

Sathyam Sundaram
Immigration as Foreign Policy

Why do people emigrate? Superficially, it may be to escape destitution or persecution or to improve their quality of life. However, people emigrate, quite simply, because some government wants them to. Governments do this to enhance their status *vis-à-vis* another country. Immigration restrictions are a tool of foreign policy for both immigrant-sending and immigrant-receiving countries. Immigration policies are designed to influence events in foreign countries to the benefit of the country adopting the policy. The post-WWII period is replete with examples of such use of immigration policy, so this inquiry will confine itself to those years. Below will be presented a brief sketch of why and how such policies are used and then some examples of the US using such policies for both its immigrants and emigrants.

Foreign Policy Described

Firstly, what exactly is foreign policy? In the general sense, foreign policy is any intercourse a government has with an object over which the said government does not have sovereignty. A more constrained definition, which will be used below, describes it as inter-state relations. A state is a sovereign authority over an amount of land and people which has exclusive legitimate authority in the exercise of coercive force. Foreign policy does have a goal: to avert detrimental external affects on the government. These affects can be war, non-optimal terms of trade, etc. Often, to avoid these calamities a state must weaken another state and immigration is a very effective tool for such an objective.

Immigrants who take part in such operations can be voluntary or involuntary. Most often, they will not realize how useful they are being to the state. At this point, let us dispense

with any idealistic, humanitarian notions of how governments should think of people, citizens or otherwise. People are inputs, pawns, in the game of statesmanship. People inherently are units of labor and often possess capital and thus are controlled by the factor markets. However, even states with no pretension to dirigisme, manipulate the factor markets for policies considered to be of “national importance.” National security considerations are of prime importance in the use of the immigration implement.

The two poles of foreign policy are isolationism and interventionism. The terms rather well define the level of intercourse in world affair their promulgators desire. Isolationism, championed by talking-head Pat Buchanan, is also called unilateralism or (in this country) “America First” (Walker 16). Interventionism, embodied in the Truman Doctrine, Roosevelt Corollary and the Clinton Doctrine, is multilateralism and enlargement. Nearly all policies can be placed somewhere on this continuum. Isolationists often seek reductions in immigration levels while the most extreme interventionists may fling the gates wide open.

Immigration as a Tool

Immigration policy is not a yes or no issue. Certainly, immigration can be banned but, more often, directed restrictions are placed on movement. To place a moratorium on immigration seems a bit stochastic and devoid of effectiveness. Such a measure rejects the concept of freedom of movement but in its universality does little to influence specific governments. For extreme isolationists, these critiques do not pose a problem as such strategists desire a similarly universal rejection of intercourse with other states. The merit, or lack thereof, of isolationism, in the general, is beyond the scope of this paper. Immigration is relevant to

policies on the isolationism-interventionism continuum because immigrants, in their state of transnationality, represent a link to foreign entities which isolationists seek to avoid.

On the other side of the coin, an absolute interventionist favors global intervention. Such a person would likely eliminate restrictions on immigration and change the role of the INS to one analogous to the Census Bureau. Such a blanket policy is, like moratoria, not useful as foreign policy.

A useful foreign policy will have varied restrictions dependent on which specific state the immigrant relationship is with. An American policy in this model would be barely restricted immigration from fellow liberal democracy Canada coupled with “suspension of entry” for the Sudanese government and military¹, under Presidential Proclamation 6958 (*Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents* 2425). Restricted immigration, in this case, is a condemnation of Sudan’s violation of UNSCR 1044 and 1054. Differential immigration policies among states can indicate support for one and rejection of another. However, permitting immigration from a state can also indicate a condemnation of the government if said immigrants are admitted as political refugees/asylum-seekers. It is this policy of immigration, which is much more complex than “open door” or “closed door” approaches, that more effectively serves foreign policy objectives.

For an Immigrant-Receiving Country, What is the Objective?

¹ This is an example with general immigration. For refugee immigration, which is more strongly linked to policy, immigration would be permitted from enemies and limited from allies for reasons to be described below.

The principle reason for accepting refugee² immigrants is to discredit the government of the state which they are leaving. If people want to leave the country of their citizenship, the question must be asked: Why? A successful policy will answer in terms of the political inadequacy or economic incompetence of the home government. The intended conclusion is: People emigrate to improve their condition. Thus, the state receiving immigrants has a better system than the sending state. This has been the basic argument for the American policy of accepting “refugees” from communist countries.

Similarly, the US will not accept political refugees from allies. When the US decides to accept refugees it indicates that the sending country is inferior or incompetent. Of course, an American ally could never be targeted with that indictment. American Cold War support of its puppet personal and military dictatorships throughout the developing world, in general, confined people living in those countries to continue their suffering. Ninety per cent of refugee allotments were allocated for communist countries (Tucker et al. 73).

The second reason for admitting refugees is that it provides a refuge for government opponents of enemies. The US has accepted over 600, 000 refugees from Cuba since the Castro revolution (Jones 280). The CIA-planned Bay of Pigs invasion used government opponents who had taken refuge in the US. Government opponents, once admitted, also serve the function of generating continued support and interest in their refuge’s policies against the

² Much of the discussion in this paper deals directly with refugee immigrants. Refugee policy, Tucker et al. argue, is closely linked to foreign policy considerations while domestic forces determine general immigration levels (Tucker et al. 18). There is not necessarily such a dichotomy. Refugee immigration policy is tightly connected to national security concerns and inter-state relations questions. General immigration is linked to refugee immigration, in that, opening the door to one group of foreigners often will prompt a review of restrictions. Many refugees will arrive impoverished; native-born citizens will want skilled and capital-possessing immigrants to dilute the flow. So, trends in refugee flows may be an indicator of future reforms in

states which they fled. Indochinese and Cuban refugees in the US have proven an important Republican bloc committed to opposition to communism.

For an Immigrant-Sending Country, What is the Objective?

There are three main foreign policy reasons to promote emigration: cultural imperialism; transmigration to swing policy positions of the targeted polity; and to expel domestic opposition. Consideration of emigration is relevant to American immigration because, although the US is a net importer of people, some Americans do emigrate. As these factors are considered, keep in mind that only rarely do the participants realize the policy they are executing.

Cultural imperialism is the primary reason Americans (and also the British) emigrate. Cultural Imperialism is that soft power described by Joseph Nye which includes subtle and, in many cases, barely detectable mechanisms to exert hegemony over another state. An Anglo-American by his/her use of English, reference to a Hollywood film or quotation of Locke projects this hegemonic structure as effectively as a Nimitz-class carrier, though on a different scale³. This notion of cultural imperialism applies to both labor and capital migration. On the corporate side, the term constructive engagement is often utilized. The implication is that, in a place where Americans are living democracy, will soon come. The policy assumes those emigrant Americans do not assimilate to a non-democratic political culture. Harvard Professor Samuel Huntington once argued that the positioning of American military expatriates in the Middle East would do much to encourage indigenous democratic movements.

general immigration. Early Cold War refugee entry prompted an immigration review which culminated in 1965.

³ One cautionary note, soft power tends not to be effective unless there are hard power (military) means to back it up as the US and UK have had.

The second rationale is transmigration. Recently, the PRC, Israeli and Indonesian governments have encouraged transmigration of their people to their occupied territories Tibet, the West Bank and East Timor, respectively. Probably the clearest US example comes from the years preceding the War of North American Aggression⁴. US open land policies, supported by American paramilitary units, encouraged the settlement of Mexican territory north of the Rio Grande. The purpose, of course, was to provide justification for military intervention to protect expatriates. More recently, the purpose would be to alter the demographic mix to achieve territorial aggrandizement by plebiscite.

The last reason to promote emigration is to expel undesirables, political or otherwise. Whether the US has mounted such a operation will likely require additional declassifications by Langley⁵. The US certainly has been on the receiving end of such emigration. The most notable is from Cuba in the Mariel boatlift. Political opponents are expelled/exiled to prevent them from inciting domestic dissension⁶. The rationale behind this is that dissidents if allowed to remain can sow the seeds of discontent (as they have in the former Soviet bloc). However, as expatriates their impact on domestic consensus can be limited.

The US, The Cold War and Immigration

The US emerged from WWII essentially unscathed while its traditional competitors for dominance were in shambles. In the marxian description, the US, in defense of its hegemony,

⁴ As it is called in Mexico. In the US, the euphemism is the Mexican-American War.

⁵ The Central Intelligence Agency is headquartered in Langley, VA.

⁶ Recall above was mentioned that recipient states provide refuge to opponents of enemy governments to undermine state legitimacy, and here enemy states seek to expel such dissidents. There is an apparent contradiction. Castro's Cuba has expelled its dissidents and formerly communist eastern Europe is now being ruled by its dissidents, while Castro continues to rule. Both thoughts are presented because both are used in policy formulation but one of them may be a *better* (more effective) foreign policy.

began to sign treaties, NATO, CENTO, SEATO and several bilateral protocols, to encircle the USSR⁷, still recovering from near destruction first at the hands of Stalin and then by Hitler. Due to the beginnings of de-colonization, to complete its circle of anti-communism, the US had to woo developing nations. The major obstacle to this foreign policy was American racism, most clearly seen in its immigration codes (Reimers 15). New leaders of developing countries, at the time selecting regimes for their new countries, could be converted to the American ideology if co-nationals living in the US were treated well and allowed free movement. The Cold War competition between the US and USSR was the impetus (with several other factors) for both the 1965 immigration reform (Tucker et al. 9) and the Civil Rights Movement.

More immediately, however, was the need to address the displaced persons (DP) situation following the war. WWII had displaced millions worldwide by invasion (fleeing Panzer columns), settlement (German, Japanese) and involuntary resettlement (Jews, Japanese Issei and Nisei, Central European minorities). Furthermore, when the Red Army seized Eastern Europe, thousands fled west. In 1949, when the PRC was founded thousands fled to Hong Kong⁸ and ROC. The Korean War displaced even more. In its ideological competition with the USSR, and to bear some of the burden placed upon recovering allies, the US began to allow in refugees in then-significant numbers. Between 1945 and 1985, the US received 2 million refugees (Tucker et al. 73).

There were also some added moral reasons to receive refugees. (Foreign policy considerations often have to be packaged with moralistic niceties to be sold to the domestic

⁷ The policy was called “Containment,” designed by such luminaries as Nitze, Acheson and Kennan.

⁸ Kennedy later admitted 14,000 Hong Kong Chinese under Presidential parole powers.

polity.) The UK, US and other countries did not provide sufficient opportunities for refugees to escape from fascist regimes. In the aftermath of the Holocaust, those fleeing communism were more easily able to gain asylum.

Due to proximity, Hong Kong, ROK and Germany received directly far more immigrants than the US. In 1959, Castro overthrew the Batista government in Cuba. Cuba, which is a mere 90 miles from the American mainland, has sent over half-million refugees to the US. In doing so Castro reduced the number of domestic dissidents (and the unemployment rate). Significantly, in the Mariel boatlift a number of criminals accompanied the refugees. Castro has shown his willingness to utilize US policy to his benefit. After the Cold War, the US has continued accepting Cuban refugees largely at the prompting of the practice's domestic constituency.

In an analogous way, Haitian immigration prompted a foreign policy response. Haiti marked the first time the US deployed land forces to stem the flow of immigrants (Hatcher 47). American military and financial assets were mobilized to normalize the political and economic situation in Haiti so that emigrants would not have a compelling reason to leave. Immigration policy can be dictated by but also prompt foreign policy initiatives.

Conclusion

As more states learn from the Haitian model, they will use immigration policies to manipulate recipient countries, reversing the flow of manipulation. Mexico has a very powerful weapon in its emigrant threat. To limit the flow of immigrant to a sustainable level the US must reinforce the Mexican economy. With sufficient foreign aid the flow of immigrants may even stop (Teitelbaum 66), as Western Europe has demonstrated. It is vital to consider immigration

as a vehicle of foreign policy and to analyze macro-trends in this light. Thus, shifting population pressures can be used as an effective weapon by both sending and receiving countries.

Appendix: Legislation

The following bills alter US immigration policy to support foreign policy endeavors.

All are from the 105th Congress.

H.R. 2570 on China

H.R. 1566 on Cuba

H.R. 2288 on Cuba

H.R. 3033 on Haiti

S. 1164 on China

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