

Engineered Migration and the Use of Refugees as Political Weapons: A Case Study of the 1994 Cuban *Balseros* Crisis¹

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a case study of the August 1994 Cuban *balseros* crisis, during which more than 35,000 fled the island and headed toward Florida in the span of a few weeks. It argues that Castro launched the crisis in an attempt to manipulate US fears of another Mariel, and in order to compel a shift in US policy, both on immigration and on a wider variety of issues. The paper further contends that from Castro's perspective, this exercise in coercion proved a qualified success – his third such successful use of the Cuban people as an asymmetric political weapon against the US. In addition, the paper argues that Castro's success was predicated on his ability to internationalize his own domestic crisis and transform it into an American domestic political and foreign policy crisis. Finally, it offers a novel explanation of how, why, and under what conditions, states and/or non-state actors may attempt to use refugees as coercive political weapons. Although dwarfed in size by the larger 1980 Mariel boatlift, the 1994 crisis is important for several reasons. First, despite its brevity, it had far reaching consequences for US-Cuban relations. Without warning or preamble, it catalyzed a shift in US policy vis-à-vis Cuban immigration that represented a radical departure from what it had been for the previous three decades. Second, it influenced US domestic politics on the national level, by expanding the scope and salience of the issue, and mobilizing not only Floridians, but also the larger public concerned about illegal immigration. Third, the crisis illustrated the potential potency of engineered migration as an asymmetric weapon of the weak. Finally, the brief, but significant, interactions of international and domestic actors in this

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case warrant examination because, although the 1994 crisis was limited, in its dynamics it resembles myriad other international refugee crises, large and small. Thus the case offers valuable lessons that may aid in dealing with future (real or threatened) crises.

INTRODUCTION

In August 1994, in the wake of some of the worst civil unrest Cuba had witnessed in decades, President Fidel Castro reversed his country's long-standing policy of arresting anyone who tried to escape the island by sea. Castro laid the blame for Cuba's domestic unrest on the US, claiming that the riots were caused by rumours of a US-sponsored boatlift to Miami. Castro then demanded "either the US take serious measures to guard their coasts, or we will stop putting obstacles in the way of people who want to leave the country, and we will stop putting obstacles in the way of people in the US who want to come and look for their relatives here" (Castro, 1994a; Masud-Piloto, 1996: 137-144). This invitation, coupled with a threat, marked the beginning of a major, although short-lived, refugee crisis, during which tens of thousands fled the island and headed north toward Florida. The crisis ended after about a month, following the announcement of a new immigration accord between the US and the Caribbean island nation. This accord marked the beginning of the end of the US's three decade long policy of welcoming all Cubans into the US as *de facto* refugees and the start of their being treated (at least on paper) like other groups trying to gain entry to the US; a follow-on accord eight months later solidified this policy shift.

Although dwarfed in size by the larger Mariel boatlift 14 years earlier, the August 1994 crisis is significant for several reasons. First, despite its brevity, it had far reaching consequences for US-Cuban relations. Without warning or preamble, the August 1994 crisis catalyzed a shift in US policy vis-à-vis Cuban immigration that represented a radical departure from what it had been for the previous three decades (Masud-Piloto, 1996: 128). Second, it influenced US domestic politics on the national level, by expanding the scope of the issue, mobilizing not only Floridians, but also the general public worried about the threat posed by illegal immigration. Third, the crisis illustrated the potential potency of "engineered migration" as an asymmetric weapon of the weak, as in a few short weeks Castro transformed an internal crisis that began with boat hijackings and a riot in Havana, into an American foreign and immigration policy crisis, in which the US was forced to provide refuge to tens of thousands of Cubans it intercepted at sea – at a cost of US\$1 million per day; and he got a new US-Cuban immigration accord.² Finally, the brief, but significant, interactions of the international and domestic actors in this case warrant examination because, although it was limited in scope, in its dynamics the August 1994 crisis resembles other refugee crises, both large and small, and thus from it, valuable lessons may be gleaned that might aid in dealing with future (real or threatened) crises.

THE MECHANISM BEHIND ENGINEERED MIGRATION

Between 1980 and 1994, the US witnessed mass refugee influxes of individuals seeking asylum, from Cuba, Haiti, El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Guatemala in this hemisphere alone. As the September 1994 report by the US Commission on Immigration Reform put it:

US policy has tried to balance a number of competing interests and concerns: preserving its international and domestic commitments to provide asylum to those fleeing persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution and providing protection to aliens who would otherwise face return to dangerous conditions in a home country; deterring illegal immigrants who abuse the asylum system as a backdoor to entry; responding to domestic ethnic and political constituencies; ensuring that US policy does not serve as a magnet for otherwise avoidable mass migration; upholding foreign policy commitments; and helping states and localities faced with the costs and other impacts of dealing with immigration emergencies (1994: 164).

The fact that these myriad interests naturally compete may unintentionally give potential sending states coercive leverage over the US (and other potential receiving states). This is one variant of what is sometimes referred to as “engineered migration”. And engineered migrations in which (real or threatened) outflows are used to induce changes in political behaviour and/or to extract economic side-payments from a target state or states are, what I term “extortive engineered migration”.³

I argue that the extortive variant of engineered migration is one of the relatively few weapons that weak actors can use to influence the behaviour of more powerful states, particularly advanced industrial democracies. I further contend that weak actors are frequently successful in wielding this weapon because they can manipulate the political vulnerabilities of leaders within these states, vulnerabilities that arise when there exists a conflict between a state’s international commitments and its domestic imperatives.⁴ Advanced industrial democracies are particularly vulnerable to exploitation because, although they have made international commitments to human rights and refugee protection, at least some segment of their population is usually unwilling to bear the real or perceived domestic costs of fulfilling these commitments, (e.g., rising welfare costs, unemployment, crime, and cultural and/or ethnic fragmentation and dilution). For instance, as was noted at the time of the 1994 crisis, Castro was “also well aware that the United States, given its values and domestic political pressures, cannot afford to send back the ‘anti-social elements’ he is encouraging to leave” (Rohter, 1994b: 1D). At the same time, the vast majority of the US public was fervently opposed to letting Castro once more turn the state of Florida “into a gigantic refugee camp” (*Newsweek*, 1980) particularly one that might once more house a variety of “undesirables”, including violent criminals and the mentally ill.⁵

Hence, the US and other states like it (those that share its values and commitments) may find themselves trapped between their international normative commitments and their domestic imperatives. When the options available to targets in the face of a massive outflow have negative (and visible) side effects, both with respect to national interests and normative commitments, targets may become vulnerable to coercion and ripe for extortion, which is, as I shall argue below, exactly what happened during the August 1994 crisis.⁶ However, before going further, it must be emphasized that this kind of coercion can only succeed when the expected negative side effects are visible, or domestically salient, to the target's population. Consider, for instance, Robert Pastor's musings on former President Clinton's conflicting policy prerogatives: "If a crisis did not engage the public or attract the media or an interest group, it was ignored. The administration, however, could not afford to ignore intense objections from a core constituency group... (and) it was wary of antagonizing a Florida ethnic group... unless a broader national domestic interest (e.g., halting an influx of refugees) forced a recalculation" (Pastor, 1996).

The analysis offered herein relies on a Putnamesque two-level game framework, meaning that one can only understand the outcome of a bargaining situation on the international level by being acquainted with what happened on the domestic level, and vice versa (Putnam, 1988).⁷ Here again, the difficulty for leaders lies in the fact that moves that may be rational on the international level may prove untenable on the domestic level, or vice versa. I contend that Castro, who is known to be a keen observer of US politics, understands well the dilemmas facing US policymakers trying both to satisfy their domestic constituencies without sacrificing international credibility and to solve international crises without creating domestic ones. Although Castro is not immune from such concerns himself, the nature and stability of his military dictatorship allow him to undertake potentially risky moves internationally with considerably less concern about possible domestic backlash. Hence, in any given refugee-driven bargaining game between the US and Cuba, Castro will be more credible than any US leader, making "extortive engineered migration" a relatively potent asymmetric weapon against the US.⁸

The rest of this paper presents and defends the proposition that the August 1994 crisis was launched by Castro as an opportunistic attempt to coerce the US to the negotiating table on immigration and a wider array of issues, and bolster his flagging popularity at home, while the precise timing of the crisis was driven by the events on the ground in Havana. It further contends that Castro's gambit was relatively successful, as it had been twice before, most famously in 1980, but also to a lesser degree in the mid-1960s, because Castro was able to internationalize his own domestic crisis, transforming it into a US domestic political and foreign policy crisis. In presenting this argument, the paper first examines Castro's possible motivations for, and objectives in, launching the

crisis; second, it looks briefly at Castro's past attempts to use refugees as weapons, to explain why he thought he would succeed; third, it traces the chronology of the crisis and highlights its consequences; and fourth, it outlines what Castro actually did and did not achieve with his refugees as weapons ploy. Finally, this paper offers some conclusions and identifies a few ways in which the US can reduce its vulnerability to future attempts at coercion via engineered migration.

CASTRO'S MOTIVATIONS

Some observers have argued that Castro's decision to open the port was no more than an act of desperation, aimed at defusing the tensions on the ground in Havana and propping up his regime, in the face of a major economic downturn and growing social unrest. In short, Castro chose to open an internal pressure release valve, in response to growing dissent and economic pressure. However, those who hew to this simple explanation usually argue that Castro's regime was close to collapse in this period, which was why he had to open the port (see, for instance, *El Nuevo Herald*, 6 August 1994: 1B.) However, most analysts, inside and outside the US Government, discount this assessment, noting that "Cuba's repressive apparatus [was] still efficient and loyal, and the ruling group remain[ed] unified" (Gunn, 1995). Further, as Cuba expert Jorge Dominguez put it at the time: "Any policy based on the idea that Castro is about to fall in the next few weeks is misguided... Bill Clinton could very easily reach the end of his presidency still waiting [for Castro to topple]" (Kirschten, 1994; see as well CNN interview with Dominguez, 30 July 1994; and LaGesse, 1994). Further, as political psychologist Jerrold Post put it at the height of the crisis, "This may not be a man who will be willing to go quietly into that good night... [even now, he retains] an electrifying chemical connection with his people" (Lambrecht, 1994).

It is nonetheless true that the prevailing strife was the proximate cause of the crisis and influenced its timing. After all, by the summer of 1994 Cuba was an economic mess. Its gross domestic product (GDP) had declined 35 per cent between 1989 and 1993 following the demise of the Soviet Union and the end of the massive subsidies and guaranteed trade Cuba depended upon for decades, and Castro had just announced one of the worst sugar harvests in decades. And it is also the case that by escalating tensions in US-Cuban relations through the rafters' crisis, and thereby engendering a hostile US response and reminding the Cuban population of American hostility to the Cuban revolution, Castro was able to boost his domestic popularity in a period of unprecedented turmoil.

Nevertheless were it the case that Castro was simply and primarily using the outflow as a release valve, we *should have* seen two things happen that did

not, and we *should not have* seen two things happen that did. First, Castro should have opened the port without first warning the US that he was considering it. Second, he should have opened the border as soon as it became clear that the prevailing discontent would spill over into serious violence. Yet he held a news conference on 5 August at the height of the rioting, warning that he would consider opening the border if the US did not change its behaviour. And then he waited an entire week before privately authorizing the Cuban Coast Guard to let anyone leave, and then did not publicly declare the borders open until 20 August, following the US announcement that sanctions on Cuba were to be tightened.

Third, and conversely, Castro should not have publicly demanded a shift in US policy as a precondition for staunching the flow. Yet in each of his public pronouncements on the crisis, he clearly stated that negotiations on US immigration policy were a necessary precondition for ending the exodus. Finally, he should have re-closed Cuba's borders exactly when it suited him, which would not presumably have coincided exactly with the conclusion of a new immigration accord with Washington. (This is particularly true, given that as many argue, Castro likes nothing better than to embarrass the US.) So were Castro not engaged in tit-for-tat bargaining with Washington, he would have surely closed the border at any time other than just after signing a new agreement with the US.

Thus evidence suggests Castro's actions were actually more strategic in nature, designed to influence the behaviour of the government in the US as much as that of the dissidents in Cuba (Pincus and Suro, 1994; Ackerman, 1997; HRW, 1994). Many analysts and government officials who have spent time in Cuba and have dealt personally with Castro and the Cuban leadership share this view. During the crisis itself, both Attorney General Janet Reno and Undersecretary of State Peter Tarnoff publicly acknowledged that Castro deliberately caused the crisis in "an effort to force a dialogue with the United States" (Kempster, 1994).

Likewise Castro biographer, Tad Szulc, has said, "He has been doing this for a living for 35 years, and realizes he only has one card to play, the weapon of refugees. He needs the breathing space and knows that the only way to get it is to force the Americans into a dialogue" (Rohter, 1994b). Furthermore, Richard Nuccio, former special advisor to the Clinton administration on Cuba, contends, "the Cuban government exacted changes in the policy of the Clinton administration towards Cuba by threatening and by carrying out those threats... Most of our Cuba policy is a result of those kinds of threats" (NPR, 2000). And former Florida Governor and now US Senator, Bob Graham, argues, "Castro, over and over in the last 35 years, has used his own people as a means of accomplishing his foreign policy objective" (CNN News, 1995). So if Castro intended to use the August 1994 migration surge to coerce a shift in US policy, exactly what did he hope to accomplish?

CASTRO'S OBJECTIVES

For some time before the 1994 crisis, Castro complained that the US was failing to hold up its end of a 1984 agreement he had negotiated with the Reagan administration, which promised 20,000 visas per year for Cubans, in exchange for his willingness to take back a number of “undesirables” from the first Mariel crisis (Masud-Piloto, 1996: 134). As the Cubans understood the accord, 160,000 visas should have been granted in a period during which only 11,000 had been forthcoming (Masud-Piloto, 1996: 135). In this same period, however, more than 13,200 illegal migrants were welcomed in the US, many of whom reached US shores on vessels hijacked in Cuba (Castro, 1994a).⁹ This supported Castro's long-time claim that for 35 years it had been US policy to encourage people to leave Cuba illegally, even if that meant stealing and hijacking.¹⁰ Castro further argued that even those people who used such violent means of escape were welcomed as “heroes in Miami” (Marquis and Whitefield, 1994). Yet whenever he interfered with these illegal departures, he was accused of human rights violations; while each time he let people leave, he was accused of trying to embarrass the US (Federal News Service, 1994).

Castro's frustration apparently deepened in the summer of 1994, as it became clear that the reception rafters were being given in July and early August 1994 was “specially warm... (even) after stealing boats, using violence, endangering the lives of people who did not wish to emigrate, and even committing murder” (Rodriguez Chavez, 1994: 4-25). Rafters arriving in this period were further reassured and “encouraged by the US government's pledge *not to change its immigration policy under any circumstances*” (Rodriguez Chavez, 1994: 14). Coupled with the prevailing unrest on the ground, this was probably the point that led Castro to consider initiating a new crisis. As one Latin American scholar said: “Castro relaxed the strictures against emigration because he was ‘greatly (and understandably) amazed by US officials' welcome to Cuban refugees who had hijacked ferry boats in Havana” (Smith, 1999: 394). On 26 July and 3-4 August, the ferry that had transported passengers from Havana to Regla for nearly 100 years was hijacked to Miami. Violence was used in each of the hijackings, and, in one case, a Cuban policeman was killed (Masud-Piloto, 1996; Chavez, 1994).

In short, Castro's key objective appears to have been a quick end to the irregular and destabilizing pattern of immigration between his country and the US. First and foremost, Castro desired a normalization of US-Cuban immigration and an end to the hijackings that were generating instability inside Cuba. (It also seems clear that he would have welcomed a loosening of the embargo, but evidence suggests he did not expect such a relaxation to be immediately forthcoming.) At the same time, he clearly benefited from the domestic boost in popularity he garnered from going “toe-to-toe” with the “American behemoth” and eliciting a reaction from the US that reminded the Cuban population of its hostility toward the Cuban revolution.

WHY DID HE THINK HE COULD SUCCEED? A COMPELLING TRACK RECORD OF TWO FOR TWO

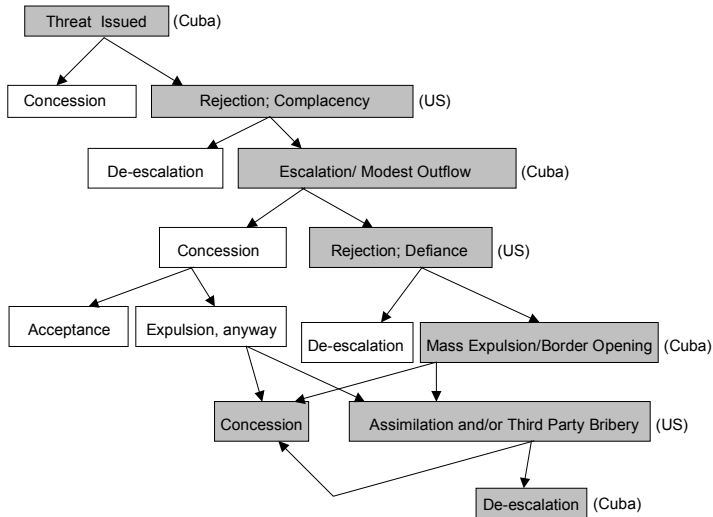
Castro likely believed the migration gambit was worth trying, in part because it had worked at least twice before – in a limited way in 1965 and rather dramatically in 1980. As was the case in the 1980 Mariel I exodus and the less well-known Camarioca outflow in 1965, Castro succeeded in dictating the course and pace of events while those in Washington, working with far more resources at their disposal, struggled to respond.

As shall become apparent, in each of the three cases, the course of events more or less followed a basic five-step pattern. First, Cuba experienced a significant economic downturn. Second, Castro sought a *rapprochement* and/or negotiations with Washington. These overtures would take place publicly via an American journalist or public figure and privately via a Cuban (or Cuban-American) business man or political envoy. Such overtures were usually rebuffed outright or (at best) would receive a lukewarm, non-committal response from Washington. Third, within a few months time, Castro would threaten to unleash a crisis by opening his borders, to which the US would respond with contempt. Fourth, within a number of weeks Castro would open the border. The US would initially welcome the refugees, but then be forced to quickly change its mind as the numbers rapidly grew. Finally, initially secret and then public bilateral negotiations would result and a new policy would be announced. And although the course of events could have transpired differently in each crisis, the path of decision-making followed a remarkably similar trajectory in each case, as Figure 1 clearly shows. This decision tree illustrates the major decision points for both Castro/Cuba and the US and all possible outcomes; the shaded portions indicate the decisions actually taken. Even a casual examination of the shaded boxes in all three cases illustrates notable consistency across three disparate crises.

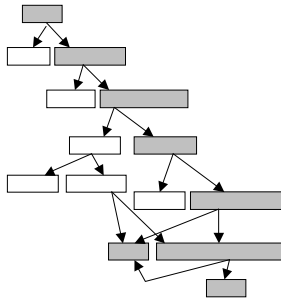
THE CAMARIOCA BOATLIFT¹¹

Following a period of economic turmoil, in September 1965, Castro surprised the exile community in Miami with the announcement that any Cuban who had relatives living in the US would be allowed to leave the island via the port of Camarioca, located on Cuba's northern shore. Castro also invited exiles to come by sea to pick up family members who had been stranded on the island, following the suspension of commercial flights between the two countries during the Cuban Missile Crisis three years earlier. To erase any doubts that he was serious, two days later he began offering two flights daily from Havana to Miami (*New York Times Magazine*, 1965: 30).

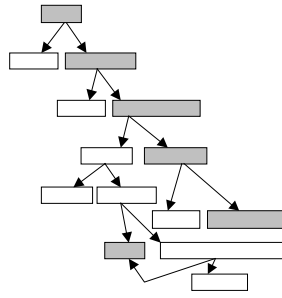
FIGURE 1
OUTCOME OF MARIEL II: THE BALSEROS CRISIS (1994)



OUTCOME OF CAMARIOCA (1965)



OUTCOME OF MARIEL I (1980)



At the time many alleged – rightly, this author believes – that Castro opened the border in order to rid the island of political dissidents with close ties to the exile community. As one author put it: “in one clean sweep, he release(d) the internal pressure of ‘closet counterrevolutionaries’ who stood ready to undermine his regime” (Gonzalez-Pando, 1998: 44). In addition, however, by unleashing his “demographic bomb”, Castro also demonstrated to the US Government how easily he could disrupt its immigration policy (Gonzalez-Pando, 1998: 44). Thus the opening of the port at Camarioca carried with it a “lightly-veiled” threat, namely that Havana, not Washington, controlled Florida’s coastal borders (Gonzalez-Pando, 1998: 44). Almost overnight, and with little warning, the Cuban Government had presented the US with a major refugee crisis.

President Johnson initially responded with contempt to Castro's move. On 3 October, during a pre-scheduled speech before the Statue of Liberty to announce landmark US immigration-reform legislation, Johnson took the opportunity to proclaim that the US would continue to welcome Cubans seeking freedom "with the thought that in another day, they can return to their homeland to find it cleansed of terror and free from fear" (*Miami Herald*, 1965: 1A). However, after thousands of exiles sailed toward Cuba, much to the chagrin of US immigration authorities, and the numbers of those leaving the island began to escalate, Johnson quickly changed tack and began a series of secret negotiations with Castro. The result, announced the following month, was a "Memorandum of Understanding", a formal agreement that established procedures and means for the movement of Cuban refugees to the US.¹² In December 1965, an open-ended airlift, which would continue until 1973, was inaugurated.

Because the Johnson administration, preoccupied with Viet Nam and fearing a tragedy in the Straits of Florida, was so quick to propose an acceptable solution to the crisis, Castro swiftly acquiesced, and the crisis ended with little immediate political cost to either side. However, Castro learned a valuable lesson from this migration crisis dress rehearsal: namely that the appearance of loss of control over US borders, coupled with the perception inside the US that Florida might be overrun, would be viewed by US leaders as politically costlier than the alternative of dealing with him. Thus if Castro could transform his own domestic problems into the US's problems via the exploitation of refugees, he could coerce its leaders into helping him solve them.

THE MARIEL BOATLIFT

In early 1980, portents of another mass outflow began to emerge. The Cuban economy stood at a five-year nadir, its GDP having shrunk by 5 per cent since the previous year, as world sugar prices plummeted (Tamayo, 2000). The CIA's Cuba Analytic Center repeatedly warned that Castro might again unleash large-scale emigration, and in March 1980 Castro himself threatened to do so if the US Government did not stop giving asylum to Cubans who commandeered ships to the US (Flink Zucker and Zucker, 1987: 60-61; Rivera, 1991: 196). Because so few policymakers in the Carter administration knew of the Camarioca crisis, they ignored repeated warnings that Castro was considering reopening one of his ports. As Engstrom put it, "The word 'Camarioca' had no meaning for them. It set off no alarms" (Engstrom, 1998: 189).

Then, in early April, following a dramatic incident in which a bus crashed through the gate of the Peruvian embassy in Havana, Castro announced that he would remove the security forces that surrounded the embassy. Within a few days, 10,000 Cubans crowded into the embassy complex, but Peru would only agree to take 1,000 asylum applicants (Gonzalez-Pando, 1998: 65-66). A few days

later, Castro again publicly invited exiles to come by sea and pick up, not just the refugees who had originally sought asylum at the embassy, but anyone who wanted to leave. Thus again Castro managed to transform his own domestic crisis into an American domestic and international crisis. Even at the time, some recognized this ploy as a weapon of sorts; for instance, the US Coordinator for Refugee Affairs, Victor Palmieri, characterized it as “a form of guerrilla warfare” (Rivera, 1991: 7). White House aide, Jack Watson, and State Department spokesperson, Thomas Reston, echoed this viewpoint, saying respectively, “Castro in a way, is using people like bullets aimed at this country” and “what you have here is not a rational process [but] Castro’s solution to the problem” (Rivera, 1991: 23).

Like Johnson before him, President Carter began the crisis with a defiant speech, in which he reaffirmed the US’s open-arms policy to Cubans fleeing Castro’s regime, proclaiming “we’ll continue to provide an open heart and open arms to refugees seeking freedom from Communist domination” (*Miami Herald*, 1980b: 1A). However, a record number of refugees arrived at about the same time as Carter made his famous pronouncement, and within a week Carter felt compelled to change the US’s position. On 14 May, the Administration ordered the boatlift stopped, but to no avail. Despite the prohibition and a subsequent naval blockade, almost 90,000 Cubans arrived in the US in May 1980 (*Miami Herald*, 1980a: 16A).

Aware of the “grave implications the uncontrollable boatlift could have on domestic politics”, the administration lost patience with the exiles that kept returning to Cuba for more refugees (Rivera, 1991: 68). This was particularly true since Carter had already been forced to declare a state of emergency in South Florida and to release \$10 million to help local governments cope with the crisis (Rivera, 1991: 68). When, in spite of these efforts, South Florida’s local infrastructure was overwhelmed, the federal government began airlifting the Marielitos to military installations throughout the country, including – most significantly, in light of what happened in 1994 – Fort Chaffee in Arkansas, where Bill Clinton was governor.¹³ As the crisis deepened but the exiles showed no signs of ceasing the boatlift despite government appeals, the Carter administration again flip-flopped and threatened exiles with heavy fines and confiscation of their vessels if they continued to bring refugees into the US; the threats fell on deaf ears.

Carter next turned directly to Castro for help in ending the crisis. But the Cuban regime promptly rejected the first American proposal for ending the crisis, viewing it as too harsh and insufficiently attractive from the Cubans’ perspective. Apparently the initial position of the National Security Council (NSC) was to demand that the Cubans suspend the sealift without offering them a *quid pro quo* for doing so (Smith, 1987: 215). Having initiated the crisis, and aware that domestic pressures were mounting in the US, Cuban representative Ricardo

Alarcon, then Vice-Minister of Foreign Relations, responded at the time, “if we ever get back to negotiating anything, it will have to be on the basis of a step-by-step process based on reciprocity. . . . We aren’t going to sit down with you to talk about stopping the Mariel operation and then have that be the end of it” (Smith, 1987: 215). “As soon as the Cubans realized that we had come only to demand suspension of the sealift, they turned us out”, according to then head of the US Interests Section in Havana, Wayne Smith (Smith, 1987: 216).

Interestingly, it appears highly plausible that the outcome of Mariel could have been rather different, and the crisis itself significantly more short-lived. As Smith noted in his memoir:

I had been on the Cuban deck back in 1965 when we had convinced Castro to replace the Camarioca sealift with an orderly departure process. In some ways, prospects were better in 1980 than they had been in 1965. Castro had initiated Camarioca without any prior expression of interest in establishing a normal flow of emigration. Yet, he had quickly closed down the sealift in return for a normal emigration process. This time, Cuban officials had been urging such a process long before the Mariel operation began (1987: 215).

Three more months would pass before the US made the kind of proposal the NSC had rejected as too placatory the previous spring, namely that the migration talks would be linked to a future (broader) agenda (Engstrom, 1998: 121).¹⁴ Shortly thereafter, Castro closed the port of Mariel. Smith, Tarnoff, and others believe this would have happened much earlier had a more conciliatory proposal been forwarded, and thus in all likelihood 100,000 fewer Cuban refugees would have come to the US (Smith, 1987: 216; Engstrom, 1998: 120, 134: fn 110; Larzelere, 1988: 254).

It is instructive to note the disparity in the speed with which the Johnson and Carter administrations each developed policy responses to their Cuban migration crises, as well as differences in their approaches. Because the policy makers in the Johnson administration figured out quickly the potential scale of the problem, they developed a response within days after Castro announced the opening of the port at Camarioca. Within a month, officials in the Johnson administration managed to provide states and localities with financial relief for the costs associated with the boatlift (Engstrom, 1998: 196). In contrast, even with considerable forewarning that Castro was considering re-opening his borders, Carter administration officials took more than three weeks to generate a policy response, one that never adequately dealt with the crisis. Furthermore, it took the administration almost two months to approach the Cuban Government about talks to normalize immigration, and then the subsequent accord was not signed until after the boatlift was ended many months later (Engstrom, 1998: 120-121). Finally, it was Congress, not the Carter administration that (six months later) generated a policy to deal with the tremendous costs of Mariel to affected states and localities (Engstrom, 1998: 196).

It is clear that because the crisis occurred during the presidential campaign, Carter absorbed the full backlash of voter indignation. He was blamed for his ineptitude in handling the crisis and for indecisive leadership, and his Republican challenger, Ronald Reagan, enthusiastically played the refugee issue to his advantage. In light of the other tribulations the President was facing in the lead-up to the November 1980 election – including the Iran hostage crisis, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, and a floundering economy – it would be an exaggeration to claim that the Mariel crisis alone produced Carter's defeat. Even so, it is clear that Carter himself believed that Mariel was an important component to his defeat. Immediately after the election, he said, "the refugee question has hurt us badly. It wasn't just in Florida, but it was throughout the country. It was a burning issue. It made us look impotent when we received these refugees from Cuba" (*Public Papers*, 1980: 2693). And the crisis did provide very effective campaign fodder for Reagan and affected the psyche of the American public, including the psyche of one particular American, future President Bill Clinton, who would himself sit at the helm of the US during the next Cuban migration crisis.

THE AUGUST 1994 BALSEROS CRISIS

The situation heats up; Castro issues a threat

The spring of 1994 brought scenes reminiscent of the Mariel boatlift 14 years earlier. In the midst of another economic crisis, between May and early August, Cuba became the site of an ever-increasing number of embassy crashings and violent boat hijackings.¹⁵ This violence culminated in street riots in Havana in early August, after 32 died when they were swept into the sea by water cannons when the Cuban military intercepted a tugboat bound for Miami (Masud-Piloto, 1996: 137).

Reading the signs of restiveness on the ground, and by now familiar with Castro's *modus operandi*, at least some in the US believed Castro might try to initiate another refugee crisis (Executive Office of the Governor, 1994). For example, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs, Robert Gelbard, publicly warned Castro on 30 July that the "consequences of launching another Mariel boatlift would be quite grave" (Zarella, 1994). But Castro had been through this situation before and recognized that the US had more to lose from an uncontrolled outflow than did he, particularly since he was again eager to engage the US in negotiations (Engstrom, 1998: 188). Thus, frustrated by the hijacking and escalating illegal departures and undeterred by US threats, on 5 August Castro held an internationally televised news conference, in which he asserted that the rioting was caused by rumours of a "US sponsored boatlift to Miami" (*New York Times*, 1994: A1). Castro went on to say that Cuba could no longer afford to be "the guardian of the North Americans'

coasts” if Washington continued to strangle the faltering Cuban economy (Rohter, 1994: A1).

The US responds, Castro escalates, and the US grows defiant

Immediately following Castro’s pronouncements, the US responded with clear signs of encouragement for those who wanted to escape and announced the existence of a classified contingency plan, Operation Distant Shore, designed to thwart Castro’s ability to launch another Mariel (US Department of State, 1994a). (Announcement of this plan seems to have been an attempt to deter Castro, as well as to reassure an anxious population in Florida.) Although the details of Distant Shore remained classified, it was officially announced that the plan included responsibilities for 40 different federal agencies that would respond to an immigration crisis, a blockade by US warships of the Florida Straits, and the arrest of any refugee trying to enter the US through that route (*Miami Herald*, 1994a: A3; *Miami Herald*, 1994b: A10.)

Nevertheless those intent on fleeing the island were not deterred, and neither was Castro. Around 12 August he announced that he would view any attempt at instituting a blockade as an act of war, and he quietly began escalating the crisis by allowing people to leave the island unharrassed. Reportedly Castro made the decision in a meeting on 12 August not to interfere with those trying to leave the island, although, as noted above, he did not publicly declare the port open until a week and a half later (Pincus and Suro, 1994; Williams, 1994a: A13). In the interim period, he had representatives at the Cuban Interests Section announce “the US is simply reaping what it sows by its own policy” (Booth, 1994: A1). On the same day, US State Department officials announced that there was no sign that Castro had yet opened his coastline to unrestricted exits, but conceded that the Cuban coastal and land police were letting small groups leave without incident (Booth, 1994: A1). To those paying attention, this was a clear sign that Castro could and would control the volume of the flows as he saw fit, a portentous signal recognized by those on the frontline in Florida, but not yet by those in Washington, who insisted that the situation was under control and did not constitute a crisis.

A domestic spoiler catalyzes a major policy shift

However, this situation was to change quickly and unexpectedly. On 18 August, “in a matter of twelve hours... the Clinton administration’s view of the influx of Cuban refugees changed from a manageable, orderly flow to a crisis demanding a reversal of 28 years of immigration policy” (Anderson, 1994: A6; Lorente, et al., 1994: A1). Significantly, however, this shift did not result directly from a move in Havana, Cuba, but rather from one in Tallahassee, Florida. Facing a tough re-election campaign in a state where immigration was an especially highly charged issue, Florida Governor Lawton Chiles decided he was unwilling to concede to

a potential repeat of the Mariel fiasco without a fight. Despite Washington's scepticism, Chiles believed that the flow of refugees would blossom into a flood, and he demanded that the federal government take action. On 18 August he went public with his criticism and an implicit demand:

Well, I think your numbers showed that we've had 2,200 [Cuban asylum seekers] already this year. But the interesting thing is this month. The interesting thing is 565 yesterday, 360 today. As we speak, they are still getting off the boat down there [in Key West]. I think we might well have 500 again today. In spite of the Coast Guard captain's statement, the most we ever had in a day in Mariel was about 856. So we're already up to 500 a day. Florida could die from a thousand small cuts and that's what Castro is doing to us. This is an emergency down here. We know that, all the citizens of south Florida know that and we're waiting for the administration to know that (Blitzer, 1994).

Chiles had concluded that a hard position against the rafters would help him in his re-election bid, and polling data from the period suggest it was a wise surmise, as September 1994 Gallup data reveal that 79 per cent of the sample population did not believe that Cuban refugees should be allowed into the US, and 91 per cent felt that Cubans should be treated just like the Haitian migrants trying to enter the US (Gallup, 1994: 228-33). Another poll conducted the following May, shortly after the accords were signed, indicated that 73 per cent of Floridians supported banning illegal immigrants from access to government services (Adams, 1995: 1A). Most Floridians were opposed to the influx, and those who were not, namely the Cuban-American community, were expected to vote for Chiles's Republican challenger, Jeb Bush, in any case.

The situation was further complicated by the fact that it had just become clear that a key component of the contingency plan that was to relieve the burden on Florida in the event of another Mariel-like exodus had been rejected out of hand by Clinton, leaving Florida even more exposed (Greenburger, 1994: A10). Specifically, when he discovered – around 16 August – the nature of the State Department's proposed resettlement plan (Distant Shore), under which Cuban asylum seekers would be distributed at military bases throughout the country, Clinton reportedly “went ballistic”, yelling “Are you nuts? Do you think I am going to do [that] again?” Other advisors confirm that Clinton's thinking on the August 1994 crisis was guided by two mottos, “No More Mariels” and “Remember Fort Chaffee” (Greenhouse, 1994c: 8).

What Clinton feared was a repetition of the personal humiliation and defeat he suffered after the last massive Cuban refugee resettlement in 1980. Dissatisfied with their long-term detainment, the Marielitos sparked riots at several of the military bases where they were being held, including Fort Chaffee.¹⁶ Shortly thereafter, then Arkansas Governor Clinton lost his bid for re-election. Although, like Carter, Clinton too might have lost even in the absence of the Cuban crisis, Clinton clearly laid blame for his loss on the Chaffee riots. As advisor and

confidant, Dick Morris, has said, his defeat in 1980 “was really the seminal experience in (Clinton’s) career” (Degregorio, 1993: 714).¹⁷

By 18 August, when it had become clear to Chiles that the administration was willing neither to recognize the escalating crisis as an emergency, nor to consider implementing Distant Shore’s proposed resettlement plan, he decided to press Washington’s hand. Chiles argued that the federal government was in denial and if it would not respond, he would. Chiles argued that it “was not a manageable situation. Not for Florida...if we do not get a response from the federal government, we will open our own facilities” (Rankin et al., 1994: A1; *St. Petersburg Times*, 1994). He declared a state of emergency in Florida, which allowed him to mobilize the Florida National Guard and detain temporarily the refugees released by the INS. Chiles made it known that he would not permit Cubans being moved from detention camps in Key West to get off the bus once they reached Miami; instead he would have them arrested and quarantined (Blitzer, 1994).

That afternoon a “principals-only” meeting of many of Clinton’s top foreign policy advisors was held, during which the decision was made to end the 28-year policy unequivocally welcoming all refugees from Cuba. Reportedly neither President Clinton, nor Secretary of State Warren Christopher or Deputy Secretary Strobe Talbott attended this “principals” meeting. Nor was any State Department staffer consulted about the proposed policy shift, and this included Assistant Secretary of State Alexander Watson, who was at least ostensibly in charge of the State Department’s Bureau of Inter-American Affairs (Novak, 1994: 23). It appears that the general consensus was that it was time to “demagnetize” the US to avoid a continuous flow of refugees. According to one participant, “the change was necessary to protect a basic fundamental policy of no massive influx that looked like Mariel” (Pincus and Suro, 1994: A31). They also agreed that the US could not appear to be tougher on the Cubans than it was on the Haitians (Smith, 1998; Drew, 1994: 430).

Although on the morning of 18 August Attorney General Janet Reno had insisted that no change in policy was under consideration – and that Chiles was “overreacting” – that same evening a new approach was announced (Pincus and Suro, 1994: A31). Following Chiles’s declaration of a state of emergency in Florida, and a subsequent meeting between Clinton, Chiles, and Jorge Mas Canosa of the Cuban American National Foundation (CANF), Clinton announced a major shift in US policy: no Cubans seeking to enter the US illegally would be allowed to enter US territory. Instead they would be rescued at sea and detained at the US naval base at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba indefinitely. This shift represented a reversal of the 35-year-old policy designed to welcome as a refugee any Cuban “escaping” Castro’s regime.

Although it is clear that Clinton and his advisors were themselves clearly disinclined to permit a repeat of Mariel, it was Chiles’ initiatives, coupled with

Clinton's steadfast opposition to a domestic relocation scheme, that actually forced the President's hand and drove the policy shift (Solomon, 1994: 2044). In making such a momentous change, Clinton knew that he would have to contend with the animus of the Cuban exile community, who would be furious that the US would consider returning the fleeing Cubans. But even at the time, risking the shift in policy probably seemed like a good gamble for a number of reasons. First, like Chiles, Clinton realized that the vast majority of Floridians, and Americans more generally, were opposed to accepting more refugees, whatever their origin. Basically, "the new calculus [was] that Clinton need[ed] to worry more about immigration than about Cuban-American votes" (Kirschten, 1995: 1198).

Second, he had a plan to placate the CANF and the exile community, namely by offering to tighten restrictions on Cuba (Stokes, 1994). Following his meeting with Chiles and Mas Canosa, on 20 August Clinton announced that visits to Cuba would again be restricted to humanitarian cases and remittances would be suspended. However, although this compromise temporarily satisfied his conflicting domestic constituencies, it did nothing to bring the crisis itself closer to a resolution; in fact, it led Castro to escalate the crisis further. As Richard Haass, NSC official under George Bush put it: there seemed to be a fundamental "inconsistency in simultaneously intensifying the pressures inside Cuba while making it harder for the discontented to flee... 'Clinton seems more interested in balancing the various interests than deciding between them'" (Solomon, 1994). Latin American expert and former Castro negotiator during the Mariel crisis, Robert Pastor, echoes Haass' sentiment, asserting "on issues concerning Central America and Cuba, US policy seemed to be driven by the interest groups with the greatest leverage and determination, whether in the Congress or in Miami. These issues were not priorities" (Pastor, 1996).

Castro ups the ante

While undoubtedly pleased that illegal rafters would finally be detained and returned, Castro was clearly less excited about the measures taken to conciliate the exile community. So the next day, he escalated the crisis further by officially opening the borders to anyone who wanted to leave. Moreover, because the Cuban public remained unpersuaded that the US's three-decade-old policy of welcoming all Cubans really had changed overnight, the announced shift did not slow the flow of rafters. Three days later, in the largest one day total ever, 2,886 rafters were intercepted at sea, while the day before, 2,338 had been rescued, and in the two weeks between 13-25 August, the Coast Guard rescued 13,084 rafters – a significantly larger number than the 9,340 who arrived during the first 12 days of Mariel.

Thus the administration's gamble that Cubans would stop fleeing once it was announced that they would not be allowed to enter the US had proven a serious

miscalculation, one that Castro promptly exploited. On 24 August, Castro gave an internationally televised speech on CNN, announcing that the US's "new policy measures only [made] the problem more complicated... [and] ... these measures [compelled] the massive exodus" (Castro, 1994b). During the same speech, he also officially announced that he had ordered the Cuban Coast Guard to stop impeding those who wanted to leave the island and/or using force to prevent Americans who wish to pick people up (Castro, 1994).

At the same time, however, Castro also intimated that he might agree to stop the exodus if the administration agreed to direct talks on a range of issues, including the embargo (Greenhouse, 1994b: A12). This position was reaffirmed the next morning, when Cuban representatives in New York announced their willingness to end the flow "only if the US agreed to broad talks on a full range of bilateral matters" (Greenhouse, 1994b: A12). Meanwhile Cuba's Ambassador to the United Nations turned the rhetorical heat up even higher, warning that the US's new strategy would lead to disaster, both for Cubans *and* Americans: "The US has devised a whole policy... to try to choke our country to hunger and allow an internal subversion that would lead to a blood bath, and *then how many millions of illegal immigrants will come?*" (Greenhouse, 1994b; emphasis added).

US defiance soon replaced with willingness to negotiate

By the following day, 26 August, there was growing public bipartisan opposition in Congress to the administration's unwillingness to negotiate with Castro, as well as a growing number of news commentaries and newspaper editorials calling for negotiations.¹⁸ Moreover, on the same day the *New York Times* ran a story announcing that the camps housing the Cubans at Guantanamo would be filled to overflowing within two weeks if the exodus were to continue. Thus Clinton's attempt to satisfy both sets of his domestic constituents had given birth to another dilemma (Nordheimer, 1994: A12). Because the rafters kept coming, the only way to end the crisis was to rely upon the Cuban Government to again begin blocking emigration. But the new sanctions against Castro and the US's staunch unwillingness to negotiate proved a powerful disincentive for Castro to do so (LeoGrande, 1998: 78).

The US blinks, but so does Castro

On 28 August, with no indication that the crisis would end of its own accord or that the flows might soon abate, the US again abruptly changed its position and agreed to negotiate with the Cubans (Greenberger, 1994). A series of bilateral talks were held between 1-10 September that resulted in the announcement of a new immigration accord and plans for a series of additional meetings (Sanchez, 1994: A7). However, for his part, Castro had to concede his demands that the accord be linked to a softening of the embargo and/or to Radio Marti's shutdown.

THE BALSEROS CRISIS, PART II: APRIL-MAY 1995

In early April 1995 the Cubans again began making vague threats to reopen their borders – a rumour that the administration leaked privately, but publicly denied (CNN News, 1995). The belief was that the renewed threats were a response to the proposed Helms-Burton legislation and to the fact that those Cubans still being held at Guantanamo were being denied entrance into the US (CNN News, 1995). One Cuban official told the *Washington Post*, “last year, there were 30,000 rafters. Next time you might see a million” (*Washington Post*, 1995: C1).

Moreover, following their trip to Guantanamo in March-April 1995, Sen. Bob Graham (D-Fla.) and Rep. Porter J. Goss (R-Fla.) warned the Clinton administration of a crisis in the making. They claimed that the thousands of Cuban refugees detained in Guantanamo were living in a “tinderbox” that could explode into rioting (Matthews, 1995: 1A). During this same period, the flow of rafters also began to rise again and reached the highest monthly total (190) since the end of the August 1994 crisis (Crossette, 1995: A4). In addition, housing the refugees at Guantanamo and in Panama for six months had already cost more than \$400 million, and the Pentagon was planning to spend \$100 million more to make the camps permanent (Sheehan, 1995).

The warnings set off what officials called “serious alarm bells” in the White House, in part because the administration was “poised to enter a critical and enormously tricky domestic policy stretch – a summer of high-stakes battles with Republicans over the size, shape, and cost of government that could well define the 1996 presidential race” (Devroy and Williams, 1995: A5). One thing Clinton officials did not need was a refugee crisis of any sort, and reportedly his top aides quickly concluded that another round of serious talks with Cuba was in order. “We were facing a double whammy when all we want is to keep foreign policy problems off the screen”, said one official. “The word was: Solve it. Make it go away with the least amount of turmoil” (Devroy and Williams, 1995).

Like Johnson and Carter before him, faced with the dilemma of choosing between the domestic political costs of another refugee crisis and those associated with further negotiations with Castro to avoid one, the administration chose the latter. Two weeks later, on the anniversary of the Bay of Pigs debacle, Ricardo Alarcon and Tarnoff met in secret – likely to shield themselves from domestic political pressure – and the new accord was announced on 2 May, 1995.¹⁹ Eight months after initially refusing to admit those at Guantanamo, the administration had again changed course and agreed to admit them on a case-by-case basis (Gunn, 1995). With the policy shift came the first official reference by the US, by Attorney General Janet Reno, to the Cuban migrants as “illegal immigrants” rather than “political refugees” (CNN’s Inside Politics, 1995).

In addition, on the heels of the new accord's announcement came word that the Clinton administration would oppose the embargo-tightening Helms-Burton legislation, and that this new policy "could be followed by engagement on other areas of mutual interest, like the fight against narcotics or environmental problems" (Greenhouse, 1995: A1). According to a White House paper, "[The US was] prepared to reduce sanctions in carefully calibrated ways, in response to significant, irreversible changes in Cuba" (Deans, 1995: 1). For its part, the CANF called the policy decision "a second Bay of Pigs" (Deans, 1995: 1).

WAS CASTRO'S 1994 MIGRATION GAMBIT A SUCCESS?

Yes, albeit a qualified success. As in 1965 and in 1980, after initial resistance, the US was forced to come to the negotiating table with Cuba; and Castro accomplished what are widely regarded as his primary objectives. Yet, progress vis-à-vis his purported long-term goals was far more modest, at least explicitly.

Primary objectives obtained

As one keen observer, Frank Calzon, Washington director of Freedom House, put it at the time, "through blackmail Castro has (again) been able to change US policy" (Grier, 1994: 3). As a consequence of the crisis, Castro did achieve what analysts regard as his key aims: namely, a US-backed halt to illegal emigration (Castro, 1994b; Fletcher, 1994) and the prosecution of Cuban hijackers (Marquis and Whitefield, 1994: A1). The agreement provided that the US would accept 20,000 Cubans per year plus an unspecified number of family members, and the 4,000 to 6,000 Cubans on the waiting list for visas would be permitted to enter the United States. This marked – albeit imperfectly²⁰ – the official end of illegal immigration between the US and Cuba and was in essence a reaffirmation of the promises made to Castro by the Reagan administration a decade earlier. However, under the 1984 agreement, the 20,000 figure was an upper limit instead of a minimum, although as noted above only a few thousand Cubans actually were allowed to immigrate each year.

Second, the US agreed to extradite and/or prosecute those who hijacked or stole boats and aircraft to flee Cuba, thus expediting a "safer, legal and more orderly process" of immigration (Williams, 1994b: A34). Castro had been pressing the US for years to concede these two points (Marquis and Whitefield, 1994: A1). The US also agreed to work on bringing down the backlog of people who had applied through the American Interests Section in Havana to emigrate legally over the previous decade, about 140,000 people (Marquis and Whitefield, 1994: A1; Williams, 1994b: A1). In exchange, Cuba promised to end the boatlift, using "mainly persuasive measures" to crack down on those who tried to emigrate illegally and to take back 226 Cuban boat people being held at Guantanamo who had asked to be repatriated (Marquis and Whitefield, 1994: A1).

No movement on the embargo or Radio Marti, but was any expected?

Castro did not make any explicit gains with respect to ending the embargo or silencing Radio Marti, two things his representatives began calling for publicly in the days leading up to the September meetings (Meisler, 1994: 1A). Nevertheless, it can be argued that the reason Castro conceded to shelve these issues was that, while he expected that he could get an agreement on immigration issues in the short run because of the visibility of the crisis, the more substantive issues of the embargo would require more time and wider support, particularly given that it was late in an election year, a fact that would not have been lost on the Cuban leader. Consider, for instance, that shortly after the crisis ended, Castro met with former Senator and US presidential candidate, George McGovern, who said:

You would be impressed with his knowledge of American politics. He knows all the American players, and he knows the pressures that play on them. He knows all about the health care debate and the crime bill and Whitewater and everything else that's going on here and showed real sensitivity to the political squeeze that the President's going through now (Federal News Service, 1994).

Furthermore, former Cuban insiders concur that Castro is a keen observer of US domestic politics. As one former Cuban official who spent 17 years in the revolutionary elite notes, "Fidel is a shrewd student of United States society, institutions and government", and he "understands the limitations on a president's power to act in many critical circumstances. This knowledge informs his every strategic maneuver" (Federal News Service, 1994). Moreover, McGovern indicated that Castro acknowledged explicitly that Clinton "was politically incapable of tackling anything as controversial as lifting the embargo in the short run, particularly in the wake of the refugee crisis which was a matter of enormous embarrassment and anxiety to the US administration" (Federal News Service, 1994). In the end, despite the Cubans' eleventh hour calls for discussions on issues wider than immigration, it appears Castro probably got everything that he expected to get, at least in short run.²⁰ However, this is not to suggest that he did not actively float trial balloons on the bigger issues, in the hope that they might produce results, only that he likely had low expectations that they actually would (Meisler, 1994: 1A; *Buffalo News*, 1994: 1).

Stymied promises of future negotiations

Castro may have expected there to be more dialogue and further positive developments down the road. Otherwise, it seems unlikely that he would have agreed to end the crisis so quickly. As one Cuba analyst put it: "It's unthinkable

that this was a rare moment of Castro charity at work... He had such leverage over Washington. He was in the position of either saving Clinton's political neck or causing him endless problems" (*Buffalo News*, 1994: 1). In addition, circumstantial evidence indicates the existence of a tacit agreement that future negotiations could occur. Shortly after the September accords were announced, Secretary of State Warren Christopher appeared on the television show, *Face the Nation*, and said of Castro: "If he moves toward democracy in a tangible, significant way, we'll respond in a carefully calibrated way... Washington is 'to be prepared to reduce the sanctions in carefully calibrated ways in response to positive developments in Cuba'" (Williams and Suro, 1994: A6). Although Christopher declined to specify what either these developments or responses might be, State Department officials indicated the administration "might ease – but not eliminate – economic or travel restrictions against Cuba if Castro allowed more freedom of expression or free elections" (Greenhouse, 1994a: A6).

More concretely, then special advisor to the Clinton Administration on Cuba, Richard Nuccio, reports that following the migration crisis in 1994 and the subsequent May 1995 accords:

A weak, and I'd emphasize weak, conditional engagement policy was added to the prior unconditional engagement policy towards Cuba. By this conditional engagement policy, an explicit understanding was arrived at between senior US and Cuban officials that Cuba's implementation of the May 1995 migration accords and its reaction to the US efforts to engage Cuba's emerging civil society could form the basis for further progress in US-Cuban relations (Brookings Institution, 2000).

Reportedly, following the May 1995 accord, the administration envoys were so encouraged that they approached members of Spain's Socialist Party to help mediate further talks with Castro. And then in late 1995, Castro met with US Congressman Esteban Torres (D-Calif.), during which Castro reportedly agreed to call for free elections, permit the creation of opposition political parties, and free political prisoners. In exchange, the US was to lift the embargo and help Cuba obtain international development bank loans, according to Congressional sources (*Cuba in Evolution*, 1998).

These developments (if real) came to a screeching halt, at least temporarily, in February 1996 when Castro ordered his military to shoot down two unarmed planes flown by Brothers to the Rescue, a Cuban-American exile group.²² In Washington, the shoot-down outraged conservatives and panicked the Clinton administration, which was in the midst of the 1996 presidential campaign. Clinton responded by quickly throwing his support behind the Helms-Burton legislation, which as noted previously he had theretofore opposed (Willon, 1998: 1).

THE 1994 REFUGEE GAMBIT WAS LESS SUCCESSFUL THAN MARIEL. WHY? RAPID REACTION OF STATE AND FEDERAL OFFICIALS

The 1994 crisis was of much shorter duration and had much lower domestic visibility than the Mariel I crisis in 1980. There were several reasons for this. First, having learned something about the dangers of reacting slowly, Florida state officials and the US Coast Guard responded relatively quickly and decisively. To block Cubans from reaching the US, the US Navy and Coast Guard diverted more than 70 ships usually used for interdicting drugs and patrolling fisheries or tending buoys. More than 8,500 Coast Guard and Navy personnel, both at sea and on shore, took part in what military officials said was one of the largest rescue operations of its kind. The operation included 350 Marines on board Coast Guard vessels to provide security, as well as a variety of A/C-130 and H-60 Jayhawk helicopters, acting as “a bucket brigade of sorts” (*St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 1994: 1A). Cutters and patrol craft would intercept rafts and transfer them to 10 larger Navy ships (mainly frigates), which made the 36-42 hour trip to Guantanamo, thus allowing the Coast Guard boats to stay in the Straits (*St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 1994: 1A). Nevertheless, this effort was not as effective as it might have been, given that the contingency plan was abandoned in the middle of the crisis, because of Clinton’s concerns about a repetition of “Fort Chaffee”.

The use of Guantanamo naval base

The administration’s policy of interdicting Cubans leaving on rafts and boats and transporting them to Guantanamo quieted domestic discontent and made the crisis far less visible to the US public, which lowered the domestic political costs of the crisis. Nevertheless, the tough new policy did not result in the deterrent effect, as the administration had hoped. Two weeks after the policy announcement, the US Coast Guard was still rescuing and shipping off to Guantanamo more than 1,000 Cubans per day. It was only after Castro agreed to close the border that the crisis ended. So while Guantanamo’s effect should not be exaggerated, but it did give the administration a bit of additional breathing room and allowed it to avoid more serious political consequences. According to former senior Clinton administration officials, it was always the Clinton administration’s intention to use Guantanamo only as a delaying tactic and to return those at Guantanamo to Cuba (Interviews with former Clinton administration official, Summer 2000 and Spring 2002).

Relative passivity of the Cuban exile population

Second, unlike during Mariel I, relatively few Cuban exiles travelled to Cuba to pick up relatives and friends. Virtually all of those who reached the US during

the 1994 crisis came under their own power. The exile community had several reasons for not directly participating in the exodus. One, Coast Guard officials promised powerful and painful sanctions would be levied against those who violated the blockade; and this time, unlike in 1980, they were taken seriously. Two, Castro's tactic during Mariel of loading exile boats with complete strangers – many of whom were criminals and/or mentally ill – undermined efforts to mobilize the exile community's support during the 1994 exodus (Engstrom, 1998: 189). They wished neither to welcome more such people into the exile community, nor to be so explicitly used as pawns by Castro; so many stayed home. Three, following Mariel, many in the exile community felt that those who were fleeing were not political refugees, but rather economic migrants, and they were disinclined to facilitate their migration (Gonzalez-Pando, 1998; Eckstein and Barberia, 2001). Finally, it is possible that the some in the exile community finally realized that by aiding the flight of those who opposed the regime they were deflating the pressure to remove Castro (Engstrom, 1998: fn 12).

The November 1994 “Republican Revolution”

Third, the size of the Republican Congressional victory in November 1994 may well have precluded some of the diplomatic openings expected by Castro from materializing. For example, it was reported that during the summer of 1994, then National Security Advisor Anthony Lake said privately that he was prepared to recommend that Clinton lift the embargo and accept the political consequences. But the November election results put that “tightly held strategy on ice”, according to a senior Clinton administration official (*Washington Post*, 1995: C1). When asked thereafter about the probability that the administration would take “bold steps on Cuba policy,” the official said, “That’s not who we (the administration) are” (*Washington Post*, 1995: C1).

Further, in March 1995, when NSC officials told reporters that they were about to recommend dropping the additional sanctions – namely, the prohibitions on remittances and family visitations – that Clinton had imposed during the height of the August crisis, the proposal was immediately attacked in Congress as capitulation to Castro and promptly abandoned (*Washington Post*, 1995: C1). Finally, as noted above, the Republican electoral victory installed Senator Jesse Helms (R-NC) as chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and Representative Dan Burton (R-Ind.) as chairman of the House Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere Affairs. With support from Helms and Burton, Cuban lobbies mobilized to tighten economic sanctions on Cuba; the resulting Helms-Burton legislation was designed to stop foreign investment in Cuba and, if possible, to damage Cuban trade (Dominguez, 1997: 60-5).²³ Although the administration initially opposed the bill, following the Brothers to the Rescue shoot-down in February 1996, Clinton threw his support behind the legislation.²⁴

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Option one: play the game, but have a better grasp of the “rules”

There is some irony in the fact that the 1994 crisis probably could have been avoided if the US had not flatly rejected Castro’s initial calls for negotiation. The kind of immigration “escape valve” Castro prefers is one “that is orderly and drawn out and not very splashy” (Rohter, 1994b). Orderly and splashless negotiations might well have generated little more than a blip on the public’s radar screen, thereby avoiding both a domestic and an international crisis. As has been noted before, history indicates “each and every president [from Eisenhower to Clinton] came to the conclusion that an important aspect of his Castro crisis [in the end] required negotiations” (Rohter, 1994b).

On the other hand, choosing to concede to Castro’s threats as soon as he makes them obviously generates its own costs, in reputation and credibility, which could encourage him to threaten the US ever more frequently and with increasing demands.²⁵ However, more careful monitoring of the prevailing economic and social conditions situation on the ground in Cuba, coupled with more aural acuity if and when Castro begins making threatening noises, could lead to earlier diplomatic intervention, which could stave off future embarrassments. It is worth noting that with few recognized exceptions, including the one in April 1995 discussed above, Castro has usually followed through on his publicly articulated threats to open the island’s borders. In other words, heretofore such threats have rarely been idle. As Engstrom notes in his analysis of the Carter administration’s response to Mariel:

The ahistorical approach of policy makers in the Carter Administration is particularly telling because the Camarioca boatlift provided tailor-made examples of the conditions that contributed to an earlier boatlift and the policies employed by the Johnson Administration to deal with it. The Camarioca boatlift offered relevant lessons that the Carter Administration did not explore. Had policy makers examined the dynamics of the Camarioca boatlift either before or during the Mariel boatlift, they may well have learned from history and developed better policies (1998: 198).

This assessment remains equally valid today; one need only change the names and dates.

Option two: make the game not worth playing by eroding the weapon’s power

Through a careful combination of public policy, education, and generous side-payments, the US (and other targets) may be able to reduce their vulnerability

to extortive engineered migration, by undermining, or at least diminishing, the perpetrators' ability to use refugees as a weapon. In short, if a target can keep a migration surge from either being perceived as or actually becoming a crisis for the target, it can significantly degrade the perpetrator's "weapons' capabilities". This may not be easy as both perpetrators and interested outsiders have powerful incentives to keep outflows visible and perceived as problematic.

However, potential targets can take a few concrete steps that may mitigate, if not eliminate their vulnerability, although several measures are potentially quite expensive. First, they can develop and be prepared to implement comprehensive and *politically acceptable* contingency plans, both to actively cope with the emergency and to help prevent the local infrastructure(s) from being overburdened. Specifically, to be better prepared the government should not wait for a crisis period to court communities that could be persuaded to take migrants – either for short or long-term stays – in exchange for attractive economic and/or political compensation packages. These plans would likely require copious financial support for those communities affected. Second, target governments can launch education campaigns with the goal of teaching the public the real economics of immigration, emphasizing that most studies have found that over time immigration generally results in a net gain for most industrialized countries (this may be particularly true for those countries facing declining birth rates and aging populations).

Third, they can actively cultivate the support of other states that could aid in burden sharing. (Again, if possible, the time to pursue such support is *before* a new crisis erupts.) For example, had all of the thirteen Caribbean and Central American states that the US approached during the 1994 crisis agreed to accept several thousand people, Castro's gambit might have failed. However, but for Panama, very few agreed to take refugees, even when offered side-payments. The few exceptions were St. Lucia, which offered to shelter Cubans in exchange for new water pipelines and roads, and the Turks and Caicos Islands which agreed to take up to 2,000 people for short-term stays of up to four weeks (*Baltimore Sun*, 1994: 1A). In any event, this kind of organized bribery could become a very expensive proposition that might still fail. For instance, convincing states to burden share with the US in 1994 grew even more difficult in the aftermath of riots in Panama that December, after which Panama demanded that the US take back the 15,000 it had agreed to host. The riots "virtually guaranteed that no other state will wish to host detention facilities on its soil", as Gillian Gunn, Director of the Cuba Project, put it in her February 1995 testimony before Congress (Gunn, 1995).

Nevertheless, countries seeking foreign aid and/or other forms of international support might be persuaded to cooperate under the right conditions. It is worth remembering that, early in the Kosovo crisis, an escalating refugee crisis on the Macedonian border at Blace was solved in just this manner (Barutciski

and Suhrke, 2001: 101). Finally, targets may choose to abrogate the prevailing norm regarding the responsibility of states to accept people deemed to be refugees, either by asserting overriding national security concerns or by simply refusing to recognize those fleeing as refugees. Targets who choose to do so may suffer significant reputational and hypocrisy costs, although under certain conditions they may deem those preferable to the domestic political costs of accepting more migrants.

NOTES

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2. For a slightly different (pre-1994) view of the issue, but one that also asserts "the Cuban government, time and time again, has forced the US government to surrender to Cuba some US sovereign prerogatives to set US immigration policies," see Dominguez, 1992. For a discussion of the 1994 crisis and how Castro used Cuban migrants as bargaining chips, see Human Rights Watch, 1994.
3. It should be noted that the target(s) of extortion might not be synonymous with the refugee recipient state(s); in such cases, this author refers to these (actual or potential) host states as third parties.
4. This conflict between international and domestic commitments has given rise to a new class of symbolic political costs, what this author terms "hypocrisy costs", defined as "symbolic political costs that arise when there exists a real (or perceived) disparity between a professed commitment to international norms and agreements, and demonstrated actions that contravene such a commitment", these are distinct from but exist in parallel with traditional reputation costs. These hypocrisy costs tend to be positively correlated with the degree of public awareness, or "issue salience" that any crisis engenders. So if no one is paying attention, no costs may result. If a crisis is very visible and has apparent and material consequences, hypocrisy costs will likely be very large.
5. For extensive discussion of the composition of the flows, see newspaper and television coverage of both the Mariel (April-October 1980) and the *balseros* crisis (August-October 1994 and February-June 1995).
6. That these negative effects need to be visible for a meaningful dilemma to exist is a key point. Consider, for instance, Robert Pastor's musings on Clinton's conflicting policy prerogatives: "If a crisis did not engage the public or attract the media or an interest group, it was ignored. The administration, however, could not afford to ignore intense objections from a core constituency group...(and) it was wary of

- antagonizing a Florida ethnic group... unless a broader national domestic interest (e.g., halting an influx of refugees) forced a recalculation” (Pastor, 1996).
7. For a different application of Putnamesque logic to US-Cuba relations, see LeoGrande, 1998. The argument presented is methodologically consistent with that offered in LeoGrande’s own analysis of the 1994 crisis, although he focuses principally on the use of sanctions by the US as a form of implicit coercive diplomacy against Cuba, and on how the US bargaining position has changed over time. He ignores completely the more explicit use of refugee-driven coercion by Cuba against the US. Thus, like LeoGrande, the analysis relies on a two-level game framework and hypothesizes that the outcome of the international negotiation was driven in large part by domestic imperatives, but focuses attention on the bargaining power that issues from the other side of the US-Cuba equation (see also Putnam, 1988).
 8. Of course, overall the US remains immeasurably stronger. So if a refugee crisis were really major – say, involving many hundreds of thousands or more – the US might entertain an invasion of Cuba, rather than concede to Castro. However, the predicted material and political costs of invasion are still regarded as significant, although the Cuban military today is a shadow of its Cold War self. For an analysis of Castro’s post-Cold War capabilities, see Walker, 1996. See also Dominguez, 1997.
 9. Interestingly, Castro’s claims were consistent with a report generated by the US Interest Section in January 1994. In a “top secret memorandum” to the State Department, CIA, and INS, visa officers in the Interest Section discussed the problems they were facing in trying to identify visa applicants with legitimate human rights cases, in that “...most people apply more because of the deteriorating economic situation than a real fear of persecution” (Masud-Piloto, 1996: 134-135).
 10. This is essentially an (in my view, correct) argument that the US too was using refugees as a political weapon.
 11. In the interest of brevity, both the Camarioca crisis and the Mariel boatlift are presented in thumbnail sketch form below. For more detailed analyses, see Kelly M. Greenhill, *People Pressure: Strategic Forced Migration and the Rise of the Human Rights Regime*, Ph.D. dissertation, MIT, forthcoming. See also Rivera, 1991; Engstrom, 1998; and Smith, 1987 for more detailed histories of these two crises.
 12. However, the Memorandum did not constitute a formal normalization of US-Cuban immigration policy; that would have to wait until the aftermath of the Mariel boatlift 15 years later. See Masud-Piloto, 1996: 61-68; Engstrom, 1998: 26-28; and Gonzalez-Pando, 1996.
 13. A similar relocation programme was employed during the Camarioca crisis. In its aftermath, it was deemed a failure because most of those relocated soon returned to South Florida. However, this misses the critical point that the primary, and successful, goal of the relocation programme was to relieve the acute and “condensed pressure” on Florida public officials (see Bach, 1984: 178-179).
 14. See also Engstrom, 1998: fn. 115 for details of an interview with negotiator, Peter Tarnoff. See again Smith, 1987; and Larzelere, 1988.
 15. For instance, on 28 May, more than 100 people forced their way into the Belgian ambassador’s residence, and on during the week of 13 July, 21 people crashed the German embassy, while another nine entered the Chilean consulate. Although the

- embassy crashings were resolved without incident, many of the hijackings involved violence, and both civilians and Cuban police officers were being killed. For details of the hijackings in this period, see *El Nuevo Herald*, 14 July to 12 August 1994; see also Masud-Piloto, 1996: 137.
16. Fort Chaffee housed more than 20,000 Cuban refugees by June 1980. On 1 June, a group of about 300 detainees tried to escape. After most were captured, they began rioting, which led to Clinton's decision to call out the Arkansas National Guard. Although few were injured, and those involved were prosecuted, the perception that Clinton had lost control adversely affected his bid for re-election. He lost to Frank White, the head of a small savings and loan, and the first Republican to serve as governor in Arkansas in a hundred years (see Smith, 1998).
 17. It is worth noting that several of Clinton's key foreign policy advisors also served in the Carter administration during the Mariel crisis, including Anthony Lake, Warren Christopher, and Mariel crisis negotiator, Peter Tarnoff.
 18. See national newspaper coverage of the Cuba crisis in, for instance, *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, and *Christian Science Monitor*, as well as TV coverage on CNN, between 25-31 August, 1994.
 19. For his part, Tarnoff claims negotiations were held in secret to pre-empt a massive exodus that might transpire in anticipation of any new immigration accord (Tarnoff, 1995; see also LeoGrande, 1998; and Kirschten, 1995).
 20. Even now these provisions remain incompletely implemented because of US adherence to the so-called wet foot/dry foot policy. The "wet foot" part of the policy means that all Cubans picked up at sea would be returned, while the "dry foot" aspect means that any Cuban who reaches the US still has the right to stay.
 21. See *Buffalo News*, 1994, which quotes "experts" whose views are consistent with this analysis: "Although Castro has used the crisis to renew his demand for lifting a three-decade-old U.S. trade embargo on Cuba, experts say they believe that his real objectives are far more modest: easier legal migration, U.S. prosecution of Cubans who make it to Florida in stolen aircraft or boats, and restoration of permission for Cuban-Americans to send money to relatives on the island."
 22. It has been argued that Castro used the shoot-down to reaffirm his credibility, and launched "a pre-emptive strike to signal to all political opponents, in Cuba and elsewhere, that he was prepared to use force to remain in power" (Ackerman, 1997).
 23. For a discussion of the provisions and consequences of Helms-Burton, see Roy, 1997: 77-108.
 24. However, Helms-Burton has never been fully implemented. Even Clinton's successor, George W. Bush, has so far decided to forego implementation of all of the bill's provisions, in the interest of not riling US allies, who have economic ties with the island.
 25. See, for instance, Jervis, 1976: chapter 3, for discussion of the potential dangers of appeasement.
 26. Plus interviews with a senior INS official (March 2000); senior US Coast Guard officials (April-May 2000); former Chile administration official (February 2002); and former Clinton administration officials (Summer 2000, Spring 2002); and extensive examination of national newspaper coverage of the Cuba crises in, for instance, *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, and *Christian Science Monitor* during both the Mariel (April-October 1980) and the *balseros* crisis (August-October 1994 and February-June 1995), as well as TV coverage on CNN, between 25-31 August 1994.

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LES MIGRATIONS MANIPULEES ET L'UTILISATION
DES REFUGIES A DES FINS POLITIQUES – ETUDE DE CAS
SUR LA CRISE DES « BALSEROS » CUBAINS DE 1994

Ce document présente une étude de cas sur la crise des « balseros » cubains d'août 1994 pendant laquelle plus de 35 000 personnes ont fui l'île en l'espace de quelques semaines pour tenter de gagner la Floride. Il y est dit que Castro a provoqué cette crise pour s'efforcer d'exploiter la crainte qu'avaient les Etats-Unis de connaître une situation similaire à celle du port de Mariel quelques années plus tôt, et pour contraindre ce pays à changer de politique aussi bien en matière d'immigration que dans d'autres domaines. Le document soutient par ailleurs la thèse que du point de vue de Castro, cette manœuvre a été dans une certaine mesure une victoire car c'était la troisième fois qu'il parvenait à se servir des Cubains comme d'une arme politique « asymétrique » contre les Etats-Unis. Ce document affirme par ailleurs que le succès de Castro repose sur sa capacité à internationaliser sa propre crise intérieure et à la transformer pour les Etats-Unis en une crise de politique à la fois intérieure et extérieure. Enfin, il explique sous un angle nouveau comment, pourquoi et dans quelles conditions les Etats et/ou d'autres acteurs peuvent tenter d'utiliser les réfugiés à des fins de manipulation politique. Bien qu'éclipsée par l'évacuation maritime de plus grande ampleur effectuée en 1980 à partir du port de Mariel, la crise de 1994 est importante pour plusieurs raisons. Tout d'abord, malgré sa brièveté, elle a eu des conséquences profondes sur les relations cubano-américaines. D'emblée, elle a induit de la part des Etats-Unis vis-à-vis de l'immigration cubaine un changement total par rapport à la politique suivie au cours des trois décennies précédentes. Ensuite, elle a influencé la politique intérieure de ce pays en donnant une ampleur et une importance accrues au problème et en sensibilisant non seulement les habitants de la Floride, mais aussi l'opinion publique dans son ensemble au problème de l'immigration illégale. Par ailleurs, la crise a montré tout le potentiel qu'offre les migrations manipulées comme arme asymétrique dans les mains des faibles. Enfin, les brèves mais importantes interactions entre acteurs internationaux et nationaux dans ce cas méritent d'être examinées car, même si la crise de 1994 a été limitée, elle rappelle par sa dynamique d'innombrables autres crises internationales de réfugiés, à grande ou petite échelle. Ce cas nous permet donc de tirer des enseignements susceptibles d'être utiles lorsque des crises (réelles ou potentielles) se produiront.

LA MIGRACIÓN MAQUINADA Y LA UTILIZACIÓN DE REFUGIADOS COMO ARMAS POLÍTICAS: UN ESTUDIO POR CASOS DE LA CRISIS DE LOS BALSEROS CUBANOS DE 1994

Este artículo presenta un estudio por casos de la crisis de balsaeros cubanos de agosto de 1994, durante la cual más de 35.000 personas huyeron de la isla y se dirigieron hacia Florida en el lapso de unas cuantas semanas. En él se expone que Castro lanzó la crisis en un empeño por manipular los temores de los Estados Unidos de otro “Mariel”, y a fin de forzar un cambio de política en los Estados Unidos, tanto en cuanto a la inmigración como a toda una serie de cuestiones. Asimismo, el artículo sostiene que, desde la perspectiva de Castro, este ejercicio coercitivo resultó ser un verdadero éxito – por tercera vez utilizó con éxito al pueblo cubano como un arma política asimétrica en contra de los Estados Unidos. Por otra parte, en ese artículo se arguye que el éxito de Castro era previsible dada su capacidad de internacionalizar sus propias crisis internas y transformarlas en crisis estadounidenses de política interna y de política extranjera. Finalmente, ofrece una nueva explicación sobre cómo, por qué y bajo qué condiciones, los interlocutores estatales y no estatales pueden intentar utilizar a los refugiados como armas políticas coercitivas. Si bien la crisis de 1994 fue ínfima en comparación a la importante crisis del barco Mariel de 1980, tuvo trascendencia por diversas razones. Primero, a pesar de su carácter breve, tuvo considerables consecuencias en las relaciones entre Estados Unidos y Cuba. Sin ninguna advertencia o preámbulo, catalizó un desplazamiento de la política a los Estados Unidos de cara a la inmigración cubana, que representó un cambio radical de lo que había prevalecido durante las tres décadas anteriores. Segundo, influyó en la política interna de los Estados Unidos a nivel nacional, al ampliar el alcance y preeminencia de esta cuestión, y al movilizar no solamente a los habitantes de Florida, sino también al público amplio preocupado por la inmigración ilegal. Tercero, esta crisis ilustró el poder potencial de la migración maquinada como un arma asimétrica de los débiles. Finalmente, las breves, pero significativas interacciones de los interlocutores internacionales y nacionales en este caso merecen ser examinadas porque si bien la crisis de 1994 tuvo un carácter limitado, en su dinámica se asemeja a una mirada de otras crisis internacionales de refugiados, grandes o pequeñas. Por tanto, este caso ofrece valiosas lecciones que pueden servir para encarar crisis futuras (reales o maquinadas).