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# The Solari Report

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## **Weapons of Mass Migration** with Professor Kelly M. Greenhill





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**C. AUSTIN FITTS:** It's my pleasure to welcome to The Solari Report today Professor Kelly Greenhill. She is the Associate Professor of International Relations and Security Studies at Tufts University and also a research fellow in the Belfer Center's International Security Program at Harvard University.

She is author of the book we're going to be talking about today, *Weapons of Mass Migration: Forced Displacement, Coercion, and Foreign Policy*, recipient of the International Studies Association Best Book of the Year in 2011 when it was published.

She is also co-author and co-editor of *Sex, Drugs, and Body Counts: The Politics of Numbers in Global Crime and Conflict*, and also the Associate Editor of the *Journal of International Security*. I just have to say that I read *Weapons of Mass Migration* twice, and have really been on a search for good academic research on the topic of mass migration and immigration, which is clearly important today, and it's only going to get more important. Professor Greenhill's work is a real contribution in this area.

So, Professor Greenhill, thank you for taking time out of what is clearly a very busy schedule to join us on The Solari Report. We very much appreciate you and your work.

**PROFESSOR GREENHILL:** Thank you, Catherine, for having me. I'm delighted to be here and to share a snapshot of the book with your audience.

**C. AUSTIN FITTS:** How did you become so interested in mass migration? How did you come to write this book?

**PROFESSOR GREENHILL:** It's actually a rather personal, historical accident and a coincidence. At the tail end of the war in Bosnia I was at a meeting



in Washington when one of the speakers on a panel on ethnic conflict mentioned how the fears of refugee flows were being effectively manipulated by some actors on the ground in Bosnia to influence European foreign policy decisions. Coincidentally I had on the desk in front of me a copy of the *Wall Street Journal* which contained that very day an article about how China was pouring large amounts of aid into North Korea to hopefully forestall a collapse of the regime, and North Korea was milking Chinese fears rather successfully.

In the back of my head, I had the Mariel crisis rolling around since I was a child in south Florida when the 1980 Mariel boatlift happened. After the panel ended, I went up to the speaker and I asked him, “Where is the book on how refugees and migrants can be used as tools of foreign policy, and even as instruments of coercion? I have this sense that even though these cases are rather diverse in time and location that there are some commonalities here.”

The speaker said, “No one has written that book.”

I said, “Hmnn,” and I was off to the races.

**C. AUSTIN FITTS:** So let’s go back. You studied from 1953 to 2006 a very large number of mass migrations and really put together a pool of case studies to discern more about this topic. Could you just start and describe the cases that you put together and that review from 1953 to 2006?

**PROFESSOR GREENHILL:** Describe the cases themselves or describe my process for gathering data?

**C. AUSTIN FITTS:** Both.

**PROFESSOR GREENHILL:** Both. Okay. The process for gathering data was rather painstaking. I started with well-known cases of mass migration and then did historical and archival research to see whether there was any evidence that attempted weaponization of migration or whether coercion was attempted. In many cases, it wasn’t. In other cases, it was.



In order for a case to meet the test of being included in the data sets it had to pass, if you will, three thresholds. So I had to find evidence and be able to corroborate the evidence that the threatened outflow was, in fact, largely orchestrated and wasn't alternatively simply driven by exigent circumstances or that the outflow wasn't simply the unintended consequence of war, famine, or other events on the ground.

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If it looked like outflows or threatened outflows had, in fact, been orchestrated, I then asked myself and interrogated the documents to see whether or not it looked like the migration was intentional and controlled by the alleged challengers and was driven by strategic motivations rather than simply motivations such as revenge or anger at neighbors. So was there, in fact, strategic motivation behind the controlling of an actual or threatened outflow?

Finally, in order for it to make it into this particular data set, the book focuses particularly on coercive engineered migration as opposed to strategic engineered migration more broadly. I had to be satisfied that the migration was not simply strategic but was also designed to induce concessions – whether they were political, military, or economic – from the target state or states.

This was a long, drawn out, painstaking process, but the interesting thing was in the process of going through all of the well-known cases I stumbled upon many unknown and lesser known cases. Also in the process of doing research, area experts would ask me, “You’re working on the use of migration as a form of foreign policy weapon. What cases are you looking at?”

I’d talk about the cases I had identified, and invariably the expert would say, “Well, why aren’t you looking at X case?”

The cases just kept coming in. Even in the book where there are between 56 cases where I was 100% certain of corroborative that they were real



coercive cases, and then another eight where the data is suggestive but I'm not completely convinced that there was a case of coercive engineered migration.

I'm pretty sure that this didn't represent the universe of cases between 1953 and 2006 because this is a phenomenon that has been hiding in plain sight.

**C. AUSTIN FITTS:** Right.

**PROFESSOR GREENHILL:** Indeed, I have identified cases between 1953 and 2006 subsequent to publication. So even given how much time and energy was put into creating the data set, there were a few cases that escaped notice and have been subsequently added. There have also been about a dozen additional cases that I've identified that have happened since 2007, including some rather recently in the context of the ongoing European migration crisis.

**C. AUSTIN FITTS:** One of my favorite parts of your book is the description of the three Cuban examples in the list. One because you managed to dig out a tremendous amount – and I don't know how you did it – of the back and forth of what was going on behind the scenes. Clearly there was a lot on the migrations themselves in the news, but the behind-the-scenes information I've never seen before.

You clearly are somebody who's had a stint in government and has a feel for how organic it is. But the thing that floored me – and I was just off the chair – was the fellow who is dealing with the second or third. He was way into it before somebody at the state department let him know, "Oh, Castro has done this before."

**PROFESSOR GREENHILL:** Yes. Poor Victor Palmieri.

**C. AUSTIN FITTS:** Right. Can you imagine his face?

**PROFESSOR GREENHILL:** I have on numerous occasions pictured the shock and awe that must have gone across his face, to be well into the Mariel



boatlift which resulted in 125,000 Cubans coming into the United States, only to discover – and he’s the most senior government official responsible for dealing with the boatlift – well into the crisis that this wasn’t the first time that the Cuban regime had used this tool against the United States.

It was pretty shocking. What might be more shocking is that that case was not unique in terms of information not being shared, either within the administrations or across administrations about how this tool has been used.

**C. AUSTIN FITTS:** Right. So this really is a tactic hiding in plain sight. So I think having a book on this topic is going to be very valuable to the next Victor Palmieri.

So tell us about the key findings. When you identified this group and sat back and looked at what had been going on from 1953 to 2006, what were the key findings?

**PROFESSOR GREENHILL:** As you’ve already suggested in the context about ‘hiding in plain sight’ this phenomena is much more common than is generally understood. Even among migration scholars at one point in time, I was at a meeting talking about results. You had mentioned the Cuban case. One migration scholar in the audience said, “Isn’t Fidel Castro the only person who’s done this?”

The answer is, “Absolutely not.”

As you say, it has been hiding in plain sight. It has been relatively common. In fact, it’s so common that we’ve seen at least one case per year on average since the refugee convention came into force in 1951. A number of cases have ebbed and flowed, but we’ve seen – at least in cases I’ve been able to identify – something of a steady uptick since the early 1970’s.

Moreover, in the cases where this tool has been employed, it’s been relatively successful. So in about three-quarters of the cases the coercers



have gotten at least some of what they sought, be it military, political, and/or economic objectives.

If one applies a more strenuous measure of success and failure, in about 57% of the cases coercers have gotten more or less all of their identified objectives.

You might think, “Well, 57% sounds only slightly better than a coin toss,” but if one compares a rate of 57% to the US – the most powerful military on the planet – and their own success rate with respect to diplomacy, the highest estimates of the US success rates are about 37%. So 57% is a pretty impressive rate in terms of extracting concessions from targets.

**C. AUSTIN FITTS:** One of my favorite stories which I heard on an interview you gave was the story of Carter lobbying Deng [12:41] on the Chinese human rights record. Maybe you could tell that story.

**PROFESSOR GREENHILL:** I think it is a compelling anecdote of how the threat of mass migration may influence leaders’ behavior. It is not a case that makes it into the database because it doesn’t meet the test criteria. We don’t know that Deng was actually trying to influence Carter, but it is quite illustrative of the potential power of this tool.

So then Vice Premier Deng during his historic meeting with President Carter in 1979, Carter was exerting some rhetorical pressure on Deng to do more to support human rights in China, including the right of Chinese to emigrate freely. According to witnesses who were in the room, Deng then turned to Carter, smiled, and pointedly retorted, “Well, alright then, Mr. President. Exactly how many Chinese would you like? One million? Ten million? Thirty million?” knowing that the answer was very much close to, “Zero.”

So as I’ve already suggested, we have no reason to believe that Deng made his comments with the intent of actually coercing the US President. However, it is worth noting that witnesses who were present in the room have attested to the fact that any discussion of human rights



in China was stopped dead in its tracks at the conclusion of this conversation.

**C. AUSTIN FITTS:** Deng was a very clever man!

One of the things you go through is the challenges of a liberal democracy which holds itself out as having humanitarian values. Maybe you could talk a little bit about the challenge of a liberal democracy in dealing with this kind of tactic and what you call hypocrisy costs. What are hypocrisy costs, and how does it relate to this mass migration as a weapon?

**PROFESSOR GREENHILL:** Hypocrisy costs are loosely speaking symbolic or material political costs that actors can impose on leaders and on regimes or administrations if their actions or their intended actions run counter or are in contradiction to their stated values, mores, and even in some cases legal obligations. While in the book I talk about how hypocrisy costs can be used to affect policy change in the migration realm, hypocrisy costs are certainly not limited. Their applicability is not limited to the migration realm, so any policy arena – whether it's a non-state actors, other actors inside political realm domestically or internationally – can point out that an administration has made rhetorical, normative, or even legal commitments to a certain set of behaviors or standards and engages in behaviors that run counter to that. People can point out that what they're doing is hypocritical.

Hypocrisy costs can be used to persuade leaders to not proceed with behaviors that might be seen or could be called hypocritical. Hypocrisy costs in terms of migration as a coercion weapon tend not to be independently sufficient to change behavior of states, but they can be a really powerful force multiplier for actors who would otherwise be too weak to influence the behavior of their more powerful counterparts.

**“Hypocrisy costs are loosely speaking symbolic or material political costs that actors can impose on leaders and on regimes or administrations if their actions or their intended actions run counter or are in contradiction to their stated values, mores, and even in some cases legal obligations.”**





To prevent hypocrisy costs from arising, or to make them go away, provide relatively powerful incentives for targets to concede to coercers' demands. Historically, in a couple of cases, Haitian leaders have managed to point out the discrepancy in how the US has treated Cubans and how it attempts to treat Haitians in the migration realm to influence US behavior and drive changes in US policy with respect to Haiti.

For instance, a then exiled Haitian leader, Jean-Bertrand Aristide, managed to use hypocrisy costs in addition to more direct material threats to encourage Haitians to come to south Florida to convince the Clinton Administration to launch a forced entry operation into Haiti in 1994 and see him restored into power. It was a very successful use of the weaponization of migration.

To be fair, in the end, the junta stepped down and the promised military operation did not have to be implemented as threatened, but the Clinton Administration's policy was clearly driven by Aristide's threats which were quite persuasive.

**C. AUSTIN FITTS:** I had no idea until I read your book how effective the Haitians had been at strong-arming behind the scenes.

**PROFESSOR GREENHILL:** It took a while, but yes, in the end it was quite successful. Aristide played no small part by going on Haitian radio and on TV. Early in the Clinton Administration when there was expectation that there would be an outflow from Haiti and an inflow into the US that would coincide with the first Clinton inaugural, Aristide used media to persuade Haitians to stay at home, although Clinton had made a promise to Aristide that he would see him reinstated into power once he was in office.

So Aristide went on the radio and told Cubans to stay at home. He trusted that Clinton would follow through on his promises. As time passed and Aristide remained in exile, in 1994 a few other things happened. In addition, Aristide went back on the radio and other media and essentially told Haitians, "I cannot tell you to remain in a house on fire. Tis better to die at sea than to remain on the ground in Haiti."



That helped focus the attention of the Administration and forced his hand.

**C. AUSTIN FITTS:** That reminds me of a much tinier example. When I was assistant secretary of housing in the first Bush Administration, the Secretary's daughter was getting married. They were having the wedding at his house on a Saturday. This huge group of housing activists who had been lobbying the department for years showed up the week before and announced that they were going to stop the driveway of his house on Saturday. He caved and gave them everything they wanted for the first time in years.

**PROFESSOR GREENHILL:** They probably wouldn't have been particularly good coverage with large numbers of people stopping the driveway.

**C. AUSTIN FITTS:** Right. I had no idea how successful Castro had been, as you said. I think his complete success was only 57%, but I think Castro was either completely or partially successful in all three efforts.

**PROFESSOR GREENHILL:** Yes. He was three for three. There are concerns in some circles that we might not have seen the last case emanating from Cuba, but of course, the US-Cuban relations have improved significantly very recently. So there is every reason to believe that the situation might improve, and we might not see another case of this kind of coercion from Cuba going forward. But, we will see.

**C. AUSTIN FITTS:** There are complaints that the Cuban baseball leagues are collapsing because all the best players have suddenly left and come to America to play here.

**PROFESSOR GREENHILL:** Yes, that would be a different kind of instrument of influence, but perhaps equally successful. Maybe someone could look at that.

**C. AUSTIN FITTS:** Another question I wanted to ask you was: One of the things you point out is the role of non-state players. When I started the book, I immediately was thinking this was a tactic to be used by state



players. But you described the role of non-state players and the growth of NGOs as the tactic is being increasingly used. One of the questions I had for you was: We're seeing an explosion of the involvement of mercenaries globally.

Could you talk about non-state actors and how they play into mass migration as a weapon?

**PROFESSOR GREENHILL:** Yes. Most of the cases I've been able to identify – that I'm confident that I've identified – the majority are cases of state to state coercion. However, in a nontrivial minority, in a number of cases non-state actors have served as coercers. In a number of these cases where non-state actors have been the coercers of state level targets, they have used the threat to impose or the actual imposition of hypocrisy costs, as I suggested before, to punch or box above their ambit in a higher weight class because the threat to impose these costs can make up for relative weakness with respect to their potential targets.

We have seen this tool used by NGOs against states to try to persuade them to take military action in particular countries. We have seen this tool used by non-state actors such as insurgent groups to similarly encourage them to take military action to intervene to help them achieve their goals against governments.

So non-state actors have played a significant if not dominant role in this kind of coercion, at least in the cases that I've been able to identify. As I said, I don't know how many other cases are out there that I haven't been able to identify.

I don't know that I've identified cases where mercenaries have tried this, but it is certainly possible that mercenaries could get into this game as well. When I say 'game' I don't mean to trivialize it but to use it as a bargaining game or an instrument of influence. We do know that there is circumstantial evidence that smugglers sometimes will exploit the values of potential liberal recipient states or of liberal recipient states' navies that are deployed in bodies of water where smugglers are active, and sometimes people get thrown overboard or even in some cases boats are



abandoned with migrants aboard. Smugglers know full well that recipient states' navies will have to rescue these people, so they take their money and they run.

**C. AUSTIN FITTS:** Right.

**PROFESSOR GREENHILL:** There is also some evidence to suggest that smugglers have attempted to manipulate the behavior of potential or recipient states in this regard, but all the evidence I've seen on that front so far has been circumstantial. So I can't site cases definitively.

**“There is also some evidence to suggest that smugglers have attempted to manipulate the behavior of potential or recipient states in this regard...”**

**C. AUSTIN FITTS:** So you published your book personally five years ago, and the topic of mass migration has just grown in importance. Of course, we're seeing enormous debate in the United States over immigration issues. Obviously Europe is exploding with this.

Tell us what you've learned. Is there any more research interest on your part in following this topic?

**PROFESSOR GREENHILL:** I have identified another dozen or so cases since the book has been published, including recent use of this tool by Turkey against the EU and a threatened use of this tool by one of the governing factions on the ground in Libya. There is no reason at this point to believe that the Libyan faction has followed through on its threats, but it's made them clear.

Interestingly ISIS also made a deterrent threat against Europe in February of last year. I have at this point seen no evidence to suggest that the threat was anything more than an idle threat, but there is an interesting coincidence in terms of the timing of the uptick in movement into Europe.

I just want to reiterate that I have no reason to believe at this point that the ISIS case is a real case, but a threat was issued.



**C. AUSTIN FITTS:** And are you going to continue to write and study these? Are there any publications we can look for?

**PROFESSOR GREENHILL:** On occasion I publish related pieces that focus on what's going on in the current environment in media, so I had a piece in *Foreign Affairs* in December. Then there was a related piece published by the European Council on Foreign Relations in January. As this continues to develop, there may well be pieces in the future. Occasionally I'll publish op-eds or various pieces that draw attention to new cases or the implications of ongoing cases.

I am currently working on a book that is not focused on migration per se, although there is a case that looks at the alleged tie between irregular migration and the threat of terrorism. The book is on a rather different topic, but it has been an outgrowth of my work on *Weapons of Mass Migration* coupled with my work on *Sex, Drugs, and Body Counts*. It is a cross-national study that focuses on the circumstances in which unverified or what I call 'extra factual information' such as rumors, conspiracy theories, propaganda, myths, and so on can – despite being unverified – materially affect states' foreign defense policies.

**C. AUSTIN FITTS:** I saw a video that was up on the internet on a presentation you gave. It was absolutely fascinating. It's a very fascinating discussion because, as you said, rumors can make a huge difference.

**PROFESSOR GREENHILL:** This was a video presentation on the new book?

**C. AUSTIN FITTS:** Yes, on the topic.

**PROFESSOR GREENHILL:** It just goes to show what the internet can do. I didn't even know that these things were out there.

**C. AUSTIN FITTS:** It was you and a doctor.

**PROFESSOR GREENHILL:** Oh, Ben Oppenheim, yes. We gave a talk at the University of Cambridge on a rumor-specific piece of the research, some survey research we've done in conflict-affected areas in Southeast Asia.



Yes.

**C. AUSTIN FITTS:** This is fascinating. Do you know when the book is expected?

**PROFESSOR GREENHILL:** My editor would like the answer to be, “Yesterday,” but it’s not quite done. We are hopeful that it will be done soon, but I’m not quite there yet.

**C. AUSTIN FITTS:** You’re right. It does dovetail very well with the migration issues. You’re talking about what are the economically efficient tactics that states can use when warring with each other if they don’t want to start a real physical war. So rumors are a wonderful tactic.

Anyway, one other thing I wanted to ask you is: If you were me and you wanted to pursue understanding mass migration better, what other sources would you recommend as excellent sources on all the issues around mass migration?

**PROFESSOR GREENHILL:** Wow! The literature is broad and wide. I might ask you to be a bit more specific. I’m at a loss because there is such a plethora of options.

**C. AUSTIN FITTS:** So let’s take Europe for now. If you are a state actor and you’re dealing with more migration than your society can easily handle or comfortably handle, where is the academic research that informs these kinds of situations historically as to what has happened in the past, what works, and what doesn’t? What is some academic research on what would inform the situation of a leader currently in Europe dealing with this situation?

**PROFESSOR GREENHILL:** There are two. There is a raft of literature, but I would say a couple of authors that jump out at me who have investigated in some detail these assimilation issues are Christian Joppke and James Hollifield.

If a leader or an informed citizen wanted to get a broad overview of some



of these issues, there is a terrific book that I use in classes entitled *The Migration Reader: Exploring Politics and Policies* that looks both at fending factors – factors that push people to move as well as pull factors. The book deals with issues of integration assimilation as well as resistance to integration assimilation and it also looks at ethical dilemmas associated with migration. It was published some years ago, and it is an edited volume edited by Anthony Messina and Gallya Lahav. It remains a terrific and rather comprehensive resource.

I could go on and on and on, and in singling out those few it is in no way meant to discount the value of many, many other great works. But those are some that come readily to mind, and there are many, many more.

There is another volume on migration and social policy which looks at some of the issues that you just raised in some detail, and it is co-edited by Gary Freeman and Nikola Mirilovic. It is an Edward Elgar volume entitled *Migration and Social Policy*, and it will be out imminently.

**C. AUSTIN FITTS:** I would think your courses would be very popular.

**PROFESSOR GREENHILL:** We have no shortage enrolling at the moment.

**C. AUSTIN FITTS:** Well, Professor Greenhill, you're doing great things. If there is anything we can do to support you, please let us know.

If you're listening to this right now and you want to stay tuned and keep up with your work, how would we keep up with when you publish and what you do?

**PROFESSOR GREENHILL:** Curiously in many ways I'm avant-garde or on the edge in the context of social media. I'm a bit of a dinosaur, so I'm not on much social media. I do, as I said, episodically publish opinion pieces. One can get a sense of what I've been up to by going to the Belfer website and searching for my name. Occasionally I post things on LinkedIn. One can also sometimes find things on the Tufts website, and I would say also there is a new paperback edition of *Weapons of Mass*



*Migration* due imminently from Cornell University Press. It should be hot off the presses any day now.

**C. AUSTIN FITTS:** And it's available on Kindle.

**PROFESSOR GREENHILL:** Yes. It is available on Kindle and through all the regular online retailers as well.

**C. AUSTIN FITTS:** Right. Well, it's a great accomplishment, and I look forward to reading your book on rumors. That is going to be very juicy.

**PROFESSOR GREENHILL:** If you were shocked by some of the vignettes that you encountered in *Weapons of Mass Migration*, just wait! I don't say that to be lascivious; the national archives and Presidential libraries are treasure troves of amazing information that reveal the detailed interworkings of governments. There is much to be gleaned from spending time in the archives. History can be quite illuminating in terms of what we're witnessing today. So I look forward to being done with the book as well.

**C. AUSTIN FITTS:** Okay. Well thank you again. You have a wonderful day.

**PROFESSOR GREENHILL:** Thank you so much for having me.

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