A Camouflaged Weapon -
Coercive Engineered Migration against Europe by Armed Non-state Actors in Libya

Rebecka Rönnegård

Thesis, 30 ECTS (hp)
Political Science with a focus on Crisis Management and Security
Master’s Programme in Politics and War
Autumn 2023
Supervisor: Magnus Ekengren
Word count: 19,719
ABSTRACT

In a world witnessing unprecedented levels of forced displacement, the weaponization of migration has emerged as a potent and unexplored tool in the foreign policy arsenals of states and non-state actors. Challenging traditional state-centric perspectives in international relations, this thesis delves into the realm of Coercive Engineered Migration (CEM) employed by armed non-state actors. With a focus on Libya, a key player in the weaponization of migration against the European Union (EU), this study investigates the strategic orchestration of migration flows, coercive mechanisms, and the diplomatic preconditions underpinning these actions. The findings reveal evidence of multiple attempts of CEM against the EU by armed non-state actors in Libya during two distinct periods: 2014-2017 and 2020-2023. Employing coercion by punishment strategies and denial mechanisms, these actors mainly sought legitimacy and resources from the EU. Armed non-state actors gained more leverage compared to state actors due to their non-diplomatic status. This thesis contributes to the existing literature by challenging realist assumptions, diversifying the understanding of non-violent foreign policy strategies employed by armed non-state actors, and highlighting the often-overlooked significance of these actors in the realm of weaponized migration.

Keywords: armed non-state actors, coercion, foreign policy, Libya, weaponized migration
LIST OF FIGURES AND TABLES

Figure 1: Overview of operationalization .......................................................... 22
Figure 2: Map of over main cities and areas of control ...................................... 26
Figure 3: Migrant Crossings on the Central Mediterranean Route ..................... 29
Figure 4: Comparative arrivals, central Mediterranean, January-August 2016 and 2017 ...... 40

Table 1: Coercive mechanisms ........................................................................ 23
Table 2: Haftar intimidation of cooperation between EU and official government ........ 35
Table 3: Haftar opposition to MoU ................................................................... 36
Table 4: Chartered flights facilitated by Haftar/LNA ........................................... 37
Table 5: Active assistance of migrant smuggling by armed non-state groups linked to the LNA/Haftar ............................................................................ 37
Table 6: Secret deals between Italy and Brigade 48 and “Al-Ammu.” .................... 38
Table 7: Leader of Zawiya Refinery Coastguard secretly invited to Rome ............... 39
# LIST OF ACRONYMES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ANSA</td>
<td>Armed non-state actor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CEM</td>
<td>Coercive engineered migration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DCIM</td>
<td>Department to Combat Irregular Migration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EU</td>
<td>European Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EUBAM</td>
<td>EU Border Assistance Mission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EUNAVFOR MED</td>
<td>European Union’s Naval Force Mediterranean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GNA</td>
<td>Government of National Accords</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GNC</td>
<td>General National Congress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GNS</td>
<td>Government of National Salvation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GNU</td>
<td>Government of National Unity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HoR</td>
<td>House of Representatives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IMF</td>
<td>International Monetary Fund</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISS</td>
<td>Institute for Security Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LNA</td>
<td>Libyan National Army</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LPDF</td>
<td>Libyan Political Dialogue Forum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MoU</td>
<td>Memorandum of Understanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSA</td>
<td>Non-state actor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAR</td>
<td>Search and Rescue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNHCR</td>
<td>United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
TABLE OF CONTENT

LIST OF FIGURES AND TABLES ................................................................. III
LIST OF ACRONYMES ................................................................................ IV

1. INTRODUCTION .................................................................................. 1
   1.1 Aim and Research Questions .......................................................... 2
   1.2 Outline ......................................................................................... 3

2. BACKGROUND .................................................................................... 4

3. LITERATURE REVIEW ......................................................................... 6
   3.1 Migration as a Foreign Policy Tool ................................................. 6
   3.2 Non-State Actors in Foreign Policy ................................................ 9
   3.3 Summary ..................................................................................... 10

4. THEORY ............................................................................................. 11
   4.1 Coercive Engineered Migration ..................................................... 11
   4.2 Rebel Diplomacy .......................................................................... 14

5. METHOD ............................................................................................ 16
   5.1 Approach ..................................................................................... 16
   5.2 A Single Case Study ..................................................................... 17
   5.3 Case Selection ............................................................................ 18
   5.4 Evidence and Limitations ............................................................ 19
   5.5 Operationalization ..................................................................... 22

6. CASE ANALYSIS ............................................................................... 25
   6.1 Actors ......................................................................................... 25
   6.2 Phase 1: Generating Flows of Migrants ........................................ 27
     6.2.1 Migration Crisis in Europe ....................................................... 27
     6.2.2 Restored Flows, New Methods ................................................. 31
   6.3 Phase 2: Coercive Strategies ....................................................... 34
     6.3.1 Haftar and the LNA ................................................................. 34
     6.3.2 Armed Non-State Actors in Sabratha and Zawiya ................. 38
     6.3.3 Permanent Leverage .............................................................. 40
   6.4 Phase 3: Attempting CEM under Non-Diplomatic Status ........... 42

7. CONCLUSION .................................................................................... 44
   7.1 Summary ..................................................................................... 44
   7.2 Discussion of Main Findings ......................................................... 45
   7.3 Limitations and Avenues for Further Research ......................... 46

BIBLIOGRAPHY ..................................................................................... 48

Literature ............................................................................................. 48
Case Material ....................................................................................... 51
1. **INTRODUCTION**

Every single day, people across the world are forced to leave their homes. In 2022, more people than ever before, 108.4 million people, were forcibly displaced (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2022). Increasing population flows has highlighted migration as a political issue and led to an expanding academic field with scholars focusing on environmental drivers (Piguet, 2013), conflict consequences (Braithwaite et al., 2019), and human rights violations (Cholewinski et al., 2009). Additionally, over the last ten years, the weaponization of migration has received more attention from decisionmakers as well as scholars. In an already vulnerable situation, migrants are exploited by political leaders in their countries of origin, or in the countries which they transit through. Coercive engineered migration (CEM) is a camouflaged foreign policy tool in state and non-state actors’ (NSA) arsenal that is more common and more successful than previously portrayed. Most often used against democracies, migrants are misused to gain leverage not possible with conventional methods (Greenhill, 2010).

Simultaneously, armed non-state actors (ANSA) have become increasingly common in all dimensions of international relations, including migration (Kruck & Schneiker, 2017). Autonomous actors challenging the state-centered international system have gained power that they use (and abuse) to impact world politics (Nykänen, 2012). Not only do ANSAs affect the foreign policy of states, but they also have the ability to exert authority in foreign policy themselves (Charountaki & Irrera, 2022). Often using unconventional methods, they challenge the international community with alternative methods compared to states (Kruck & Schneiker, 2017). In fact, ANSAs are identified as the most obvious threat against the EU, specifically concerning weaponizing migration flows (Roderick Parkes, 2022). Despite their growing power, ANSAs actors remain under-examined in international relations literature in general, and in weaponized migration scholarship in particular.

Weaponized migration is a complex and multifaceted foreign policy tool that can be used by various actors in the international system. During the migration crisis in Europe in 2015, Türkiye exploited Syrian mass migration to gain leverage towards the EU (Gökalp Aras, 2019b, 187). Following a series of threats to “open the doors,” the EU and Türkiye signed a deal in which billions of Euros along with several other contributions were allocated to Türkiye (Greenhill, 2016, 327). Moreover, in the fall of 2021, thousands of migrants were flown to
Minsk and further bussed to the border between Belarus and Poland. The migrants were left in unprotected encampments to await the winter creating a humanitarian crisis (Greenhill, 2022, 155). In this case, Belarus was accused of acting as a proxy for Russia, seeking to destabilize the EU using migrants as a weapon (Bekić, 2022, 163). Furthermore, ANSAs controlling Libya have copied the successful tactics of dictator Muammar Gaddafi, exploiting migrants to gain international leverage and resources (Greenhill, 2022, 159). Evidence indicates ANSAs in Libya have not only exploited migration flows ejected by other factors but have also incentivized and created migration flows to put pressure and gain leverage on European actors. In addition, they have used migrants kept in detention centers for blackmailing purposes (Liga, 2018, 22; El Kamouni-Janssen, 2017, 27).

Previous attempts at coercive engineered migration against the European Union suggest various actors use this foreign policy tool differently for various aims. The goals, abilities, methods, and mechanisms of states, proxies, and armed non-state groups vary, and they perform foreign policy under different preconditions (Fakhry et al., 2022; Coggins, 2015). In the state-centered international system, state actors have access to diplomatic tools that ANSAs have not. States can, and often do, sign treaties or agreements to solve migratory disputes. Evidently, the official government in Libya signed the EU-backed Memorandum of Understanding with Italy in 2017 to stem irregular migration (MoU, 2017). In contrast, ANSAs in Libya have attempted CEM to gain legitimacy and resources without access to diplomatic tools. Compared to state actors, Libyan ANSAs have operated under different preconditions which have allowed them to gain other types of leverage on European states. This leads me to the assumptions of this thesis: armed non-state actors have a strategic nature and, therefore, use migration as a foreign policy tool to gain leverage and resources. Additionally, when using coercive engineered migration, they gain more leverage upon their target compared to states due to their non-diplomatic status.

1.1 Aim and Research Questions
More broadly, the purpose of this qualitative study is to further establish the use of migration as a foreign policy tool by ANSAs as an important research agenda. By broadening the field, I provide a foundation for further advancement on generalization and theory building within coercive engineered migration. Challenging the realist assumption of state-centralism, the analysis focuses on non-violent foreign policy strategies by ANSAs performed in a state-
centric world system. This is an exploratory study addressing the lack of research on ANSAs in the literature addressing migration as a foreign policy tool and the lack of non-violent strategies in foreign policy scholarship on ANSAs. For this aim, I will use a case study on ANSAs in Libya. Out of the identified actors using migration as a foreign policy tool against the EU, Libya stands out. In Libya, the state does not have a monopoly on controlling migration flows across state borders which gives access to various ANSAs to incentivize, manipulate, and exploit migrants. Moreover, one of the main migration routes to Europe transits through Libya and both state and ANSAs have used these flows as a foreign policy tool. Additionally, studying CEM within a context where smuggling is an integral part of the dominating illicit economy will provide additional nuances. Thus, the contextual factors in Libya allow for a study of the strategic orchestration of migration flows against Europe by ANSAs which will highlight the preconditions under which various actors attempt CEM. Furthermore, with an in-depth analysis of documents and archival sources, this single case study will provide much-needed insights into the use of CEM by ANSAs actors in Libya. It will answer the following questions:

1. To what extent did armed non-state actors in Libya strategically orchestrate migration flows to Europe using coercive mechanisms between 2011 and 2023?
2. Under what preconditions have these actors attempted this strategic tool?

1.2 Outline
This thesis will proceed as follows. First, I provide a background necessary for the case analysis. Second, I situate my argument in relation to the broader literature on migration as a foreign policy tool as well as the scholarship on ANSAs in foreign policy in which the former is identified to lack diversity in terms of ANSAs and the latter on non-violent strategies. Third, the theoretical framework based on Kelly Greenhill’s (2010) theory of Coercive Engineered Migration (CEM) and Bridget Coggins’s (2015) work on rebel diplomacy is presented. Fourth, the methodological section that follows details ontological and epistemological foundations. A critical discussion of the single case study method, material, and sources is also provided. Fifth, the case study is presented by analyzing orchestration and strategical aspects of generated migration flows, coercive mechanisms, and the diplomatic preconditions under which CEM is performed. Finally, this thesis is concluded by a discussion of the main findings and avenues for further research.
2. BACKGROUND

For the purpose of this thesis, it is important to understand the context in which migration as a foreign policy tool is performed. Therefore, this thesis will proceed to present a brief history of the migratory relations between Libya and the EU.

Libya is the third largest country in Africa; however, relative to its size, it has a small population of 6.8 million1 (World Bank Open Data, n.d.). In August 2022, the migrant population amounted to almost 680,000 (Council of the European Union, n.d.); however, migrants in the hands of smugglers are often hidden, therefore, it is hard to estimate the exact number of irregular migrants2 in Libya. A substantial migration population is not a new circumstance in Libya. In the 1960s, the discovery of oil attracted economic migrants to come to work, live, and send remittance back to their families. In the decades to follow, few migrants came to Libya intending to reach Europe; it was not until later Libya became a transit country.

To curb increasing irregular migration in the 1990s, the European Union started cooperating with neighboring countries. To achieve a deal similar to other Mediterranean states, dictator Muammar al-Qaddafi, who ruled Libya between 1969 and 2011, began stimulating irregular migration from Libya to put pressure on certain EU countries. Indeed, Libya did become a transit country which the EU negotiated with to curb the flow of irregular migrants (Mustafa, 2018). Scholars have proved that the Libyan leader repeatedly used CEM against the EU and its member states, mainly Italy (Greenhill & Leonard, 2016; Tsourapas, 2017).

In 2011, Libya joined the Arab Spring and the Qaddafi regime fell. The Libyan civil war served as a great methodological and practical challenge for migratory relations between the EU and Libya. Since its outbreak, the official foreign policy priority of the EU in Libya has been political stability, due to its urge to cooperate with its neighbor on migratory issues (Ceccorulli, 2022). Despite the challenge, the EU Border Assistance Mission (EUBAM) was launched in 2013 primarily aiming to provide capacity-building services and strengthen Tripoli’s control of border regions (EEAS, n.d.). When the Libya-Italy corridor became an ‘irregular hotspot’ during the 2015 migration crisis, the EU’s efforts to curb irregular migration intensified.

---

1 Total population in 2022, the most recent number from World Bank Open Data.
2 There is no universally accepted definition of irregular migration. It is defined by the European Union as “movement of persons to a new place of residence or transit that takes place outside the regulatory norms of the sending, transit and receiving countries” (European Commission, n.d.).
Previously established relationships between Libya and Italy enabled the EU to quickly support Libyan border management (Debono, 2020, 464). Additionally, the EU launched EUNAVFOR MED Operation Sophia to halt human trafficking (Operation Sophia, n.d.). Furthermore, resurrecting the Treaty of Friendship, Partnership, and Cooperation signed between Libya and Italy in 2008, Italy and Libya negotiated the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) the 2 February 2017 (MoU, 2017). The MoU was presented to EU leaders as a breakthrough with the ability to ‘close’ the central Mediterranean route, like the deal with Türkiye had closed the Western Balkan Route. However, the Turkish deal could not be copied due to Libya’s lack of government control of its security apparatus, and its ability to control its borders (Micallef & Reitano, 2017). The MoU committed Italy and Libya to cooperate in order to stem illegal migration flows and Italy agreed to provide Libyan institutions with technological support and to finance already active hosting centers (MoU, 2017). In 2020, EUNAVFOR MED Operation Sophia was replaced by EUNAVFOR MED Operation Irini which not only focused on disrupting smuggling and trafficking but also aimed at implementing the UN arms embargo on Libya (Operation Irini, 2023).

From the start of the migration crisis until the present, it is evident the EU and Italy did not only negotiate with the officially recognized government in Libya; multiple actors have been addressed in migratory diplomatic efforts including tribes, municipalities, and militias (Ceccorulli, 2022). Scholars have found the practice of CEM against the EU continues in Libya claiming the militias continue the coercion performed by the country’s former leader; however, in new ways (Greenhill, 2022). An in-depth analysis of CEM used by ANSAs in Libya will be presented in Chapter 6.
3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Scholars use three main concepts when discussing migration as a foreign policy tool: migration diplomacy, coercive engineered migration (CEM), and migration instrumentalization. They share the same foundation – migration is a fundamental part of the bargaining game in bilateral and multilateral relations – however, they emphasize various aspects. Migration diplomacy is based on three main assumptions: (1) the state is the main actor regulating cross-border mobility, (2) a state’s foreign policy objective is the main driver of migration diplomacy, and (3) migratory issues with a direct impact on inter-state relations are exclusively considered (Adamson & Tsourapas, 2019, 116-117). Migration diplomacy spans a continuum between cooperation and coercion highlighting mutually beneficial agreements as well as the use of migration flows to punish the actor that does not meet demands. Indeed, the difference between the two is often blurred (Tsourapas, 2017). Moreover, CEM and migration instrumentalization are used interchangeably throughout the literature emphasizing the induction, manipulation, or exploitation of migration flows by state or NSAs for political, economic, or military ends. To achieve their aim, actors either attempt political blackmail or to overwhelming the capacity of the target state (Greenhill, 2010; Monika Sie Dhian Ho, 2022). Due to its realist foundation, migration diplomacy singles out the interest and power of state actors. Therefore, migration diplomacy does not comply with a central component of this thesis – non-state actors; henceforth, I will use the concept of CEM. However, all three concepts are included in the literature review in order to provide a comprehensive overview of the fundamental works.

3.1 Migration as a Foreign Policy Tool

Using the definition provided by Hill (2015, 4), foreign policy is understood as “the sum of official external relations conducted by an independent actor (usually but not exclusively a state) in international relations.” Coercive engineered migration is not a new foreign policy tool; however, it has received little attention relative to the number of attempts and its effectiveness (Greenhill, 2010). Arguments for why it has been unrecognized vary; Greenhill (2010, 14) claimed the main reason is its nature as a camouflaged weapon used in settings of forced migration for other aims, while Teitelbaum (2015) suggested its academic residence at the intersection between two disciplines has caused it to be overlooked. Furthermore, academic journals used to focus on the effects of migrants on domestic politics rather than on its effect on foreign policy (Duncan, 2020). However, the growth of right-wing anti-migration parties and increased politicization of migration issues during the 1980s caused scholars (and
policymakers) to increasingly view migration through a security lens (Zhyznomirska, 2018, 202). Additionally, in an academic field otherwise dominated by realism, neorealism became increasingly influential enhancing the security aspects of migration. This caused new research agendas to emerge including securitization of migration, externalization of border control, and migration management (Liďák & Štefančík, 2022, 133).

The research agenda on migration as a foreign policy tool is concerned with the intersection between migration and international politics. Two of the pioneers attempting to conceptualize the connection between foreign policy and migration were Michael Teitelbaum (1984) and Myron Weiner (1985). Teitelbaum recognized the application of mass displacement as a tool to destabilize or embarrass adversaries and recommended American foreign policy to develop a contingency plan aimed at deterring “coerced emigration” (449). Even though Teitelbaum did not develop a concept for the phenomenon, he provided an important foundation. Weiner furthered the scholarship by suggesting the need for a security/stability framework for the study of migration as a foreign policy tool. The author also established the agency a sending state has over migration flows and the ability to use them as coercive measures (Teitelbaum, 1984; Weiner, 1993).

Early authors developed an important foundation. However, a comprehensive analysis of CEM along with significant development of its conceptualization was not provided until Kelly Greenhill published her book *Weapon of Mass Migration: Forced Displacement, Coercion, and Foreign Policy* in 2010. Her groundbreaking study identified more than 50 attempts of coercive engineered migration between 1951 and 2006 in which two-thirds were partly or fully successful (Greenhill, 2010). Her theory will be presented in detail in chapter four. Furthermore, Greenhill’s theory has been frequently cited in later research, especially after the European migration crisis in 2015. Her work has also encouraged further research; one distinct study was provided by Adamson and Tsurrapas (2019), and while recommunicating several aspects of Greenhill’s study, they added the aspect of withholding populations (rather than just sending) as an important foreign policy tool.

It is important to acknowledge the lack of diversity in this academic field concerning time settings, geographical contexts, and actors. The literature is dominated by analyses in a post-Cold War setting and overall, the impact of migration as a foreign policy tool preceding the 20th century remains to be explored. Arguably, it is not surprising as CEM is a relatively new
scholarly approach and interest in the concept truly took hold after 2015. However, the literature paints the picture of CEM being a 20th and 21st century phenomenon, while this still stands to be determined. Moreover, the literature is centered around European contexts. However, the field expresses a certain level of awareness and willingness to correct this tendency (Tolay, 2022, 361). Authors have analyzed countries such as Cuba (Kami, 2018), Moldova (Laube, 2019), Ethiopia (Geddes & Maru, 2020), China (Oyen, 2015), Egypt (Tsourapas, 2021; Völkel, 2022), Morocco (Fernández-Molina & Hernando De Larramendi, 2022; Kutz & Wolff, 2022; Norman, 2020), and Libya (Ceccorulli, 2022; Tsourapas, 2017). However, in a majority of these studies, the EU (or a European country) was a part of the analysis. Furthermore, relations between Türkiye and the EU, and particularly the EU- Türkiye Statement from 2016, is the most common setting in CEM literature (Bekić, 2022; Gökalp Aras, 2019a, 2019b; Greenhill, 2016). The overrepresentation of Türkiye in the literature is logical due to migration demographics and the consequences of the 2016 deal. Nevertheless, as migratory routes have shifted, the literature should explore other relationships to further the scholarship. Moreover, even though Greenhill (2010) stated that CEM is particularly compelling to NSAs, the literature does not reflect this claim. One reason is its conceptualization as state-centric; Adamson and Tsourapas referred to “state actions” and “state diplomatic aims” when conceptualizing migration diplomacy for their influential study. The authors recognized the monopoly of the state in world politics is diminishing; however, they argued it remains the central actor in regulating migration (Adamson & Tsourapas, 2019, 116). Additionally, I argue the exclusive focus on state actors in early works in the field has contributed to the methodological nationalism still dominating today. Furthermore, Europeanism may also have contributed to this development.

However, a few authors have attempted to broaden the literature on coercive engineered migration. Fakhry et al. (2022) concluded several different actors pose the threat of coercive engineered migration; strong states, weak states, proxy actors, and NSAs such as militias and smugglers are likely to use this weapon against the Union. Moreover, in a Gulf state setting, Malit and Tsourapas (2021) demonstrated the importance of strategies used by NSAs in migratory relations. Additionally, Roderick Parkes (2022) found that terrorist groups with roots in the Middle East and North Africa, for example, Daesh, pose the most obvious threat to the EU in exploiting migration flows for their own winning. Moreover, recognizing the state centrim in the literature, Tolay (2022, 372) suggests analyses should be broadened to include
the interests of migrants, refugees, displaced populations, and host communities. Arguably, Tolay missed the importance of ANSAs, such as militias and insurgent groups.

3.2 Non-State Actors in Foreign Policy

Traditionally, four types of actors have been identified in foreign policy: state actors, international actors, private actors, and transnational actors (Baumann & Stengel, 2014). For a long period, international relations were dominated by state action and the literature was state-centric. However, during the 1970s, other actors became important research subjects which introduced non-state actors in the literature. NSAs have become increasingly common in international relations challenging the international community with alternative methods compared to states (Kruck & Schneiker, 2017). Therefore, they are a crucial research subject in foreign policy.

The distinction between state and NSAs may be difficult and problematic. For example, non-state groups may provide ‘public’ functions and states may follow ‘private’ logic. Some scholars have used the definition of a state to outline an NSA as any actor who does not represent a sovereign state (Kruck & Schneiker, 2017). However, such a broad definition makes operationalization difficult. Other scholars have developed criteria to define NSAs. The dominant approach includes a capability for decision-making and an ability to implement them beyond states’ borders (Darwich, 2021, 3).

A leading strain of the literature focuses on violent non-state actors. Schneckener (2006, 25) defined ANSAs as those “1) willing and able to use violence for pursuing their objective; and 2) not integrated into formalized state institutions such as regular armies, presidential guards, police, or special forces.” The literature has established that NSAs have a significant impact on states’ foreign policy; however, more relevant for this thesis is the increasing evidence that NSAs also exert power in foreign relations (Baumann & Stengel, 2014, 490). Furthermore, a majority of the literature analyzing foreign policy of ANSAs is state-centric and focuses on civil wars, in particular, terrorism, insurgency, and rebel groups (Charountaki & Irrera, 2022). Additionally, ANSAs are often analyzed in the context of proxy relationships (Darwich, 2021).

The literature has largely ignored non-violent strategies performed by ANSAs. However, Charountaki and Irrera (2022, 7) identified that ANSAs primarily have three modes of
operation: violence, conventional and asymmetric power, and diplomacy. Denoted as rebel diplomacy, Coggins (2015, 107) highlighted that ANSAs engage in strategic communications with foreign actors and regimes. In the same manner, Pierman (2015) challenged realist assumptions arguing states, as well as ANSAs, are able to have a strategic culture; both have a leadership structure, a cultural, logical, and goal-oriented thought process, and a sense of shared identity, history, and ideas. Additionally, when studying weak states and non-state actors’ influence in international politics, Busby and Greenhill (2015) found evidence these actors use the power of norms as nonviolent instruments of persuasion to compensate for material shortcomings. The most common is to expose the stronger counterpart’s gaps between legal commitments and actual behavior.

3.3 Summary
This study builds upon literature on migration as a foreign policy tool and NSAs in foreign policy. In summary, both fields of inquiry are relatively new and lack diversity. Literature on weaponized migration is state-centered and lacks analysis of how NSAs use this foreign policy tool. Furthermore, studies on ANSAs have yet to expand on non-violent strategies. Against this backdrop, it seems relevant to explore how ANSAs use coercive engineered migration. Preceding, theoretical and methodological foundations will be presented.
4. THEORY

In order to understand non-state actors’ strategic use of migration as a foreign policy tool, I adopt a theoretical framework based on CEM and rebel diplomacy. This section first presents the foundations of Coercive Engineered Migration, a theory developed by Kelly Greenhill, to create an understanding of migration as a foreign policy tool. Second, Rebel Diplomacy is introduced to put CEM in a perspective of ANSAs’ strategic, non-violent interactions in foreign policy.

4.1 Coercive Engineered Migration

The theory of coercive engineered migration was first presented in *Weapon of Mass Migration: Forced Displacement, Coercion, and Foreign Policy* in 2010. Kelly Greenhill distinguished between four types of strategic engineered migration: dispossessive, exportive, militarized, and coercive. This thesis will focus on coercive engineered migration defined as “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). Coercive engineered migration is often embedded in strategic engineered migration for dispossessive, exportive, or militarized reasons. Hence, it is camouflaged, and the significance of the coercive dimensions has been underestimated (Ibid, 14). This thesis will use the general definition of coercion, which is also used in Kelly Greenhill’s theory. Coercion is understood as “the practice of inducing or preventing changes in political behavior through the use of threats, intimidation, or some other form of pressure” (Greenhill, 2010, 12).

CEM is used for various, and often multiple, motives; approximately 60 percent have political objectives, 30 percent military objectives, and 50 percent economic objectives (Greenhill, 2019, 265). The existing research is state-centric; therefore, these numbers do not necessarily apply to NSAs. However, ANSAs are often driven by the struggle for international recognition (political motive) and to gain funds and resources for their end goal (economic or military motive) (Darwich, 2021; Coggins, 2015). Hence, there is reason to believe non-state actors’ fundamental motives are similar to those of state actors, but with different driving factors. Moreover, in her groundbreaking study, Greenhill (2010) found well over half of the CEM attempts were successful. Given the success rate, the tool is particularly compelling to weak state and NSAs who lack the resources to gain influence using conventional methods (Greenhill, 2010).
The foundation of CEM is the action of a challenger to generate, manipulate, or exploit migration flows against a target. **Targets** are those actors exposed to coercive engineered migration (Greenhill, 2010, 42-43). Moreover, the **challenger** is the actor who attempts coercive engineered migration. There are three different types of challengers who engage in CEM: **generators**, **agent provocateurs**, and **opportunists**. **Generators** create, or threaten to create, migration flows unless the target concedes to the demands of the challenger. Typically, this is a weak, undemocratic actor who lacks the resources to gain influence with more conventional methods. **Agent Provocateurs** incentivize, or in other indirect ways, act to generate outflows of migrants. Like Generators, Agent Provocateurs are often illegitimate and less powerful; however, they claim their means justify their ends (e.g., autonomy or independence). These actors often seek international support due to their lack of resources (Greenhill, 2010, 23). Agent Provocateurs may also threat (and aim) to turn a small numbered outflow into crisis through lobbying or publicizing enemies (Ibid, 28). **Opportunists** are passive exploiters of existing migration flows generated by others. Historically, these actors have been both strong and weak, democratic and illegitimate. Opportunists exploit an existing crisis to enhance their own goals (Greenhill, 2010, 30-31).

There are an infinite number of diverse methods employed by CEM actors including, but not limited to, hostile threats, use of military force, positive inducements, financial incitements, and opening of borders that normally are closed (Greenhill, 2010, 13). Citing Byman and Waxman’s book *Dynamic of Coercion*, Greenhill argued the most common mechanisms used when manipulating a target are to threaten a target government’s relationship with its core supporters (power-based erosion), create a popular dissatisfaction with the political leadership in the target state (unrest), and debilitate a state as a whole (weakening) (Greenhill, 2010, 37-38). Byman included an additional mechanisms that is interesting in terms of CEM: to convince the target future benefits are unattainable through chosen strategy (denial) (Byman, 2002, 59-82). Greenhill argued denial is off the table due to the non-military foundation of CEM. She claimed only power-based erosion, unrest, and weakening are applicable which all rely on a ‘coercion by punishment’ strategy in which challengers aim to convince political leaders in the target state to concede to their demands by creating a crisis in which the political costs of resistance are too high (Greenhill, 2010, 37-38). However, due to the exploratory nature of this study, denial will be included in the analysis (see Table 1, Chapter 5). It is important to
recognize challengers often try to trigger more than one of the mechanisms at the same time (Byman, 2002, 50-51).

Migration crises tend to create division in heterogeneous political societies. Some will offer strong support for human rights and refugee protection while others will form anti-migration camps. Particular to liberal democracies, the tension between international obligation and domestic opinions has given rise to what Greenhill referred to as hypocrisy costs – “symbolic political costs that can be imposed when there exists a real (or perceived) disparity between a professed commitment to liberal values and/or international norms, and demonstrated state actions that contravene such a commitment” (Greenhill, 2010, 52). When trapped between normative (and legal) commitment to protecting refugees and a domestic electorate affected by anti-migration rhetoric, liberal political leaders are vulnerable to coercion. Moreover, if a challenger can make a migration crisis disappear, and thereby limit the hypocrisy costs, it will be tempting to accept the demands. Indeed, evidence suggests targets often do concede, at least partly, to challengers demands (Greenhill, 2002, 107-108).

Nevertheless, CEM is only successful when the negative effects of an outflow of migration are domestically salient, in other words, visible and perceived critical by the target state’s population. Greenhill claimed “the measure of salience of a refugee crisis is how much political damage failure to end it with alacrity will do to a leader in the short run, or to his/her legacy in the longer term” (Greenhill, 2002, 109). Further, the author found the salience of a migration crisis is dependent upon the endurance in time and size of the crisis, its geographical proximity, the target’s involvement in provoking the crisis, the ethnic affinity between the refugees and the target state, and the geostrategic significance of the migration crisis. When some or all these factors apply, the target state’s vulnerability to CEM increases (Ibid, 110).

Finally, ANSAs viewed as illegitimate by the international community, “have little left to lose” in creating or exploiting a migration crisis for their winning. In fact, a crisis is often necessary for this type of actor to force negotiations with a more powerful actor; in the face of a crisis, a stronger party may negotiate with actors they previously were unwilling to talk to. Following the generation of a crisis, the weaker part gains the upper hand by having the possibility of making it disappear in exchange for financial or political payoffs (Greenhill, 2010, 29-30).
4.2 Rebel Diplomacy

In the book *Rebel Governance in Civil War* Bridget Coggins (2015) examined how ANSAs, here denoted ‘rebels,’ use strategic communication in external relations. In Coggin’s work, rebel organizations were defined as:

consciously coordinated groups whose members engage in protracted violence with the intention of gaining undisputed political control over all or a portion of a pre-existing state's territory. They are rebels because they violently oppose the existing state government and/or any other rebel group. (Kasfir, 2015, 24)

Compared to this thesis’s definition of ANSAs (see Chapter 3), both definitions highlight these groups’ willingness and ability to use violence; however, the definition of rebels places an emphasis on opposition against another group. In the Libyan context, ANSAs use violence against the government they deem as adversary and the groups affiliated with it. Hence, the term ‘rebel’ is relevant for this analysis even though ‘armed non-state actor’ is used as a concept in the analysis.

The international system is state-centered; therefore, the traditional definition of diplomacy only includes state actors. ANSAs do not have access to common diplomatic actions like treaties, trade agreements, alliances under international law, international forums, and diplomatic privileges. If ANSAs are invited to participate in formal diplomacy, it is under the conditions of a state (Coggins, 2015, 99-101). Engaging diplomatically with rebels can be a politically sensitive issue (Huang, 2016).

Coggins defines rebel diplomacy as the engagement of rebels “in strategic communication with foreign government or agents, or with an occupying regime they deem foreign” (Coggins, 2015, 106). Rebels are often committed to their foreign policy and dedicate significant attention to their external relations. It is a tactical choice used by strong and weak groups alike. Actors who need international recognition in order to attain independent statehood as well as actors who organize domestically, for example, prove social services or create legal political bodies, are more likely to use rebel diplomatic tools (Huang, 2016). Coggins finds rebels use diplomacy for two main reasons. First, it is common for rebels to want to gain state control and, therefore, adopt state-like practices. Second, rebels seek to gain means and benefits from foreign partners (Coggins, 2015). Furthermore, Reyko Huang (2016) emphasizes rebels use
diplomacy to gain international legitimacy and seek international allies to discredit the state actor against which they are fighting.
5. METHOD

This thesis is underpinned by a qualitative neo-positivist design. It builds on archival and documentary material analyzed in a single case study through qualitative content analysis. Operationalization is based on works by Greenhill (2010), Byman (2002), and Coggins (2015).

5.1 Approach

The goal of this study is to explore the extent to which ANSAs use CEM and the state-centered context in which they use it. The events of coercive engineered migration are visible; war, violence, and oppression force people to flee their homes, leaving empty cities in ruins behind them. In search of a new home, flows of migrants are created, manipulated, and exploited by actors for their own gain. The evidence of this study will retell these events of coercive engineered migration; therefore, an objective understanding of reality governed by probabilistic laws in which theories are used to understand the case will be applied. Neo-positivism rests its ontological beliefs on mind-world dualism, thus, understanding reality as existing independently of the human mind (Jackson, 2016, 41-42). Reality is understood through the senses; therefore, true knowledge can only be gained through observations (Ibid, 60). For consistency throughout this thesis, the neo-positivist epistemology will guide the choice of material, methodology, and analysis.

Finding causal relationships in political science is nearly impossible due to the non-predictable nature of human behavior. Therefore, as a methodology in social sciences, neo-positivism meets criticism regarding its claim of generalizable, context-free explanations of social phenomena disregarding potential beliefs and biases (Harding, 1986, 227-229; Jackson, 2016, 69-70). However, neo-positivistic research acknowledges that while the real material world exists, knowledge is often socially conditioned and open to challenge and reinterpretation (Della Porta & Keating, 2008, 24). As such, researchers ought to settle for probabilistic causal relationships and accept the varying degree of control over situational beliefs and biases due to social sciences’ inherent dependency on historical data belonging to particular contexts (Harding, 1986, 227-229; Jackson, 2016, 69-70). Despite its inherent limitation, this thesis is founded on neo-positivism because it aims to further establish the use of migration as a foreign policy tool by ANSAs as an important research agenda. By broadening the field, I also allow for advancement in generalization and theory building within coercive engineered migration.
Due to the exploratory nature of this thesis, I use an abductive approach; hence, the theoretical framework provides a foundation guiding my research questions and analysis (Janiszewski & van Osselaer, 2021). An abductive approach is particularly well suited for this project because it makes do with incomplete data or lack of information. Previous explanations and known rules found in theory and previous literature on CEM and ANSAs are used to determine possible data. Based on available data, I form hypotheses and provide a conclusion that is a best guess. Abductive reasoning allows me to bridge the gap between what is already known in CEM and NSA literature and the new information that I wish to obtain. Though less certain, it is a valuable tool for scientific inquiry (Franceschetti, 2017). Moreover, the abductive approach allowed me to add rebel diplomacy to the theoretical framework at a later stage in the research process to get a more nuanced analysis of ANSAs’ attempts at CEM.

5.2 A Single Case Study
Case studies are employed in a variety of social science research and are diverse in results, characteristics, and objectives. A case is defined as “a phenomenon, or an event, chosen, conceptualized, and analyzed empirically as a manifestation of a broader class of phenomena or events” (Vennesson, 2008, 226). Cases do not exist until the researcher makes a case through delimiting, defining, and describing. A case study enables in-depth empirical investigation to develop and evaluate theoretical explanations (Ibid, 226-230). The theory of CEM is based on Greenhill’s large-N quantitative research. Thereafter, Greenhill and other authors have complemented the field with qualitative research to test and improve the theory. However, qualitative research on ANSAs’ use of CEM is lacking. As such this thesis aims to add to the current literature by doing a qualitative single case study uncovering the use of migration as a foreign policy tool by ANSAs in Libya.

Single case studies are often criticized for not being generalizable. However, generalization is only one of a range of practical skills carried out in scientific work; it is only one of many ways knowledge is produced. Case studies are heuristically important, especially when establishing a research agenda (George, 2005). Particularly, case studies produce context dependent knowledge necessary for expert activity; it is inadequate to only study context-independent facts and rules (Flyvbjerg, 2006). Furthermore, a case study may be particularly prone to be affected by the author’s biases. The author must understand the issue before proceeding to the case study and this understanding may unwillingly point the author towards supportive
evidence (Yin, 2014). To the contrary, Flyvbjerg (2006) concludes case studies actually have a greater bias towards falsification than towards verification. Thus, to avoid biased conclusions, this thesis will include all relevant evidence, regardless of its verification or falsification of the theoretical hypotheses. Ultimately, I remain conscious of the pitfalls of using a single case-study method.

5.3 Case Selection

Case selection is an integral part of the research process. There are several ways to proceed; this thesis applies a strategic case selection based on theoretical characteristics (Ruffa, 2020, 1139). Moreover, in the EU’s efforts to externalize migration, it has partnered with several countries from which migrants origin and or transit through. There is evidence several of these countries have applied coercive mechanisms in their use of migration as a foreign policy tool. A majority of the literature details actions by Türkiye, who used conditionality and open threats against the EU during the migration crisis in 2015 (Gökalp Aras, 2019a). Some attention has also been paid to Belarus which created a humanitarian crisis at the Polish border in order to destabilize the EU in 2021 (Greenhill, 2022, 155). Additionally, some scholars have highlighted Morocco’s weaponization of migrations against Spain in retaliation for a political move in 2021(K. Greenhill, 2021). Libyan attempts of CEM have been analyzed by several authors; however, the focus has been placed on Gaddafi’s repeated use of migrants to coerce the EU for various purposes and the EU’s efforts to cooperate (Ceccorulli, 2022; Tsourapas, 2017). Thus, the literature lacks an in-depth analysis of ANSAs attempts at CEM against Europe.

For the exploratory purpose of this thesis, thus, to provide a foundation for new explanations, I have selected a deviant case. In reference to the literature on migration as a foreign policy tool, the contextual factors in Libya stand out, thus, making it a deviant case. In comparison to state-centered analyses, a case study of Libya allows for the theoretical framework to be applied in an NSA context (Seawright & Gerring, 2008). Furthermore, there are primarily four reasons that make the Libyan case stand out from other states in which CEM has been attempted against the EU. First, since the fall of Gaddafi in 2011, no authority has been able to control the state and its population in its entirety. The state is politically fragmented and controlled by rival governments along with ANSAs. Thus, the state does not have a monopoly on controlling population flows across their borders giving access to various ANSAs to incentivize,
manipulate, and exploit migrants. This makes an interesting addition to the state-centered literature. Second, evidence indicates ANSAs in Libya have attempted CEM against Europe, at the same time, the lack of economic opportunities suggests migration was orchestrated for economic reasons. Studying the strategic orchestration of migration flows for coercive purposes within a context where smuggling is an integral part of the dominating illicit economy will provide additional nuances. Third, in Libya, both state and ANSAs have used migration as a foreign policy tool which provides a foundation for analyzing the different preconditions in which various actors attempt CEM. A comparison between a state actor with diplomatic status and ANSAs without it operating within the same context will reveal important differences. Fourth, one of the main migration routes to Europe transits through Libya and the current trend indicates an increased arrival of migrants in the upcoming years. Therefore, from an EU perspective, it is important to conduct empirics on weaponized migration along this route. Thus, Libya is a fitting case for challenging the realist assumption of state-centrism and further establishing the use of migration as a foreign policy tool by ANSAs as an important research agenda.

Additionally, it is important to define spatial, temporal, and other boundaries in a case study. This thesis employs a holistic single-case design; in other words, it involves units of analysis on a single level. The primary reason for this design is the holistic nature of the theoretical framework (Yin, 2014, 55). The unit of analysis is armed non-state groups, which is limited to include ANSAs in Libya that in this study are identified to have attempted CEM against the EU, or EU member states. Furthermore, previous literature has proved dictator Muammar al-Qaddafi who ruled Libya between 1969 and 2011 repeatedly used CEM against the EU. However, the extent to which ANSAs have continued this practice after his fall remains to be determined. Therefore, the temporal scope of this thesis is limited to include identified attempts of CEM between 2011 and 2023.

5.4 Evidence and Limitations
Coercive engineered migration is by default a camouflaged foreign policy tool. Recognizing the challenge in identifying data on attempts to use this secretive weapon in a fragmented, autocratic context, this thesis engages in ambitious data collection using evidence from a multitude of sources. Using data and investigator triangulation allows for multiple measures and the development of converging lines of inquiry (Yin, 2014, 55).
The material used in this thesis is documentary information and archival records. Vital material has been retrieved from independent think tanks, independent civil society organizations, centers of expertise, major news outlets, international organizations, and a few academic journals. Primarily, announcements, government publications, written reports of events, progress reports, formal studies, and news reports are used. The records are retrieved through systematic internet searches and library archives. Primary search terms include “migration flow,” “migration route,” “migration cooperation,” “migration diplomacy,” “migration as a weapon,” “migration instrumentalization,” “anti-trafficking,” “coercion,” “coercive engineered migration,” “demand,” “extortion,” “blackmail,” “Haftar,” “militia,” “smuggling,” “trafficking,” “support,” and “funding.”

Documentary and archival information are stable sources that can be viewed repeatedly. They are unobtrusive, meaning evidence is not created as a result of the case study. Moreover, they can be broad as well as specific; records contain long periods, many events, and several settings while also covering exact names, references, and details of an event. While being useful, documentary and archival information may be difficult to retrieve or access. Additionally, the selection of the evidence may be biased, and the reporting or documentation of an event may be partial. Particularly, data concerning ANSAs may be prone to hidden agendas. Therefore, it is important to understand the records used for this thesis were written for a purpose other than this case study. Hence, as a researcher, I am a vicarious observer of this evidence. Throughout the research process, identifying the objectives behind the different documents will mitigate the likelihood of incorrect use of identified evidence. This is pursued through careful selection of sources; a main emphasis has been placed on material retrieved from politically independent foreign policy think tanks and organizations in Europe, and international organizations (Kruck & Schneiker, 2017, 4; Yin, 2014, 106-108).

---

3 For example, the Netherlands Institute of International Relations, the Italian Institute for International Political Studies, the French Institute of International Relations, the Brussels International Center, and the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR).
4 For example, the Institute for Security Studies, the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, and the Atlantic Council.
5 For example, the Foundation for Strategic Research and the European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats.
NSAs in foreign policy are a particularly challenging object to study due to their non-state status and the characteristics of the environments they operate. The ideal scholarly environment requires freedom, strong institutions, unbiased reporting, etc. Yet, ANSAs often operate in conflict settings with low state capacity and a lack of records. Hence, reliable and comparable data are often nonexistent or inaccessible and scholars depend on the limited extent of official documents and other archival records. Additionally, political sensitivity, high stakes, and the non-transparency of migration as a foreign policy tool further complicates access to reliable data. Indeed, official records are scarce on issues that are inherently disguised. However, these challenges are not limited to studies of ANSAs in migratory relations; most studies aiming to capture international security, conflict, or, indeed, camouflaged foreign policy tools, face these challenges, including those studies focusing on state actors (Kruck & Schneiker, 2017; Tokdemir & Akcinaroglu, 2022, 174). Yet, the presented challenges have not prevented academic studies of state activity in inaccessible environments; hence, it should not limit an expansion of the field to include ANSAs. Evidence from conflict contexts is by its nature imperfect. Regardless, this data is needed to analyze foreign policy processes at a point in time when ANSAs have an increasing influence.

There are no straightforward solutions to overcome the lack of reliable and comparable data. However, an important foundation is a clearly defined object of study guided by accessible data. Having the use of CEM by ANSAs in Libya against the EU as the main point of inquiry, I focus on the orchestration, strategic, and coercive dimensions of this weapon and the preconditions under which it is used. This has (partly) been documented, primarily in reports by European think tanks, expertise centers, and media outlets. In addition, I use all available data, however, with caution. Reports, formal studies, and working papers provide data on specific events, and news articles provide statements by individuals, groups, and countries. Archival records from EU countries provide important information on the responses. Fieldwork including interviews would have provided this study with additional data with high reliability; however, time and financial limitations of this master’s thesis impeded such a possibility. Given these research challenges, choosing an appropriate method and applying it productively becomes even more critical.
5.5 Operationalization

The general analytical strategy of this thesis is to follow its theoretical propositions to link case study data to the central concepts. The structure of the qualitative content analysis is to analyze the material to find support for the proposed and alternative explanations using the indicators specified below (Yin, 2014, 136).

The analysis will be performed in three phases. First, a foundation will be established by analyzing whether ANSAs generated migration flows strategically. The operationalization is based on Greenhill’s comprehensive study from 2010. Second, the coercive dimensions of these flows will be analyzed. Greenhill (2010) as well as Byman (2002) provide the foundation for this operationalization. Third, preconditions under which ANSAs attempt to use migration as a foreign policy tool will be analyzed. It is operationalized through Coggin’s (2015) work on rebel diplomacy.

Figure 1: Overview of operationalization

Phase 1. Did ANSAs strategically generate migration flows?

Phase 2. What coercive mechanisms did ANSAs use?

Phase 3. Under what preconditions were CEM by ANSAs attempted?

Phase 1

In phase one I will analyze the strategic dimension of migration flows. Specifically, I will answer the question, were flows of migration (largely) orchestrated between Libya and Europe between 2011 and 2023? Indicators include testimonies and statements from migrants, and the timing, size, and destination(s) of the migration flows. The alternative explanation provides migration was driven by other causes and controlled by the migrants themselves. Furthermore, if the alternative explanation is proven false and flows, indeed, were orchestrated, the next step is to analyze whether the generation of migration flows was strategic. Indicators include challengers’ statements about the intent, and timing, size, and destination of population movements. The alternative explanation reads migration flows were intentional (and controlled by the challenger) but driven by other motivations (Greenhill, 2010, 21).
To further the analysis, challengers will be identified in accordance with Greenhill’s theory. Indicators for *Generators* include (the threat of) directly creating migration flows. Indicators for *Agents Provocateurs* include actions designed to incite others to generate outflows, behaviors stimulating migration movements, encouragement of outflow, and (threat to) turn small-scale migration into full-scale migration crisis. Indicators for *Opportunist* include (threat to) close borders thereby creating a humanitarian crisis, offers to alleviate the existing crisis in exchange for concession, or in other ways manipulating/exploiting an existing crisis to their advantage (Greenhill, 2010, 23-31).

**Phase 2**

The next phase focuses on the coercive dimensions of the generated migration flows. The fundamental question to answer is: was the generated migration flow (largely) orchestrated, strategic, and coercive? Indicators for the coercive element include threats or demands issued, challenger testimony, congruence between timing and execution of threats that appear related to targets’ responses, and target testimony that indicates a belief that coercion was attempted. The alternative explanation reads the population outflow was strategic but was not designed to include concessions from the target (Greenhill, 2010, 21). Furthermore, this phase includes an analysis of coercive mechanisms specified in Table 1.

**Table 1: Coercive mechanisms.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method of Coercion</th>
<th>Goal of coercion</th>
<th>Target of coercion</th>
<th>Coercive strategy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Power-based erosion</strong></td>
<td><em>(Threat to)</em> undermine political leadership among its core supporters.</td>
<td>Group of individuals whose support is necessary to remain in power (core constituents and individuals who shape public opinion).</td>
<td>Generate dissatisfaction among core supporters.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Unrest</strong></td>
<td><em>(Threat to) create popular disaffection.</em></td>
<td>Large segments of, or the whole population.</td>
<td>Punish civilians or increase the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Weakening</strong></td>
<td>Debilitating the country as a whole.</td>
<td>Infrastructure, communications, economic strength, and/or social cohesion.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Denial</strong></td>
<td>Strategy for victory.</td>
<td>Exploit vulnerabilities in the target’s strategy for victory – make the target’s strategy fail.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table created by the author (Byman, 2002, 59-82).

**Phase 3**

Phase three will analyze the preconditions under which ANSAs attempt migration as a foreign policy tool. A comparison between formal and rebel diplomacy will highlight the exclusive conditions under which ANSAs perform foreign policy. Indicators for formal diplomacy include negotiations between two equal parts (state and state) that see each other as equal under the law, prerequisites for who is empowered to negotiate, legally binding decisions, and the ability to commit to decisions. Foundational indicators for rebel diplomacy are the same as for traditional diplomacy but are made negative. The alternative explanation provides all actors operate under the same preconditions (Coggins, 2015).
6. CASE ANALYSIS

During two time periods, 2014-2017 and 2020-2023 this thesis identified several attempts of coercive engineered migration by ANSAs in Libya against Europe. Evidence suggests that ANSAs were given legitimacy and concessions in return for stopping migrant crossings over the Mediterranean. Before turning to an in-depth analysis of the attempts, it is important to consider the important actors in this setting.

6.1 Actors

Since the start of the civil war, Libya has been a fragmented state. After the elections in 2012, the transitional government General National Congress (GNC) was formed in Tripoli. In new elections in June 2014, the House of Representatives (HoR) was elected. However, the GNC refused to accept the legitimacy of the HoR, and clashes between its supporters broke out in the capital. As a result, the HoR relocated to Tobruk in the eastern part of the country controlled by General Haftar. The GNC reformulated as the Government of National Salvation (GNS); both the HoR and GNS claimed to be the rightful government. Following a year of low-level civil conflict, a UN-sponsored national dialogue resulted in the formation of the Government of National Accords (GNA) in 2016. The GNA was headed by Fayez al-Sarray and it was internationally recognized as Libya’s legitimate government (Akamo et al., 2023). Following the intensified conflict in 2019 and 2020, the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum (LPDF) established the Government of National Unity (GNU) headed by Abd al-Hamid Dabaiba who at the point of writing remains the internationally recognized leader of the state (Horsley & Gerken, 2022). Despite repeated international attempts to unify a fragmented Libya, it remains divided between two rival governments claiming legitimacy (Akamo et al., 2023). Additionally, through the civil conflict, many ANSAs have claimed power in local communities. For the purpose of this study, I will focus on groups that in this study have been identified as attempting CEM against the EU.

General Khalifa Haftar, a former member of Qaddafi’s military, emerged as a leader unifying anti-Islamist forces after the dictator’s fall (Akamo et al., 2023). In 2014, Haftar formed his military force known as the Libyan National Army (LNA), an alliance of tribal or regional-based armed groups or militias. In central and eastern Libya, the group maintains various degrees of control (see Figure 2) (Ntaka & Csicsmann, 2021). In eastern Libya, Haftar and the LNA have monopolized security as well as the formal and informal economy. Hence, Haftar
is an important player in human trafficking. In the first half of 2023, Haftar contributed to 60 percent of the illicit trafficking from Libya to Italy (Saini Fasanotti & El Gomati, 2023). Moreover, the LNA first attracted international support when it successfully expelled Islamist militias from Benghazi (Fraioli, 2020). When Haftar in 2019 attempted to realize his ambition to take full control over Libya and launched an offensive against Tripoli, he gained support from the Wagner Group. However, even with international backing, including France, Egypt, and the United Arab Emirates, Haftar was forced to retreat. (Akamo et al., 2023; Fraioli, 2020). Haftar also has a close partnership with Russia and Vladimir Putin (Wintour, 2017).

Figure 2: Map of over main cities and areas of control.
controlled critical state infrastructure and have received direct payments from the state (Ntaka & Csicsmann, 2021). The Libyan Coastguard have operated under the GNA Ministry of Defense; however, in effect, various militias control its actions (Liga, 2018). Regarding international support, when General Haftar’s forces advanced towards the capital in 2019, Türkiye intervened in favor of al-Sarraj (Akamo et al., 2023). The GNA also received military aid from Italy and Qatar (Robinson, 2020).

The former tyrannic rule by Qaddafi benefitted ANSAs after his fall. A fractured political landscape, a weak state infrastructure, and manipulation of tribal, regional, and political groups allowed for the empowerment of ANSAs in the dictator’s absence. Ntaka and Csicsmann (2021) found the general concern of these groups was the inclusion in the state’s power center. Rather than competing with the ruling government, their main objective has “been to leverage politics by accessing and controlling state resources and apparatuses” (Ntaka & Csicsmann, 2021, 634). Indeed, ANSAs have gained control over state functions, primarily the Coastguard, and thereby used migrants for political purposes to gain leverage on Europe. Fakhry et al. (2022, 14) claimed the modus operandi for ANSAs in Libya “is to push clandestine migration flows into public awareness in order to effect political changes.” This thesis will proceed to analyze the use of migrants in foreign policy by ANSAs in Libya after the fall of Gaddafi.

6.2 Phase 1: Generating Flows of Migrants

6.2.1 Migration Crisis in Europe

In general, a migrant needs a smuggler to pass through Libya. Migrant smuggling is rooted in the Libyan history and trafficking is a vital pillar of the Libyan economy. Following the fall of Qaddafi, smuggling networks have greatly expanded; chaos, violence, and lawlessness provided an ideal setting for the illicit economy and human smuggling to flourish (Micallef & Reitano, 2017; El Kamouni-Janssen, 2017). The demand for the smuggling business increased with conflicts, repression, terrorism, and lack of opportunity in home countries. Following the Arab Spring, regimes that had cooperated with the EU on border control collapsed, and conflict arose in the region forcing people to flee their homes (Moffa & Maddaloni, 2019). The flow of migrants from Syria aiming to reach Europe opened up the smuggling market in Libya even more. Smugglers seeking quick revenues were strikingly involved in extending the migration route to Europe. Thus, before the height of the migration crisis, population flows were generated by other causes but allowed smugglers to benefit (El Kamouni-Janssen, 2017, 8).
The timing, size, and destination do not unambiguously suggest migration flows at this time were orchestrated to gain leverage against Europe. Yet, with the duration of the migration crisis, the driving factors changed.

The supply side of the smuggling networks has shown the ability to respond to new realities with a changing domestic context within Libya and international efforts to counter migration from Libya (El Kamouni-Janssen, 2017, 30). Italy’s first search-and-rescue mission in 2013, fundamentally changed the smuggling operations across the Mediterranean Sea. Instead of aiming for the Italian shore, unseaworthy boats were filled with migrants aiming for international waters where smugglers relied on Italian Naval ships to rescue migrants and bring them to Italy. This allowed smugglers to increase the number of trafficked migrants; the business became even more lucrative and they started to actively recruit migrants to send overseas (El Kamouni-Janssen, 2017, 33). Evidently, in 2014, the number of border crossings reached a new record, and the worst refugee crisis in Europe since the Second World War had arrived. Through the Central Mediterranean route, in which Libya is the main coast of departure, 170,000 migrants arrived in 2014 and almost 154,000 migrants made the crossing to Europe in 2015 (see Figure 3). An additional 3,400 people in 2014 and 3,770 people in 2015 died or went missing at sea (Frontex, 2015, 2016). At the beginning of 2016, countries along the Western Balkan corridor adopted a joint migrant registration system and placed fences and military along its borders effectively closing the route. Additionally, the EU-Turkey Summit agreement signed on March 7 halted migrants on the Eastern Mediterranean Route (Župarić-Ilić & Valenta, 2019). Consequently, more migrants tried to reach Europe through the Central Mediterranean Route which, in 2016, resulted in the highest number of detected migrants, more than 180,000 people (Frontex, n.d.).
Figure 3: Migrant Crossings on the Central Mediterranean Route.

When the Syrian flow of migrants decreased, smugglers actively recruited Sub-Saharan Africans living in Libya which lifted the power of the smuggling networks to new levels (El Kamouni-Janssen, 2017, 8). Additionally, the line between smuggling and trafficking has been thin in Libya. Kidnapping of migrants has been widespread; they have been taken to detention centers or forced to get on a boat. A migrant told the Netherland Institute of International Relations, “No one in his right mind would get on that rubber boat with 110 people. But with a gun at your back? It was the only choice I had” (El Kamouni-Janssen, 2017, 17). Fieldwork suggests up to 40 percent of migrants have been forced onto boats, as such, many did not travel to Europe on their own account (El Kamouni-Janssen, 2017, 18-19). Thus, active recruitment of migrants already in Libya and testimonies indicating the migration was not controlled by the migrants themselves suggest the migration flows during the height of the migration crisis were orchestrated.
Furthermore, the heartland in human smuggling to Europe was during the migration crisis the northwestern coastline (from Zuwara eastwards to Tripoli) and in June 2016, operation Sophia’s mandate was extended to include training of the Libyan Coastguard and Navy operating in this area (Council of the EU, 2016). While officially assisting the GNA with activities combatting irregular migration, evidence suggests the Coastguard, controlled by various militias, aided human smugglers (El Kamouni-Janssen, 2017, 16). Thus, the opportunity to act as ‘gatekeepers’ emerged for the Libyan Coastguard. The Institute for Security Studies (ISS) concluded a high risk of supporting ‘gatekeepers’ who “fulfill specific donor priorities yet are unable to cooperate” (Herbert, 2019). Indeed, documentation implies that boats from the smaller smugglers were targeted by the Coastguards while boats from smuggling kingpins were ignored (El Kamouni-Janssen, 2017, 19). During the same period, the EU-Türkiye deal saliently expressed the Union’s commitment to halting the flows, and how far it was willing to go in conceding to demands. This gave other actors, including ANSAs in Libya, incentives to use migration as a foreign policy tool. Thus, the timing also suggests migration flows were orchestrated.

The history of smuggling, a state in chaos, and the lack of economic opportunities in Libya provide an alternative explanation suggesting economic incentives could have been the only reason for orchestrating migrant crossings over the Mediterranean Sea. However, adding to the analysis Pierman’s (2015) argument of ANSAs’ ability to have a strategic culture, along with Coggins’ (2015) theory of rebel diplomacy claiming that the same actors are committed to their foreign policy gives fruit to the strategic dimension of the orchestration of the migration flows. Taken together, active recruitment of migrants, forced departures, and the timing aligning EU concessions in return for halting large flows of migration suggests that ANSAs orchestrated migration flows to strategically put pressure on Europe. However, this assumption is best confirmed by a challenger’s statement of intent, towards which further research should be dedicated.

Furthermore, suggesting flows from Libya to Europe were strategically orchestrated is not to reject the importance of conflict, repression, and the fall of EU-cooperative regimes following the Arab Spring. Large migration flows heading towards Europe during this period were indeed ejected by causes other than orchestration. However, as evidence suggests, ANSAs not only allowed smugglers to operate in the areas they controlled but also facilitated the active recruitment of migrants who in many cases were forced onto unseaworthy boats. Thus,
indicators for CEM suggest orchestration was applied to already ejected flows. In other words, ANSAs can largely be categorized as *Agent Provocateurs* indirectly generating an outflow of migrants by allowing smugglers to operate in areas they controlled. Moreover, specifically analyzing the Coastguard operated by various ANSAs, they acted as *Agent Provocateurs* when simply allowing migrants to pass. In addition, these ANSAs also actively assisted human smugglers, particularly the powerful kingpins; thus, they acted as *Generators* when actively creating flows of migrants.

### 6.2.2 Restored Flows, New Methods

Strategic orchestration of migration flows from Libya to Europe by ANSAs did not only occur during the migration crisis. In April 2023, a Frontex Intelligence report revealed smuggling groups had chartered flights from Damascus luring migrants to reach Europe through a boat crossing from Libya to Italy. Data suggest 363 flights were conducted by Cham Wings between Syria and Benghazi between January 2020 and June 2023. With an average of 150 migrants per flight, a total of 54,300 migrants were smuggled to Libya onboard flights during this period. Cham Wing was blacklisted by the EU following its role in illegal crossing between Belarus and Poland in 2021. However, the sanctions were lifted in July 2022 (Engerer, 2023). Moreover, the use of chartered flights clearly indicates migration has been used as a foreign policy tool strategically orchestrating flows to put pressure on the EU. Migrants have actively been recruited in other parts of the world through advertisements of a “guaranteed 100%” secure journey to Italy (Elsobky, 2023). This is a method allowing ANSAs to recruit migrants that would otherwise not have taken the migratory route through Libya, or not have tried to reach Europe at all, and to speed up the time from origin, through transit, to destination. Thus, chartered flights allow a larger flow of migrants from Libya heading towards Europe, thus, creating a higher pressure on their target. No specific ANSAs has been found to administer the flights. Yet, this method has only been adopted in Benghazi which is controlled by Haftar and the LNA (Sansone, 2023). Furthermore, evidence suggests Haftar issued specific security clearances to enable smugglers to operate along this route (Elsobky, 2023). Indeed, with no clear evidence of direct involvement in the flights, the LNA has acted as *Agent Provocateurs* incentivizing migration flows by allowing smugglers to use infrastructure and operate in the area they control.
Additionally, in another case concerning restored migrant flows, ANSAs linked to the LNA and Haftar were found to actively assist migrants transiting through Eastern Libya to reach Italy. In October and November 2022, a large increase in boats arriving at Italian shores was recorded with a majority originating from the Cyrenaica region in eastern Libya, controlled by Haftar and the LNA. The route that once had represented only a marginal portion of migratory departures, accounted for most arrivals in Italy during this time (Kaval, 2022). This development continued in 2023. As of late March 2023, at least 10,628 migrants had arrived in Italy during the first three months of the year, an increase of 152 percent from 4,207 migrants during the same period in 2022. At least half of the migrants had departed from Cyrenaica (Agenzia Nova, 2023). The reopening of the migratory route was facilitated by the controlling powers in Cyrenaica; however, carried out by ANSAs linked to Haftar and the LNA (Ibid; Kaval, 2022). Again, the LNA acted as Agent Provocateurs, and the ANSAs with connections to Haftar acted as Generators.

In contrast to arguing these migration flows were strategically orchestrated, some authors recognize alternative explanations. Villa and Pavia (2023) argued migration flows were restored due to the pandemic. Tourism-based economies crippled which pushed migrants to embark on the dangerous journey to Europe. However, whilst this is relevant for a country like Tunisia, tourism represents an insignificant part of the Libyan economy (Statista Research Department, 2023; World Bank Group, n.d.). Furthermore, Villa and Pavia (2023) also identified the effects of the Russian invasion of Ukraine as a driving factor of migration through Libya, emphasizing energy and food prices. Yet, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) reported the domestic price of gasoline was the second lowest in the world (3 cents per liter), and other energy prices also remained low following the invasion (International Monetary Fund, 2023). The food price only increased slightly7 (World Food Program Price Database, n.d.). Additionally, Horsley and Gerken (2022) argued the massive costs of the war in 2019 made the LNA turn to smuggling seeking to increase their revenue. However, this remains an allegation and facts are yet to be provided. Thus, identified alternative explanations fall short of identifying driving factors for restored migration flows.

---

Evidently, ANSAs’ mode of operation has changed since the beginning of the migration crisis until the present time. I have identified five fundamental changes between the first substantial flow of migrants in 2014-2017 and the second surge starting in 2020. First, the primary point of departure has shifted. During the migration crisis, departures were centered on the western shores of Libya. The second time around, departures have been more scattered over the coast and the dominant point of departure has moved to the Cyrenaica region controlled by Haftar and the LNA. Second, the buildup of migration flows has changed from very rapid, only a few months in 2014, to a slow escalation from April 2020 until the present time. Third, there is a difference in the composition of the nationalities of the migrants. During 2014-2017, 80 percent of irregular migrants were from sub-Saharan Africa. The restored flows since 2020 have been dominated by Tunisians and Egyptians. Fourth, the active policing of the shores has increased dramatically over time and the proportion of migrants being stopped trying to leave Libya is considerably higher during later years. Fifth, the type of boats attempting a crossing has changed indicating a shift in the actors involved. During the migration crisis, small, unseaworthy boats with less than 100 migrants onboard dominated the smuggling business in the Mediterranean. These types of boats are significant for opportunistic actors aiming for international water where they counted on Search and Rescue (SAR) missions to take the migrants to European shores. During the restored migration flows, larger and more rigid boats with more than 100 migrants onboard have prevailed indicating more sophisticated smuggling networks with a higher logistical ability (Horsley & Gerken, 2022; Villa & Pavia, 2023). Arguably, ANSAs’ strategic ability has allowed them to choose methods depending on domestic and international circumstances, therefore, their mode of operation has changed over time.

Summarizing phase 1, during 2014-2017, the flow of migrants using the central route increased exponentially when ANSAs in Libya saw the lucrative opportunity in smuggling people to international waters where SAR teams evacuated migrants to Italian shores. The active recruitment, testimonies of migrants forced onto boats, and the timing of EU concessions to other Mediterranean states suggest migration flows were strategically orchestrated. Starting in 2020, a majority of migrants departed from eastern Libya where Haftar and ANSAs allied with him facilitated chartered flights and actively assisted in smuggling efforts. The methods used clearly indicate orchestration was intentional; speeding up migration routes and increasing migration flows allowed Haftar and the LNA to put a higher pressure on their target.
6.3 Phase 2: Coercive Strategies

When a flow of migrants is generated, a challenger can offer to make the crisis disappear if the target state concedes to their demands. According to Greenhill’s theory, CEM is only successful when the negative effects are domestically salient. Furthermore, it will be particularly appealing for the target state to concede to coercive demands if the *hypocrisy costs* can be limited.

In 2015, approximately one million migrants reached Europe, and more migrants arrived in the years to come. With a xenophobic foundation, migrants were perceived as a threat reducing the standard of living. In many EU member states, the anti-migration rhetoric was strong, and the narratives were fed by right-wing ultranationalist parties. With such dominating discourses on the one side, and normative and legal obligations to protect refugees on the other side, the EU found itself trapped between a rock and a hard place. This gap was exploited by challengers attempting CEM against the EU and its member states (Greenhill, 2016). Furthermore, Italy is a key member state with its previous relations and its geographical proximity to Libya. With the crisis, migration became the second most important issue for Italians. Among EU member states in 2016, the most hostile view towards migrants was held by Italians (Holloway et al., 2021). Thus, Italy was dealing with a frustrated electorate. With a national election coming up in the spring of 2018, the government initiated contact with several ANSAs in Libya to mitigate migration (Micallef & Reitano, 2017, 17). Over the years, surveys indicate the issue of migration has become increasingly important for the European population (European Commission, 2021). Additionally, migration as a weapon has been highlighted by the Union. A proposal addressing the instrumentalization of migration is at the point of writing during its final stages of legislative adoption in the European Parliament (Orav, 2023).

6.3.1 Haftar and the LNA

Already from the beginning of the migration crisis, Haftar saw opportunities in the EU’s efforts to mitigate migration. On April 23, 2015, the European Council gathered for a special meeting concerning increased migration to the Union, and the tragic loss of lives at the Mediterranean Sea. European leaders committed to (1) strengthening their presence at sea, (2) fighting traffickers, (3) preventing illegal migration flows, and (4) reinforcing internal solidarity and responsibility (European Council, 2015). The following day, April 24, in an exclusive interview with CNN, General Haftar expressed he could cooperate with the EU on migration
issues: “If [EU authorities] take the right approach, we will certainly cooperate. The right approach will benefit Libya and its fight against terrorism. And I repeat, that means lifting sanctions against Libya – specifically those against the army” (Melvin, 2015). Haftar chose his words delicately setting the tone and pointing out his most valued concessions. He did not pose a clear threat in the interview; however, between the lines, it is evident he wanted to intimidate any cooperation between the EU and the government in Tripoli. This thesis does not find any evidence of his statement being successful in gaining leverage on the EU in 2015. However, it did provide a foundation for future leverage – and concessions.

Table 2: Haftar intimidation of cooperation between EU and official government.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>Target</th>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Denial</td>
<td>Cooperation with the EU on migration – gain resources and legitimacy</td>
<td>EU’s strategy of cooperation with the official government.</td>
<td>Intimidate cooperation between the official government and the EU.</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In February 2017, both Italy and the EU increased their measures of cooperating with Libya. Italy and the GNA signed the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the main objective of reducing the number of migrants departing from Libyan shores aiming to reach Italy. As actions to strengthen the Coastguard had already been taken, the agreement had few practical consequences apart from several ships handed over from Italy to the Coastguard (Varvelli & Villa, 2019). EU leaders agreed to support Italy in its implementation of the MoU, as well as provide support to the Libyan Coastguard, intensify efforts to disrupt smuggling, and allocate necessary funds for migration-related projects in Libya (European Council, 2017).

Haftar strongly opposed the MoU and when Italy in August 2017, began a naval mission in Libyan waters, Haftar threatened to confront Italian naval ships (Murphy, 2017). Following this threat, Italy reduced the number of ships included in the mission. Italy motivated its decision to scale back due to protests in Tripoli (Balmer, 2017). However, foregoing the official explanation, there is a possibility this was a successful use of coercion. Haftar used threats of attacking the Italian navy to prevent the success of the MoU. A threat of attack against the navy
is a threat to create popular disaffection (unrest) and it is a threat to debilitate the country as a whole by targeting a state institution (weakening). Additionally, it is a threat directed towards the target’s strategy to mitigate migration (denial). Haftar exploited vulnerabilities in implementing the MoU, and thereby prevented Italy from gaining the desired benefits out of the deal.

Table 3: Haftar opposition to MoU.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>Target</th>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unrest, Weakening, Denial</td>
<td>Prevent MoU success – gain resources and legitimacy.</td>
<td>Italian Navy, Strategy MoU, (population)</td>
<td>The threat of attack against the navy.</td>
<td>Reduced the number of ships in the mission.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Furthermore, incentivizing chartered flights and actively assisting migrants to cross the Mediterranean were strategically orchestrated attempts with coercive dimensions creating popular disaffection (unrest) and convincing Italy and the EU their strategy of cooperating with the GNA was failing (denial). Arguably, their main goal was to achieve cooperation with Italy in order to receive resources and legitimacy. Moreover, following the disclosure of Haftar’s involvement in increased flows toward the EU, he was invited to a meeting with Italian Prime Minister Meloni, Foreign Minister Tajani, Defense Minister Crosetto, and Interior Minister Piantedosi in May 2023 (Saini Fasanotti & El Gomati, 2023). An official meeting with all the highest-ranking politicians in Italy not only legitimized Haftar as an important political figure in Libya, even though he officially held no official position within the Libyan state, but also gave him an opportunity to place coercive demands. Indeed, evidence suggests Haftar demanded both military and financial support from Italy to control migration over the southern and coastal border (Tharwat, 2023). Only three weeks after the official meeting in Rome, a mass deportation of migrants occurred in eastern Libya (McDowall, 2023). 4,000 migrants were forced to walk across the land border to Egypt in what is accused of being staged as Haftar sought to express his commitment to reducing migrants from eastern Libya to Europe (Saini Fasanotti & El Gomati, 2023). This suggests Italy called for visible results from Haftar before conceding to his demands.
The coercive methods by Haftar and the LNA were (at least partly) successful. In receiving an official meeting with the Italian government, they received legitimacy. Regarding resources, this thesis did not find any record of financial or military concessions; however, it could be planned for the near future or have been received covertly. In addition, an important indicator for coercion is a target testimony demonstrating a belief that coercion was attempted; indeed, in the spring of 2023, the Italian government recognized attempts of CEM against the state. Italy blamed Russia and the Wagner Group, affiliated with Haftar and the LNA (Amante & MacSwan, 2023).

The reveal of the chartered flights between Damascus and Benghazi did not only extort a meeting between Italy and Haftar; in June 2023, a Maltese delegation also met with him (Alnajjar et al., 2023). Likewise the Italian case, following the meeting Haftar has been accused of orchestrating anti-migration efforts. July 8, Sea-Watch International reported Haftar had arranged an illegal pullback of a fishing boat with 250 migrants onboard in waters near Malta. The migrants were returned to Benghazi (Vasques, 2023). This evidence suggests that Haftar has been dealing with Italy and Malta in similar ways, arguably to access European funding and to further his legitimacy.

Table 4: Chartered flights facilitated by Haftar/LNA.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>Target</th>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unrest, Denial</td>
<td>Create popular disaffection and convince Italy and Malta their strategy fails – legitimacy and resources.</td>
<td>Large segments of the Italian (and Maltese) population and the strategy of cooperation with the official government.</td>
<td>Increase migration flow (to create a crisis)</td>
<td>A meeting between Haftar and Italy and Malta.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5: Active assistance of migrant smuggling by armed non-state groups linked to the LNA/Haftar.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>Target</th>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
6.3.2 Armed Non-State Actors in Sabratha and Zawiya

Sabratha and Zawiya are two important port cities along the western coast from which many migrants departed during 2014-2017. In 2017, Italy made deals with militia groups in these cities to stop migrant departures from Libyan shores. In August 2017, the Associated Press was the first to reveal a “verbal agreement” between Italy and the two most powerful militias in Sabratha, also considered the heads of trafficking in the region: Brigade 48 and “Al-Ammu” (Michael, 2017). They are affiliated with the GNA which allowed Italy to deny any partnership with militias (Liga, 2018); “the Italian government doesn’t negotiate with traffickers” officials responded to the findings by the Associated Press (Michael, 2017). Even though Italy denied the deal, evidence suggests several meetings took place between the parties and that the militias have received equipment, boats, salaries, and most importantly, impunity for other forms of smuggling (Liga, 2018; Michael, 2017). Specifically, in exchange for halting the migrant flow, Al-Ammu requested a hangar ship from Italy, in which to establish its headquarters (Mannocchi, 2017). Since the records of these deals are hidden, there is no evidence specifying the actions by Brigade 48 and “Al-Ammu”. However, the large flows towards Italian shores created by the trafficking kingpins, and the congruence between meetings and concessions suggest coercion was used. Considering the frustrated electorate in Italy, it is likely they aimed for power-based erosion and unrest. A ‘coercion by punishment’ strategy is likely due to the high hypocrisy cost a continued flow of migrants would entail for the Italian government.

Table 6: Secret deals between Italy and Brigade 48 and “Al-Ammu.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>Target</th>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unrest, Denial</td>
<td>Create popular disaffection and convince Italy and Malta their strategy fails – legitimacy and resources.</td>
<td>Large segments of the Italian population and the strategy of cooperation with the official government.</td>
<td>Increase migration flow (to create a crisis)</td>
<td>Meeting between Haftar and Italy.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Libyan Coastguard under the official government is closely linked to local ANSAs. Evidence suggests EU funds reach these militias through projects aimed at supporting the Coastguard; in effect, these groups receive EU funding to stop migrant boats from departing (Herbert, 2019; Lowings, 2018; Pacciardi & Berndtsson, 2022). One of the militias performing official state functions has been the Zawiya Refinery Coastguard. The EU has actively avoided direct engagement with the Zawiya unit, which Italy also claims it has. In contrast to this claim, The Guardian revealed Italy had invited one of the world’s most notorious human traffickers, the leader of the Zawiya Refinery Coastguard, Abd al-Rahman Milad, known as Bija, to a meeting on May 11, 2017, in Rome under the title “commander of the Libyan Coastguard” (Tondo, 2019). During the meeting, Bija demanded funds in exchange for stopping migrants (Ibid). Indeed, there is evidence that Italy transferred “extraordinary sums of money” to Bija following the meeting (Micallef & Reitano, 2017). Very similar to Brigade 48 and “Al-Ammu,” the Zawiya Refinery Coastguard facilitated migration flows that could be used coercively to have Italy agree to their demands. The difference is reporting has revealed the coercive strategy – the threat of continued migration flows if not conceding to financial demands.

Table 7: Leader of Zawiya Refinery Coastguard secretly invited to Rome.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>Target</th>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Power-based erosion, unrest</td>
<td>Create disaffection among core supporters and large parts of the population – to receive resources.</td>
<td>Core supporters and large parts of the population in Italy.</td>
<td>Demands in exchange for cooperation.</td>
<td>Funds were transferred to the challenger.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
large parts of the population – to receive resources.

In March 2017, the Italian Minister of Interior Marco Minniti stated he expected a new record of migrants reaching Italian shores during the year, more than 250,000 migrants (Liga, 2018). In contrast, a dramatic drop in departures occurred which suggests Italy gave in to the demands of Brigade 48, “Al-Ammu,” and the Zawiya Refinery Coastguard, and in return, they began stopping migrants departing from the Libyan shores. In agreement, the Italian Institute for International Political Studies concluded that the sudden drop in departures was not caused by the MoU; rather, it was the strategy put in place by the EU and Italy to cooperate with Libyan ANSAs to stop or defer migrant departure that gave the result (Varvelli & Villa, 2019). Directly approaching tribes, cities, and militias, as well as pursuing talks with both Sarraj in Tripoli and Haftar in Tobruk strongly contributed to halting migrant departures (Liga, 2018). Compared to 2016, 51 percent fewer migrants arrived in Italy in July, in August the numbers had fallen to 83 percent (see Figure 4).

*Figure 4: Comparative arrivals, central Mediterranean, January-August 2016 and 2017.*


### 6.3.3 Permanent Leverage

An evident effect of EU action, in particular Italy’s direct engagement, was the switch from trafficking to anti-trafficking activities by ANSAs. Following the agreement between Italy and Bija, the Zawiya Refinery Coastguard started to intercept boats and bring back migrants to the
Al Nasser Detention Centre in Zawiya (Liga, 2018, 22). Likewise, the French Institute of International Relations found Brigade 48 and “Al-Ammu” moved “from the market of human trafficking to the market of extortion” (Liga, 2018, 25). The anti-trafficking activities had an immense effect on migrant crossings (see Figure 4). Many migrants were brought to detention centers officially controlled by the Department to Combat Irregular Migration (DCIM); however, in practice run by ANSAs (El Kamouni-Janssen, 2017, 16). A report by the Netherlands Institute of International Relations from 2017, details the DCIM centers were full and migrants were transferred to “other parties” paid by authorities to keep migrants detained. Full detention centers indicate more migrants are kept in informal centers officially outside the state’s control (El Kamouni-Janssen, 2017, 19).

In line with Adamson and Tsourapas’ (2019) claim that withholding populations constitutes a foreign policy tool, the switch from trafficking to anti-trafficking has placed powerful militias in a position to use detained migrants as leverage. Instead of making revenue off of trafficking migrants, Brigade 48, “Al-Ammu,” and the Zawiya Refinery Coastguard, among others, receive funding from the EU and its member states to detain migrants in Libya. Notably, these ANSAs can simply return to their first way of business if concessions from Europe stop coming (Herbert & Harchaoui, 2017). As such, refugees in detention centers have become a “valuable commodity and a political bargaining chip” that has been used to blackmail the EU and, in particular, Italy (El Kamouni-Janssen, 2017, 27). Thus, detained migrants are exploited for permanent leverage which ANSAs can coercively use against the EU and EU member states for continued international recognition, material assistance, and funds. Therefore, in addition to migration flows sent towards a target state, migrants detained by ANSAs in Libya are also being used as a foreign policy tool against Europe.

Summarizing phase 2, the most common target was the Italian population aiming to create unrest or power-based erosion. Italy’s position as the EU’s broker between Libya and the EU, the history between Libya and Italy, and the geographical proximity between the two states made Italy a strategic target for ANSAs. In agreement with the central principles of rebel diplomacy, the attempts have been characterized by the goals of gaining resources and legitimacy. Indeed, financial assistance, equipment, impunity, and meetings with official state officers have been granted to ANSAs in Libya. However, it is important to notice that evidence of concessions was not found for all attempts. Thus, in line with the theory, it is a weapon with a high success rate, yet all attempts are not successful. In addition, the anti-trafficking efforts
resulting in an aggressive increase in detained migrants gave ANSAs yet another coercive strategy at their disposal. As long as there are migrants in detention centers, actors can use the threat of their release as leverage against the EU and EU member states. As such, the detention centers funded by the EU have become a permanent leverage used against their sponsor.

6.4 Phase 3: Attempting CEM under Non-Diplomatic Status

It is evident armed non-state actors and state actors alike use migration as a foreign policy tool to pursue their goals. In Libya alone, ANSAs and the internationally recognized government have employed migrants as bargaining chips to gain leverage towards Europe (Pilosu, 2022). However, the preconditions under which these two types of actors attempt CEM are rather different.

EU’s urge to cooperate with the Libyan government has been outspoken since the beginning of the 2000s’. Despite the lack of a legitimate government with control over its population and territory, the compulsion to have an official counterpart to cooperate with has continued (Migration Policy Centre, 2013). Following the migration crisis, Italy and the GNA negotiated, under formal diplomatic guidance, on mitigating migration with the end goal of signing a legally binding agreement. In January 2017, Interior Minister Marco Minniti made an official visit to Tripoli to sign the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the GNA president Fayez al Sarraj (Cusumano & Riddervold, 2023). The MoU was automatically renewed in 2019 and 2022 (Pilosu, 2022). Moreover, when CEM is applied in bilateral contact between states, it is bound to the diplomatic codes of conduct. For example, the negotiations between the GNA and Italy took place between two equal parts (state and state) and it was predetermined who was empowered to negotiate. Even though blackmailing, evidently, occurs between states, the surprise factors are more limited since everything is contained within the bounds of formal diplomacy.

ANSAs in Libya do not have access to diplomatic agreements and prerequisites for who should be at the negotiating table. In contrast to the diplomatic efforts with the GNA, the bilateral contact between Italy and ANSAs was concealed. Arguably, the EU and Italy did not officially want to engage with actors not recognized by the international community as legitimate. Covertly engaging with these groups gives them the opportunity to (threat to) expose the secret agreements, thus exposing decisionmakers to political damage. Also, ANSAs are not bound to
send certain actors to negotiations; they can send whoever they think will benefit them the most. Evidently, a world-known human trafficker was in Rome representing the Coastguard at a meeting in 2017. Therefore, I argue the possibility of exposing a secret deal, sending a beneficiary broker, and their general unpredictability gives ANSAs more leverage compared to states when attempting CEM. Thus, rebel diplomacy adds coercive strategies to a ANSAs’ arsenal.

Additionally, without the ability to sign legally binding agreements, and with secret deals in particular, ANSAs have the opportunity to break agreements with no further consequences than (possible) termination of support. Thus, holding ANSAs accountable towards their end of the agreement is challenging and they have the upper hand in relation to their target. When ANSAs decide the deal is no longer in their favor, they can simply discontinue their part of the agreement. For example, anti-trafficking efforts only continue as long as they benefit ANSAs controlling the shores of Libya; when deemed more attractive, these actors may simply return to smuggling. Moreover, the EU has been determined to respect human rights in all its actions in Libya (European Council, 2017). However, ANSAs accessing EU funding have conducted interceptions at sea and managed detention centers without regard for human rights. It is unclear whether the EU funds came with any strings attached to respect human rights; however, it is clear the funding has continued, even with the knowledge of migrant abuse (Varvelli & Villa, 2019). Thus, when attempting CEM, ANSAs have yet another strategy at their disposal to gain more leverage in comparison to states: accountability towards their end of the agreement is on their terms.

Summarizing phase 3, ANSAs gain more leverage compared to states when attempting CEM due to the possibility of exposing a secret deal, sending a beneficiary broker, being accountable solidly on their own terms, and their general unpredictability outside the boundaries of formal diplomacy.
7. CONCLUSION

7.1 Summary
In contemporary global affairs, migrants are used as weapons. The alarming phenomenon is not new; however, increased migration has highlighted this foreign policy tool and enabled more actors to benefit from it. With an increasing importance in international relations, this weapon is also included in the arsenal of armed non-state actors. Even though these actors have been identified as one of the most obvious threats against the EU, their importance has been neglected in the literature. Coercive engineered migration is a complex and multifaceted weapon that has been used differently by various actors. Thus, this thesis assumes ANSAs have a strategic nature and, therefore, use migration as a foreign policy tool to gain leverage and resources. Additionally, when using coercive engineered migration, they gain more leverage over their target compared to states due to their non-diplomatic status. Through an exploratory study using a case study on ANSAs in Libya, I have specifically addressed the questions: to what extent did armed non-state actors in Libya strategically orchestrate migration flows to Europe using coercive mechanisms between 2011 and 2023? Under what preconditions have these actors attempted this strategic tool?

In two time periods, 2014-2017 and 2020-2023, I discovered evidence of numerous attempts at strategic orchestration of migration flows by ANSAs in Libya against the EU and EU member states. Seeking legitimacy and resources, ‘coercion by punishment’ strategies were most commonly used in addition to denial mechanisms aiming to have the target’s strategy fail. The operative strategies of ANSAs changed over the two time periods indicating a strategical ability to adapt to domestic and international conditions. Concerning preconditions, ANSAs operate without diplomatic boundaries and were found to gain more leverage compared to state actors, primarily due to the possibility of exposing covert agreements and regulating accountability on their own terms.

The overarching purpose of this qualitative study is to further establish the use of migration as a foreign policy tool by ANSAs as an important research agenda. Within a state-centric field of research, I challenge realist state-centric assumptions by analyzing non-violent foreign policy strategies by ANSAs. This thesis makes a necessary addition to a scholarship lacking diversity on emerging ANSAs exerting power in foreign policy performing non-violent strategies.
7.2 Discussion of Main Findings

A central factor of coercive engineered migration is the creation of a migration crisis. ANSAs viewed as illegitimate by the international community frequently need to create a crisis to force talks with internationally recognized, legitimate, often more powerful, actors. In the face of a crisis, the stronger party is more likely to agree to negotiate with actors they previously were unwilling to talk to. In agreement, there are no records of negotiations between ANSAs in Libya and European actors before the European migration crisis in 2015, only after the crisis was evident. Hence, as the CEM theory suggests, a domestically salient crisis in the EU (in particular, in Italy) induced cooperation providing a foundation for coercion. High hypocrisy costs made cooperation with illegitimate actors attractive to European politicians. Thus, this thesis confirms the argument by Busby and Greenhill (2015) that non-state actors exploit norms for their own benefit.

This study contradicts Greenhill’s theory concerning the number of coercive mechanisms used in CEM attempts. Greenhill highlights three mechanisms from Byman’s work on coercion (2002, 59-82), namely, power-based erosion, unrest, and weakening. However, I find a fourth mechanism from Byman’s work – denial – has been used by the opposing government led by General Haftar and ANSAs allied to him. Intending to prevent Italy and the EU from gaining their desired outcome, stopping irregular migration over the Mediterranean, Haftar aimed coercive attacks towards the EU and Italy’s strategy of cooperating with the internationally recognized government. In 2015, he attempted to intimidate cooperation between the official government and the European Union. Two years later, he threatened to attack the Italian Navy to prevent the success of the MoU. Furthermore, chartered flights and active assistance of migrants clearly indicate an effort to undermine the cooperation between Italy, the EU, and the official government to stop migrant departures; it was an effective demonstration of the inadequacy of the MoU to stop the flows. In conclusion, by exploiting vulnerabilities in the target’s strategy and thereby making it fail, Haftar could convince the EU and Italy that halting migration flows was unattainable by cooperating with the official government, thereby, making the option of cooperating with Haftar and the LNA much more attractive. Haftar has been invited to official meetings in Italy concerning migration cooperation, thus, indicating successful attempts of the coercive mechanisms currently not included in the theory of CEM: denial.
Furthermore, I find rebel diplomacy adds important nuances to the analysis of CEM by ANSAs that have not been highlighted in previous research. It clarifies the diplomatic boundaries in which state attempts of CEM are contained. Blackmailing and coercion, evidently, occur between states; however, diplomatic practices limit the surprise factors. It should be noted this assumption only holds when states accompany diplomatic practices. However, even if states sometimes sidestep diplomatic regulations, evidence suggests migratory relations between states often involve official agreements, an instrument inaccessible to ANSAs. Instead, ANSAs ought to covertly agree with a government reluctant to expose a deal with an illegitimate international actor. A significant finding of this study is that, in line with the hypothesis, the possibility of exposing the deal gives ANSAs more leverage toward their target in comparison to states signing official statements. Moreover, with secret agreements comes the challenge of accountability. ANSAs may simply discontinue their part of the agreement when they deem it is no longer in their favor. Therefore, in comparison to states, ANSAs also gain more leverage towards their target by the opportunity to regulate accountability solidly on their own terms.

Migration was securitized with the growth of right-wing anti-migration parties and increased politicization of migration in the 1980s. With the migration crisis in 2015, anti-migration rhetoric intensified, and right-wing politics expanded over Europe. Migration issues have become increasingly important for the European electorate and the weaponization of migration has reached the highest political authority in Brussels. While focus previously has been paid to state actors, the results of this study demonstrate the importance of including ANSAs on the political agenda when addressing weaponized migration against the EU. Not only does this study confirm that illegitimate international actors orchestrate migration flows against the EU, but it also establishes these actors gain more leverage compared to state actors. The results of this study contribute to a clearer understanding of the extent to which CEM has been used against the EU by ANSAs in Libya and the preconditions under which the attempts were performed. The results should be taken into account when security and migration policy is developed in the European Union and within member states.

7.3 Limitations and Avenues for Further Research
The findings of this study have to be seen in the light of some limitations. Pursuing research in a fragmented context characterized by civil war is challenging; studying ANSAs carrying hidden agendas using a camouflaged foreign policy tool within this context is even more
challenging. The lack of available and reliable data limited the scope of the analysis to ANSAs who in document and archival sources were identified to have attempted CEM against the EU. To get a complete account of the number of actors and the extent of attempts of CEM, fieldwork is required, which was beyond the scope of this research. In addition, fieldwork including interviews would allow for the collection of testimonies of intent, strengthening the conclusions of this work.

This thesis has a lower external validity due to its qualitative nature. Although intrinsic conclusions can be made, it is not feasible to extrapolate and apply this thesis' findings to other situations. This exploratory study aimed to diversify the field and broaden the research agenda to ANSAs. Large-N studies are more suited for generalizable theory building within coercive engineered migration. Moreover, by concentrating on Greenhill's (2010) theory, this study has adopted a relatively narrow perspective. Naturally, this hypothesis is not comprehensive. This indicates that although theories can direct research, they typically provide a one-dimensional understanding. Consequently, other pertinent information has been left out. Future studies could explore migration as a foreign policy tool from other perspectives, for example, cooperative migration diplomacy.

Based on my results, I recommend future research to further investigate the preconditions of ANSAs attempting CEM in a state-centric system. The literature would benefit from a comparative study on attempts by ANSAs and state actors. Additionally, rebel diplomacy provided this thesis with a foundation highlighting differences between state and ANSAs based on diplomatic status. Other perspectives may highlight differences in strategies and methods. With ANSAs increasing importance in foreign relations, these perspectives are important to accentuate in future studies.

Finally, the Libyan case highlighted key aspects of this study, namely the importance of ANSAs’ attempts of CEM against Europe and the differences in leverage ANSAs have the ability to gain. Furthermore, beyond the scope of this research, the Libyan case emphasized proxy actors within foreign policy. General Haftar’s close relationship with Russia and the Wagner Group has caused proxy accusations against him in a similar manner as Belarus was accused of being a proxy to Russia when orchestrating the migration crisis on the Polish border in 2021. Proxy relationships add yet another layer of complexity to CEM towards which further research should be dedicated.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Literature


Case Material


International Monetary Fund. (2023). Libya.


Mannocchi, F. (2017, August 26). Italy accused of bribing Libyan militias to stop migrants reaching Europe. Middle East Eye.


Memorandum of understanding on cooperation in the fields of development, the fight against illegal immigration, human trafficking and fuel smuggling and on reinforcing the security of borders between the State of Libya and the Italian Republic. (2017).


