutually exclusive types: coercive engineered migration, dispossessive engineered migration, exportive engineered migration, and militarized engineered migration (Greenhill 2008, 8).

Coercive engineered migration starts from the premise that a state or non-state actor that lacks traditional means of influencing is willing to use human beings as weapons instead of bullets (Greenhill 2010, 2-3). Such a model includes three actors: the challenger or the coercer actor, the target, and the migrant or refugee group. Thus, coercive engineered migration represents “those cross-border population movements that are deliberately created or manipulated in order to induce political, military and/or economic concessions from a target state or states” (Greenhill 2010, 13). Since it is a displacement across the border that is deliberately created by a third party, the case of refugees can also be taken into account, not only migration as defined above. Greenhill includes coercive engineered migration into the phenomenon called strategic engineered migration because it is considered a subset of a larger class of events that are based on creating and exploiting such crises with political and military purposes (Greenhill 2010, 14).

Each of the four types/subsets of strategic engineered migration has to respond to a specific list of criteria in order to classify a migration as such, but there must be noted that coercive engineered migration is often incorporated in the other three types of strategic engineered migration.

Coercive engineered migration must be largely orchestrated, not to be caused by exogenous causes and not to be controlled by the respective refugees or migrants. It must be strategic, meaning that even if the flow is controlled by a challenging actor, it must not be driven by non-strategic motivations, such as anger or revenge. Also, even if the migratory flow is strategic, it must be created to induce concessions from the target actor, in other words it must be coercive. (Greenhill 2010, 21)

The *dispossessive engineered migration* has as main objective the appropriation of the territory or property of another group/groups or its/their elimination because it/they is/are represented as a threat to the ethnopolitical or economic domination of those who cause migration. An example provided by Greenhill is ethnic cleansing. (Greenhill 2010, 14)

The *exportive engineered migration* has as main objective strengthening a domestic political position, by eliminating political opponents, or destabilizing targeted foreign government (Greenhill 2010, 14).

The *militarized engineered migration* is the one conducted during an armed conflict in order to gain a military advantage against a specific opponent by disrupting or destroying its command and control, logistic or transport capabilities. Also, its goal could be the

enhancement of challenger's force structure by acquiring new personnel or resources. (Greenhill 2010, 14)

One important point that must be highlighted is the fact that most of the targeted states are liberal democracies. In a later work, K. M. Greenhill argues that democratic countries are vulnerable to this type of coercion because they are caught between conflicting imperatives due to the conflicting imperatives between they are caught: on the one hand, the state has rules to protect people who run from persecutions and violence, and, on the other hand, parts of democratic policies are sometimes against accepting internationally displaced persons for a number of reasons that vary from economic to cultural ones (Greenhill 2016, 79).

In line with Greenhill's theory, the British political scientist Mark Leonard proposes the term "*connectivity wars*" based on the premise that in the 21st Century, the most important battleground will not be air or land, but the global economy's interconnected infrastructure: disruption of trade and investment, of the rules of international law, of the Internet, of transportation and the movement of people (Leonard 2016, 13). If until now interdependence was represented as a barrier to conflict, Leonard says that the perspective has been changed by countries trying to exploit existing asymmetries in relations with other countries (Leonard 2016, 15). From this point of view, he brings in a typology of superpowers that could form a new G7, depending on the field in which they excel: the financial superpower (USA), the regulatory superpower (EU), the construction superpower (China), the migration superpower (Turkey), the spoiler superpower (the Russian Federation), the energy superpower (Saudi Arabia), the peoples' power (imagined majorities grouped on the WWW) (Leonard 2016, 22-25). Leonard paraphrases Clausewitz saying that "global politics had to be continued by still other means" (connectivity conflicts) and since war is "often an unfathomable option", governments are manipulating the things linking countries together (Leonard 2021a). Globalization's connections do not eliminate the tensions between countries, but offer new means to compete or to engage in a conflict (Leonard 2021b, 9).

Unfortunately, these year's events prove that war is still an option, but it seems that there is no hindrance in using large masses of people or other means, such as supply chains, to achieve perpetrator's officially undeclared goals.

In order to analyze the issue of refugees from Ukraine using the above conceptual framework, it is necessary a brief presentation of this issue, including a comparison with the situation in Syria.

2. Refugees from Ukraine: a matter of both statistics and humanitarian crisis

Until the beginning of 2022, Ukraine used to be both a destination (13th place in the world) and an origin country for international migrants (8th place in the world), according to the 2022 edition of *World Migration Report* (McAuliffe and Triandafyllidou 2022, 25). At the same time, the common history of Ukraine and Russia has configured two of the most important bilateral corridors in the world (Russian Federation – Ukraine and Ukraine – Russian Federation) meaning that around 3 million people born in Russian Federation moved to Ukraine and almost the same number of persons have moved to Russia from Ukraine (McAuliffe and Triandafyllidou 2022, 27). Moreover, since the illegal occupation of Crimea by Russia and the fighting in Donbas until the end of 2021, OCHA registered a total number of almost 1 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre 2022), leaving the Eastern part of Ukraine in the hands of the pro-Russian authorities of the so-called Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics.

The 2022 war of Russia against Ukraine has triggered a huge flow of IDPs and refugees towards neighboring countries that is overlapping the 2014 humanitarian crisis² and the dramatic effects of COVID-19 pandemic³. The number of border crossings from Ukraine in the first week of the war exceeded by far the one recorded annually in the period 2014-2015 (Figure no. 1).

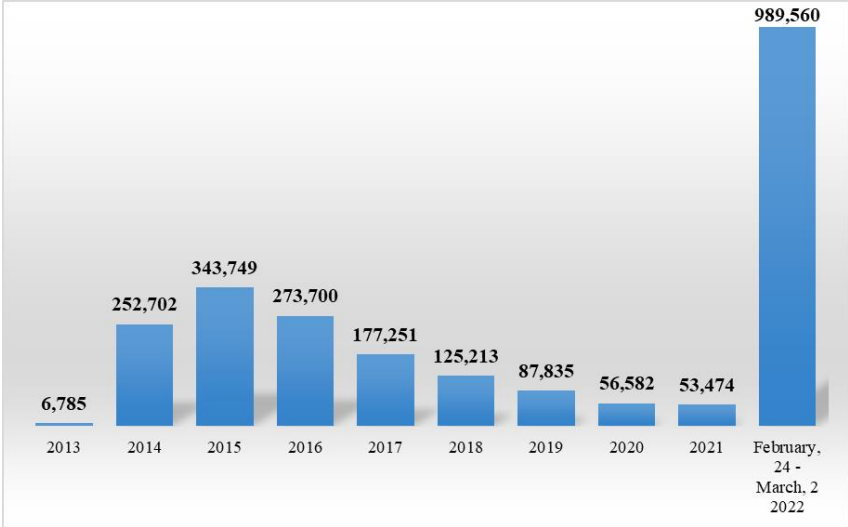


Figure no 1. The evolution of the annual number of border crossings from Ukraine since 2013 and in the first week of the war, according to UNHCR statistics (UNHCR 2022c)

After three months of war, the total number of border crossings from Ukraine was almost 6.6 million (February, 24 – May, 24 2022) (UNHCR 2022c). Also, at the end of May 2022, over 2.2 million persons had already returned to this country (UNHCR 2022c). Still, the number of people from Ukraine abroad is still high. Even if the number of border crossings in each neighboring country is significant⁴, only a part was recorded individually in Poland (1,152,364 persons), Republic of Moldova (86,266 persons), Romania (82,334 persons), Hungary (24,091 persons), Belarus (8,027 persons), and Russian Federation (1,152,364 persons, but here are allegations made by the Ukrainian side of illegal deportations). Most of them continued their journey to and were recorded in Germany (780,000 persons), Czech Republic (366,632 persons), Italy (125,907 persons), Spain (118,199 persons), Türkiye (85,000 persons), Bulgaria (78,291 persons), Austria (70,153 persons), etc. (UNHCR 2022c).

The context of people fleeing Ukraine might be compared with the one of Russian intervention in Syria (September 2015 – beginning of the withdrawal in May 2022). There are many similarities in the approach to civilian targets. Even if the international humanitarian

² The World Health Organization (WHO) has been closely following the humanitarian crisis in Ukraine since the beginning of the conflict in 2014. Its statistics show a large number of deaths (over 10.000), injured and internally displaced persons. Also, since 2014, about 3.4 million people are in need of health-related humanitarian assistance. (World Health Organization 2022a)

³ According to WHO statistics, Ukraine ranks 22nd in the world in terms of total COVID-19 cases and 16th in terms of deaths (cumulative total). Moreover, less than 35% of the population is completely vaccinated against Covid-19 (World Health Organization 2022b).

⁴ According to UNHCR estimation, as of June, 7 2022, over 3.8 million persons from Ukraine crossed the border to Poland, 1.1 million the border with Russian Federation, more than 731 thousand the border with Hungary, 613.4 thousand the border with Romania, 491 thousand the border with Republic of Moldova, 484.6 thousand the border with Slovakia, and 16.6 thousand the border with Belarus (UNHCR 2022c).

law protects civilians against effects of hostilities⁵, Russia has not taken the necessary measures, but has instead turned them into targets in order to deter resistance, to produce economic damage, and to cause massive displacements of people.

According to the Action on Armed Violence database, a British NGO, as of June 08, 2022, 3,951 civilian casualties were reported as a result of the use of explosive weapons by enemy forces: 1,945 civilians killed and 2,006 wounded civilians, of which at least 142 children (Action on Armed Violence 2022a). Most civilian casualties were in the cities of Donetsk (1,450), Kharkiv (721) and Mykolaiv (486), as well as in locations as residential urban areas (991), multiple urban areas (742), entertainment venues (600), villages (389), schools (186), and hospitals (115) (Action on Armed Violence 2022a). Such actions are also acknowledged by UN General Assembly Resolution A/RES/ES-11/1, which states the existence of reports “on attacks on civilian facilities, for instance residences, schools and hospitals, and on civilian casualties, including women, the elderly, people with disabilities and children” (UN 2022a).

In the case of the intervention in Syria, the same database centralizes 997 incidents in which Russia used explosive weapons against civilian targets, for a period of about six and a half years (September 30, 2015 - March 16, 2022), with catastrophic results from a humanitarian point of view: 3,750 civilians killed, 4,666 wounded civilians, 388 villages bombed, 313 attacks in residential urban areas and 40 on camps for internally displaced persons, 22 hospitals and 14 schools destroyed, etc. (Action on Armed Violence 2022b). The attacks have displaced a large number of people, both internally (6.2 million people, including 2.5 million children (UNHCR 2022d)) and externally (more than 5.6 million Syrians in neighboring countries: Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, Egypt and other African countries) (UNHCR 2022e). Moreover, in 2016, now retired U.S. Air Force General Philip Breedlove, the former Supreme Allied Commander in Europe, argued in front of the U.S. Senate Armed Services Committee that Russia and Syria were working together trying to undermine European security by “deliberately weaponizing migration in an attempt to overwhelm European structures and break European resolve” (Ellyatt 2016).

In the case of the war in Ukraine, data on the number of IDPs indicate over 8 million by the middle of May 2022, while about 13 million people are stranded in the affected areas due to increased security risks, destruction of road infrastructure, lack of travel resources or information on safe accommodation. (World Health Organization 2022c). Moreover, the decision of the UN International Court of Justice following the trial on the allegations of genocide under the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (Ukraine vs. Russian Federation) underlines the extent of the “human tragedy” in Ukraine and the need for both parties to respect international humanitarian law (ICJ 2022).

As the war continues, in addition to the increase in the number of casualties and refugees, other problems may arise that will increase the complexity of the crisis, such as cases of epidemic diseases due to the impossibility to continue the Ukrainian vaccination campaign, the poor sanitation conditions of living, and lack of access to overall health services. Those vulnerabilities are to be exploited by the parties supporting Russia to create and consolidate unfavorable currents of opinion and social unrest in the transit and destination countries.

⁵ The Fourth Geneva Convention and its Additional Protocols introduce and clarify the term *protected persons* and establish the basic rule and field of application for civilian protection. Also, the First Protocol clearly states that “The civilian population as such, as well as individual civilians, shall not be the object of attack. Acts or threats of violence the primary purpose of which is to spread terror among the civilian population are prohibited” (Article 51.2) and “Civilian objects shall not be the object of attack or of reprisals. Civilian objects are all objects which are not military objectives as defined in paragraph 2” (Article 52.1). (The Secretary General’s Annual Report 2016 n.d.).

Although at European level, public opinion proves solidarity with the Ukrainian people (Ipsos European Public Affairs 2022, 27), there are countries (Hungary, Bulgaria, Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Poland) where the media reports that nationalist and far-right parties compare the situation of Ukrainian refugees with the illegal migrants and refugee crisis of 2015 and emphasizes the so-called “privileges” granted to the former (EURACTIV Network 2022). There is, in fact, a different social representation on the issue of Ukrainian and non-Ukrainian refugees, but it is explainable by the different cultural and geographic coordinates that define them. The pro-Ukrainian sentiments are determined by the perception of cultural similarities with the rest of the European population, the geographic proximity, and the constant exposure to the information flow during war.

However, in the near future, Europeans’ support for measures taken in support of Ukrainian refugees could decline due to the volatility of the images created by the media, as well as cross-cutting factors such as social ones (the number of refugees, the potential for outbreaks of infectious diseases due to the above mentioned factors, the psychological exhaustion affecting not only the population in the conflict area and refugees, but also those who regularly follow the flow of information about the war), political ones (anti-refugee and anti-involvement discourses of nationalist parties) or economic ones (sanctions imposed on Russia with repercussions on the European economy already affected by the Covid-19 pandemic).

Moreover, the UN reports on global impact of war in Ukraine on issues such as food, energy and finance systems shows that billions of people face the greatest cost-of-living crisis in a generation (UN 2022b). Especially the countries of Africa and Asia are severely exposed to at least one of the three transmission channels of the crisis, some of them even to all three: rising food prices, rising energy prices and tightening finances (UN 2022b, 16). For instance, the UN Economic Commission on Africa argue that 58 million people from those living above poverty line in Africa are heading to poverty due to the complex effects of both Covid-19 pandemic and war in Ukraine (UN 2022b, 6). In this context, the American Professor Timothy D. Snyder is accusing Russia to have “a hunger plan”, starving “much of the developing world as the next stage in his war in Europe” (Snyder 2022), since the Russian naval blockade stops Ukraine, one of the most important providers of agricultural raw materials (Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN 2022), to exports its goods. In his posts, Snyder lists the steps of Vladimir Putin’s strategy: first, this is an attempt to destroy the Ukrainian state by cutting its exports; second, it is meant to trigger new refugee flows from MENA (countries that are supplied with food by Ukraine) and, therefore, instability in EU; finally, to generate world hunger that will provide the necessary framework for a Russian propaganda campaign against Ukraine, asking the latter to accept the territorial losses and the world to lift sanctions against Russia (Snyder 2022). Snyder’s assertions are sustained by UN above mentioned reports and the Secretary UNCTAD, Rebeca Grynspan, who warned that “another vicious cycle starts; the cycle of social unrest leading to political instability as a result of the weakened ability of countries and families to cope with yet another global crisis, on top of Covid-19 and the climate crisis” (UNCTAD 2022).

In this framework, the question on the deliberative creation or manipulation of cross-border population movement appears to be a clear dimension of Russian strategy in the illegal war in Ukraine. Still, even if the events indicate the existence of a certain type of coercion, it is necessary to apply Greenhill’s model in order to be able to conclude whether or not it is a case for strategic engineered migration. The above brief presentation of the situation in Ukraine and over its borders, as well as the comparison with Syria help to apply the analysis model in detail without further expanding the explanations.

3. Conclusions: Is there a case for strategic engineered displacement?

The use of Greenhill’s model requires first of all to link the demographic event of refugees to the larger demographic phenomenon of migration, even if the acknowledged couple is immigration – migration, and refugees are a distinct category, as stated in the first section of this paper.

Second, there must be analyzed the extent to which the recent events fall within the definition of strategic engineered migration.

If there are indeed one or more forms of strategic engineered migration, we must point out from the outset that, given the fact that the war is still ongoing, we cannot conclude on the output of challenger’s actions in terms of success, failure, or, even, indetermination.

The first requirement is met since Greenhill herself identified more than 50 cases of strategic engineered migration since the signing of the 1951 UN Refugee Convention to the completion of her book (Greenhill 2010), in which both migrant and refugee groups are studied together. Thus, the temporal and thematic extension of the subject of the analysis of 2022 refugees from Ukraine is not considered to be an error of method.

The second requires to place the issue of refugees under the definitions of the four types of strategic engineered migration. The subsequent analysis must start with establishing the elements to be examined, such as in Table no. 1.

Table no. 1. Items of analysis, according to strategic engineered migration model⁶

Item of analysis	Identification
Challenger	Russian Federation
Is the challenger a democracy?	No Authoritarian regime (The Economist 2021)
Principal target(s)	NATO/EU countries and partners
Is the target a democracy?	Yes, in various degrees (The Economist 2021)
Power distribution favors target or challenger?	Target
Migrant/Refugee group	People from Ukraine
Expected size of migration	Very large
Principal objective(s)	Lifting international sanctions against Russia Depopulating the war zones for easy takeover Destabilizing European countries and creating social unrest
Outcome	Indeterminate, since the war is ongoing

It is important to emphasize some of the declarations of Russian officials which can provide clues regarding the intentionality of Russia’s actions⁷, outside the stated purpose of the so-called “special military operation”. For instance, in the Address by the President of the Russian Federation on 24th of February, 2022, in which V. Putin has decided to carry out the

⁶ The items are taken from Kelly M. Greenhill’s model of strategic engineered migration (Greenhill 2010, 24-69) as described in the second section of this paper.

⁷ More of this type of declarations are to be found on the websites of the President of Russia (<http://en.kremlin.ru/>), the Government of Russia (<http://government.ru/en/>), and their social media accounts, including those of the Security Council.

operation/war in Ukraine, he declared as follows: “I would now like to say something very important for those who may be tempted to interfere in these developments from the outside. No matter who tries to stand in our way or all the more to create threats for our country and our people, they must know that Russia will respond immediately, and the consequences will be such as you have never seen in your entire history.” (President of Russia 2022a). Moreover, in a speech on 12th of April, 2022, he warns on “new waves of migration, including those heading to European countries” as the result of Western actions against Russia (President of Russia 2022b). Even if Putin is blaming the West for the refugee flow and the future migration waves, his declarations show a strong correlation between the warnings on “consequences as never seen” and massive displacement of people.

If there is a case of coercive engineered migration, then the answer to the next three questions should be positive (Greenhill 2010, 21):

- a. Was it (largely) orchestrated?
- b. The displacement of people is clearly driven by the Russian Armed Forces who deliberately bomb civilians and civilian targets, triggering a refugee flow in the neighboring countries, as above official statistics, reports and declarations indicate. The answer is thereby YES, and the analysis moves on to the next question.
- c. Was it strategic?

Also, the answer to this question could be considered to be YES if there are taken into account Russian President’s and other officials’ declarations on the consequences that will emerge if other actors will intervene in the developments triggered by Russia.

- a. Was it coercive?

At the moment, there is no clear evidence that the coercer designed the refugee flow to induce concessions from the target, the West. The most obvious demand, lifting sanctions against Russia, was not a purpose from the beginning due to the fact that sanctions became more and more numerous and harsher after the declaration of the so-called “special military operation” (Bown 2022). Moreover, the targeted actors (Western countries and their population) do not perceive yet the refugees as instruments of coercion, but, contrariwise, still show support towards them (see the previous section). Indeed, the displacement is strategic, but since the actions are not completed yet, there are aspects to be studied further. So, the answer to this question is still open.

Another case that could be explored is the one of dispossessive engineered migration. As Kelly Greenhill argues, one dimension of the purpose of this type of strategic engineered migration is mainly to appropriate the territory of a specific group. Although speeches by Russian officials emphasize that the Russians and Ukrainians are one people (President of Russia 2021), actions during the Donbas war, as well as the bombing of civilian targets in recent months, provides clues of a potential intention to remove the Ukrainian population from the region. Apart from the current war, by January 2020, Ukraine recorded over 1.4 million IDPs from Donbas and Crimea (Sasse, War and Displacement: The Case of Ukraine 2020, 348), most of them living in the Kyiv-controlled territory (Interfax Ukraine 2016). According to Centre for East European and International Studies, two opinion polls carried out in 2016 and 2019 in Donbas revealed that, even if the results of the 2014 separatist referendums were supposedly in favor of independence (Scout 2014), a majority of the population surveyed in areas not controlled by the Ukrainian government (55%) would prefer to be part of the Ukrainian state (Sasse 2019). The same poll showed that self-identification as “ethnic Ukrainian” increased from 2016 to 2019 (Sasse 2019) which probably might give some clues to pro-Russian and Russian authorities about the reaction of the population in the separatist regions to the future escalation of the conflict. This is why a logical step in

“liberating” the people from the separatist regions could consist in the elimination of those who declare themselves “ethnic Ukrainian”.

Expulsive engineered migration is usually used in order to transform one country’s social structure and to undermine or embarrass foreign governments (Greenhill 2008, 9). In this case, if Russia’s goal is to destroy European cooperation on migration and asylum, it has failed with the EU consolidating its legislation (the activation of the Temporary Protection Directive), and most member states showing solidarity both with Ukraine and to each other. According to Greenhill, an occurrence of expulsive engineered migration is the 2021 attempt of Belarusian President, Aleksander Lukashenko, to create a massive illegal migrants and refugee flow towards three EU countries (Latvia, Lithuania and Poland) (Greenhill 2021). Also, this example could be a coercive engineered migration, if Lukashenko’s purpose was to force the EU to drop the sanctions against Belarus (Greenhill 2021).

Finally, militarized engineered migration is mainly conducted to gain a military advantage as presented in the previous section, but since the displaced people are especially women, children and elderly (The Guardian 2022), there is no public evidence that Russia is trying to disrupt the Ukraine’s command and control capabilities, to deprive Ukraine of the support basis for its forces or guerillas, or to enhance its own forces structure acquiring additional manpower by triggering and maintaining the refugee flow (according to UN, by 16th of June, 2022 over 1.2 million border crossings from Ukraine were registered in Russia (UNHCR 2022c)). Furthermore, over 2.5 million of people returned to Ukraine since 28th of February, 2022 (UNHCR 2022c).

There could be multiple overlapping motivations and objectives driving Russia towards the case of refugees: from the attempt to determine the lift of international sanctions against it, to depopulate the war zones for easy takeover, and to destabilize European countries. Each of them is correlated with the other, but none of them is answering the officially declared goals of the so-called “special military operation”: “demilitarize and de-Nazify Ukraine”, protect people against “the eight years of genocide by Ukraine’s government” and ensuring Ukraine’s neutral status.

Moreover, even if the present paper is dedicated to the refugees from Ukraine, the issue of the repercussions of the war on other countries cannot be excluded. This is about the potential intention of Russia to create a flow of illegal migrants and refugees from Africa and Asia to Europe, by disturbing and denying the food supply chains from Ukraine, in order to destabilize it and to force the lifting of sanctions. Still, this is an issue to be further analyzed as events unfold.

Analyzing the four types of strategic engineered migration and having in mind the basic statement of Greenhill’s model that the variants are not mutually exclusive and many outflows comprises multiple motivations and objectives, the conclusion of this paper is that the case of refugees from Ukraine meets some of the basic conditions for coercive engineered migration, remaining that the specific concessions pursued by Russia to be revealed as the war develops, as well as for dispossessive engineered migration. Also, there could be discussed the example of expulsive engineered migration, but, until now, Russia failed to provoke a strong negative reaction against refugees from Ukraine, nor did adversely affected the EU migration and asylum system.

In conclusion, it can be stated that the massive displacement of the population both inside and outside Ukraine is not controlled exclusively by refugees, but is deliberately induced by a state actor in order to achieve political and military ends. Therefore, the case of Ukrainian refugees could be a case of strategic engineered migration.

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