

**The Externalities of Civil Strife:  
Refugees as a Source of International Conflict**

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*Abstract:* Domestic strife and civil war frequently produce large population dislocations and refugee flows across national boundaries. Mass refugee flows often entail negative consequences for receiving states, particularly in developing countries. Moreover, civil violence frequently extends across national boundaries as ‘internal’ conflicts are not constrained by borders. This paper argues that refugee flows between states may significantly increase the likelihood of militarized interstate disputes (MIDs) in that dyad. Refugee-receiving states are more likely to initiate MIDs as they intervene to prevent further externalities, and refugee-sending states initiate MIDs as they violate borders in pursuit of dissidents. Moreover, this research challenges conventional theories of international conflict that focus almost exclusively on distributional issues between states. These propositions are tested in the first-ever quantitative analysis of the relationship between refugees and MID initiation, 1955-2000. Results confirm that refugees significantly increase the probability of international conflict in a dyad.

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## **The Externalities of Civil Strife: Refugees as a Source of International Conflict**

Periods of civil unrest and persecution frequently generate population dislocations and mass refugee migration across national boundaries. Civil wars in Afghanistan, Sudan, the Balkans, and Liberia, to name a few examples, have significant repercussions for states in the region as people leave their homes in search of safety elsewhere. Government persecution of political opponents, human rights violations, and ethnic cleansing campaigns—normally understood as matters of ‘domestic’ politics—may also have far-reaching effects as migrants flee one-sided violence by their government. These refugee flows can be quite large; conflicts in Afghanistan, Mozambique, and Rwanda have generated well over one million refugees each. Therefore, political turmoil at the domestic level can have significant spillover effects for other states in the international system and may provoke strong reactions by others when external costs are high. In addition, ‘internal’ violence may extend across national boundaries as conflicts between governments and refugees/dissidents are frequently not contained by borders. Negative externalities and cross-border violence suggest that refugee flows may provoke tensions between states, and at the extreme, such migration has the potential to spark militarized disputes between host and home countries.

There is a growing body of literature on the security implications of migration in general and refugee migration in particular (see e.g. Adamson 2006; Lischer 2005; Rudolph 2003; Salehyan and Gleditsch 2006; Weiner 1992). Recent quantitative work confirms the intuition that political violence and persecution are a significant determinants of flight (see e.g. Davenport, Moore, Poe 2003; Melander and Oberg 2006; Moore and Shellman 2004). Yet, refugees are not simply the unfortunate by-products of war, but may serve as catalysts for

conflict, including conflict between states. Some have suggested that refugee migration can provoke international hostilities between states, including military action (Dowty and Loescher 1996; Posen 1996), although this claim has not been rigorously tested. Case-studies of particular refugee crises provide anecdotal evidence that international military endeavors are often precipitated by mass refugee migration. For instance, it has been argued that a major reason for the US invasion of Haiti that ousted the military junta and reinstated President Aristide in 1994 was to prevent further refugee migration (Newland 1995). Similarly, a frequently-heard justification for NATO military operations in Kosovo was to prevent further mass migration out of the Balkans. Refugee-sending countries may also launch military attacks on neighboring territories in pursuit of refugees and rebels among them. The Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982 and the Rwandan invasion of Zaire in 1996 were largely motivated by the desire to clear refugee camps that harbored militant factions. Yet, the link between refugee flows and international conflict been under-theorized and has not been subjected to systematic empirical testing. Therefore, this paper asks: do refugee flows increase the probability of militarized interstate disputes (MIDs) between sending and receiving countries?

This paper also promises to significantly improve upon our understanding of the sources of international conflict. Despite a large body of work on the causes of war and similar international disputes (e.g. Bennett and Stam 2004; Bremer 1992; Bueno de Mesquita et al 1999; Fearon 1995; Oneal and Russett 2001; Vasquez 1995), refugee flows between states hardly receive mention in the literature despite many examples where refugee crises precipitated armed interventions and hostilities between states. More generally, there has been scant attention to how civil wars and political unrest *within* states may spark disputes *between* states (but see

Gleditsch, Salehyan, and Schultz 2007).<sup>1</sup> Typically, scholars have focused on factors that constrain the use of force between particular dyads such as distance, power ratios, political liberalism, and economic ties (e.g. Bremer 1992; Gartzke 2007; Morrow 1999; Schultz 1999). Others have looked at issues that may motivate armed conflict between states, particularly the distribution of territory and resources (Hensel 2001; Hensel, Mitchell, and Sowers 2006; Vasquez 1995). The externalities of civil war have been overlooked in discussions of international conflict, although many have found that internal conflicts have significant negative consequences for neighboring states (Ghobarah, Huth and Russett 2003; Murdoch and Sandler 2004; Salehyan and Gleditsch 2006). The burdens of refugee inflows and the diffusion of violence across borders may point to additional factors motivating international conflicts and are specific triggers that lead to interstate disputes.

Traditional studies of conflict, moreover, have tended to treat civil and international violence as separate fields of inquiry, reflecting the long-standing field division between comparativists and IR scholars. This has been slowly changing as recent research blurs the boundaries between intra- and inter-state violence; analyses of civil war have begun to incorporate international variables and vice-versa (e.g. Balch-Lindsay and Enterline 2000; Carment and James 1995; Doyle and Sambanis 2000; Gleditsch 2007; Regan 2000; Saideman 2001; Trumbore 2003; Walter 2002; Woodwell 2004). For instance, Trumbore (2003), Saideman (2001), and Woodwell (2004) argue that the persecution of domestic minorities can give rise to international conflicts when countries intervene to protect their ethnic kin. Beyond kinship ties, Gleditsch, Schultz, and Salehyan (2007) find that all forms of civil war—ethnic and non-ethnic—significantly raise the probability of a militarized interstate dispute in a dyad. They

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<sup>1</sup> Mansfield and Snyder (2005) argue that domestic political instability caused by democratization and other regime transitions may spark international conflicts. However, they do not directly assess the effect of civil war within states.

conjecture that refugee flows and other conflict externalities may be one explanation for this link although this is not explicitly tested. Salehyan (2007) argues that civil wars frequently provoke conflicts between states when rebel groups have access to external sanctuaries across international boundaries.

Adding to these studies, I argue that refugee flows are more than just the consequence of civil unrest, but may also contribute to international disputes between sending and receiving countries. They may do so in two ways. First, refugees constitute a negative externality borne by receiving states, and these states may launch military actions to seal their borders, threaten sending regimes with violence, and even invade the sending state to prevent further flows. Second, refugee-sending states may violate the sovereign territory of their neighbors in order to attack political and/or ethnic rivals that have fled across the border as well as punish the states that harbor them. Moreover, such conflicts are more difficult to resolve through bargaining because promises to end refugee-producing human rights violations and attacks against dissidents are not credible. I test these claims through the first large-N quantitative analysis linking refugees to the initiation of militarized interstate disputes (MIDs), and cover the years between 1955 and 2000. Even when controlling for the presence of civil war within states in a dyad and other factors known to be associated with MIDs, refugees are a significant predictor of conflict. Moreover, this study reveals that refugees increase the probability of dispute initiation by both sending and receiving countries.

### **Refugees and International Conflict**

Refugees crises are not merely humanitarian disasters—despite their clear humanitarian dimensions—but have real security implications for states. I argue that refugee migration increases both: 1) the likelihood that receiving states will mobilize forces against the

sender, and 2) the likelihood that sending states will initiate disputes against the host. Mass, disorderly migration poses significant burdens on receiving states and refugee-generating conflicts frequently extend across territorial boundaries.

Before proceeding, it is useful to note the scale and extent of global refugee migration. Figure 1 displays the global trend in the number of refugees, 1961-2002. The number of refugees worldwide rose steadily during the Cold War—reflecting the rise in the number of armed conflicts during that period (see Fearon and Laitin 2003)—and peaked at roughly 18 million in the early 1990s. The number of conflicts and the number of refugees has been declining since the end of the Cold War, possibly as the superpowers were no longer willing to fund insurgencies and were more willing to approve peacekeeping operations. At its peak, the number of refugees exceeded the population of the Netherlands, and if “refugees” were a single country, it would be the 59<sup>th</sup> most populous state in the world. Yet, refugees are not evenly distributed across states. Some countries such as, Iran, Pakistan, and Jordan hosted over 1 million refugees each; refugee populations were also quite large in some of the least developed countries such as in Africa. Tanzania, Zaire, and Malawi were hosts to particularly large refugee populations.

--Figure 1 Here--

### *Refugees as a Negative Externality*

The terms ‘internal,’ ‘domestic,’ and ‘civil,’ conflict imply that violent interactions between states and dissidents, and the negative consequences of war and human rights violations, are contained within the state. Rather than treating states as independent units, it may be more appropriate to view them as interconnected in dense networks of social interactions where processes within one state have significant repercussions for other states in the region and

elsewhere (Balch-Lindsay and Enterline 2000; Gleditsch 2002a; Simmons, Dobbin, and Garrett 2006). The human costs of civil war and state persecution may not be entirely borne by the country itself, but may create significant externalities, or spillover effects, for others.

Refugees may contribute to several types of negative externalities.<sup>2</sup> First, refugee migration can inflict a significant economic burden on host countries. Although some international aid may be available, refugee hosts—which include some of the world’s poorest nations—often bear much of the costs of maintaining refugees. Refugees require humanitarian assistance and public services supplied by their hosts, and may compete with locals for jobs and scarce resources, bringing them into conflict with domestic actors (Martin 2005). Compared to voluntary labor migrants, refugees are also less likely to contribute to productive economic activity in their hosts (Cortes 2004); as opposed to economic migrants, refugees are not selected for their skills, may have suffered war trauma making employment difficult, and may have lost their assets prior to flight. In a related study, Murdoch and Sandler (2004) find that civil wars in one country have a significant negative impact on GDP growth in neighboring states; they propose population migration as a potential causal factor, but do not test this explicitly.

Second, refugees may entail negative public health consequences for their host countries. Refugee camps are often crowded and unsanitary, creating conditions ripe for infectious disease; refugee inflows stretch domestic medical resources thin; divert health resources away from normal care; and refugees may have specific health needs related to war trauma that overwhelm the host. A growing body of empirical research finds that civil wars significantly increase the rate of morbidity and mortality in the affected country itself as well as in neighboring states (Ghobarah, Huth, and Russett 2003; Iqbal 2006). Studies have shown that

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<sup>2</sup> Refugees may not always be a negative burden and can contribute positively to their host societies in the long-run. However, they often have short-term costs associated with their immediate care.

refugees have contributed to the spread of diseases such as HIV/AIDS, malaria, cholera, and diarrhea, among other infectious diseases (Collier et al 2003; Rowland and Nosten 2001; Toole and Waldman 1997).

Third, refugees may upset the ethnic balance in their host countries through what may be thought of as a ‘demographic’ externality. Refugees and immigrants may be seen as unwelcome foreigners and a cultural ‘threat’ to the host community (Weiner 1992; 1978). Ethnic tensions may become especially pronounced when refugees possess ethnic ties with groups already present in the host society. In countries where ethnic cleavages are deeply entrenched, large, unexpected migrant inflows may tilt the delicate ethnic balance in the host society and spark inter-group conflict. As Brown (1996: 576) writes, “The sudden influx of refugees can aggravate ethnic problems and further complicate the picture by changing the domestic balance of power.” Lake and Rothchild (1998: 25) point to similar dynamics in their discussion of the diffusion of ethnic conflict across states.

Finally, refugee flows may directly affect the security and stability of the host country by contributing to organized armed conflict on the host’s territory. Salehyan and Gleditsch (2006) find that refugee inflows from neighboring states significantly increase the risk of civil war. Along with the refugees themselves, foreign fighters, arms, and ideologies that contribute to violence may also stream across the border. ‘Refugee warrior’ communities (see Lischer 2005; Salehyan 2007a; Zolberg, Suhrke, and Aguayo 1989) can expand rebel networks to encompass the host state when militants establish bases on external territory and when they form social ties with domestic opposition groups of a similar ethnic or political orientation. Therefore, at the extreme, refugee inflows may lead to violent turmoil on the host country’s territory. For



instance, Jordan was involved in a bloody armed conflict in 1970 when it moved to expel Palestine Liberation Organization fighters operating within refugee camps on its soil.

This discussion suggests that spillovers can seriously jeopardize interstate relations. Receiving countries may confront the sender to compel them to end civil wars and human rights violations that produce refugee burdens. Such bargains share certain similarities with conflicts over externalities in the economic realm (see Coase 1960). As the 'Coase Theorem' suggests, those that suffer a negative externality will be willing to pay some cost to prevent its production at the source. Thus, negative externalities become part of the bargain between states. Receiving countries may issue threats and warnings to the sending state, demanding a change in that state's domestic behavior. They may also close border crossings and move troops near the international boundary; military operations and force deployment near the border may be seen as provocative. At the extreme, they may be willing to prevent negative externalities through military invasions of the source state.

Yet, the use of force may not be a forgone conclusion. The bargaining-and-war perspective (see e.g. Fearon 1995; Powell 1999; Slantchev 2004; Wagner 2000) emphasizes that war results when parties cannot agree on an acceptable settlement. This bargaining framework was developed in the context of dyadic disputes between states over the distribution of some good such as territory. Refugee flows resulting from civil wars and human rights violations are different from bargains over divisible goods because policies generating forced migration are under the unilateral control of the sending state (see Schultz 2007 for a related discussion) and introduce a third actor, the domestic opposition. Yet, as the bargaining framework suggests, agreements between states may be difficult to reach when states cannot credibly commit to a deal because of temptations to renege later. The refugee-receiving country may demand that the

sending state cease attacks on rebels and dissidents—and perhaps accommodate the opposition—in order to stem the flow of refugees across the border. Yet, credible promises to do so are difficult to secure because refraining from repressive policies threatens the very survival of the regime and the benefits of rule. The sending state may view the risk of external attacks to be acceptable given the benefits it hopes to achieve by continuing crackdowns against domestic opponents. Moreover, as Thyne (2006) argues, external signals in support of rebel aims and threats of intervention may in fact exacerbate domestic conflict by emboldening the opposition and leading them to make more extreme demands.

While refugee flows can contribute to low-level tensions between states, major military conflicts may also arise when receiving states forcefully intervene in the refugee-sending state to remove the regime in power and/or induce a major change in policy. Military invasions in Haiti and Kosovo were partly motivated by the desire to stem further refugee migration. In a televised address shortly before the US operation in Haiti in 1994, President Clinton remarked: “Today, more than 14,000 refugees are living at our naval base in Guantanamo. The American people have already expended almost \$200 million to support them... We will continue to face the threat of a mass exodus of refugees and its constant threat to stability in our region and control of our borders.”<sup>3</sup> In these cases, the refugee-sending country could not commit to ending repressive policies because doing so would exacerbate domestic dissent. This discussion leads to a first hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 1. Refugee migration between a dyad will increase the probability that the receiving country will initiate a militarized interstate dispute (MID) against the sending country.*

### *Refugees and the Externalization of Conflict*

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<sup>3</sup> “Your Time is Up: Clinton Address on Haiti.” *Boston Globe*. September 16, 2004. p. 12.

All forms of international migration underscore the frequent non-congruence between the boundaries of the state and its citizenry (Fox 2005; Guarnizo, Portes, and Haller 2003; Shain 1989; Shain and Barth 2003; Waldinger and Fitzgerald 2004). States are formally sovereign over a given territory and claim to govern the affairs of their citizens; yet, migration implies not all citizens of the state are physically present within its territorial jurisdiction. The state's laws and regulatory capabilities do not reach citizens beyond its geographic domain. Yet, when migrants leave the state, attachments to the homeland and activism in home-country politics rarely end at the border, and may persist for generations (Collier and Hoeffler 2004; Lyon and Ucarer 2001; Shain and Barth 2003; Sheffer 2003; Tatla 1999). Therefore, interactions between the state and the 'polity' often extend beyond formal/legal state boundaries and give rise to transnational social processes involving migrant diasporas.

In the case of refugee migration, such flows threaten to extend violence and opposition activities across national boundaries. Migrants flee civil war and state persecution for safety in countries of asylum, and most of the world's refugees flee to countries in close proximity to their country of origin. However, particularly when borders are porous, they are not necessarily immune from continued attacks by the state. States may pursue their ethnic and/or political rivals across the border, and such attacks necessarily violate the sovereignty and territorial integrity of others. States will object military incursions on their soil, particularly if local populations also become caught up in cross-border attacks. No state welcomes foreign incursions and military violations of their sovereignty, even though the physical ability to firmly control borders may be lacking (Andreas 2003; Herbst 1989; Jackson 1987; Zacher 2001).

Refugees may not be passive actors, however. In many cases, while the vast majority of refugees never directly participate in violence, rather than being unfortunate victims of

violence, some refugees have mobilized into insurgent organizations and refugee camps often serve a double-purpose as sanctuaries for militant groups (Lischer 2005; Salehyan 2007a; Stedman and Tanner 2003; Zolberg, Suhrke, and Aguayo 1989). Recruitment into a rebel organization may provide refugees a better alternative to life in a camp and provide individuals a sense of purpose. These ‘refugee warrior’ communities sometimes form when their hosts are too weak to prevent the militarization of refugee camps; in other cases, host countries actively encourage and aid dissident activities as a way to undermine their international rivals. Thus, violence between the country of origin and refugee communities may not be one-sided, but takes the form of transnational civil wars that span international boundaries (Salehyan 2007a, 2007b). Indeed, studies at the sub-national level on the geography of civil conflict have confirmed that battles frequently take place in close proximity to international borders (see e.g. Buhaug and Gates 2002); refugee warrior groups are likely to be responsible for much of this finding. Sending states may launch attacks on their neighbor’s territory in order to strike at external rebel bases and to clear refugee camps close to the border.

Cross-border attacks on refugees and transnational rebel organizations are certainly a source of interstate conflict as they violate respect for international boundaries. In addition to conflicts over incursions across the border, cross-border violence may engulf local populations, threatening the security of the refugee host. For instance, during the civil war in Nicaragua, the Nicaraguan Army frequently clashed with Contra forces among refugees in Honduras. There were several incidents where Honduran border guards were killed, locals were harmed as they were caught in the cross-fire, and thousands of Hondurans in the border region left for the interior citing security fears.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Julia Preston. “Honduras Feels Impact of Contra War: Government Cedes Border Strip To Nicaraguan-Rebel Fighting.” *Washington Post*. November 11, 1986. p A1.

More directly, the sending state may accuse the host country of harboring dissidents and political opponents. Accepting refugees is more than a humanitarian act, but implicates the sender in committing human rights violations, jeopardizing bilateral relations (Rosenblum and Salehyan 2004). Refugee sending states may directly attack the host state in retaliation for protecting their political opponents and for encouraging refugee militarization. Thus, support for militant activities and the existence of external rebel bases among refugee communities are especially likely to escalate into international hostilities (Salehyan 2007).

As before, bargaining and negotiations may be difficult in these circumstances. Cross-border strikes against external rebel bases and 'hot pursuit' raids may jeopardize bilateral relations, but the costs of confrontation with the host state may be seen as acceptable when compared with the tactical advantages to be gained over domestic rebel organizations. Moreover, disputes about alleged host country support for rebel organizations are difficult to resolve through bargaining because it may be difficult for the host state to credibly commit to reversing its policies (see Bapat 2006; Salehyan 2007; Schultz 2007). In many instances, host countries deny supporting rebels despite home country allegations, and it is difficult to prove that the state is *not* engaging in a pernicious policy; it is hard to prove a negative fact. Verifying compliance with demands to discontinue rebel support is difficult since rebel assistance may continue covertly. Moreover, states supporting rebel organizations may find that the benefits of promoting instability in neighbors outweigh the risk of retaliatory strikes. Finally, refugee host states may find it difficult to comply with demands to evict rebel organizations because they find it too costly and dangerous to forcibly move against such groups.

This discussion suggests that refugee origin states may launch militarized disputes against refugee host states. Such dynamics have been recently apparent during the refugee crisis

in Darfur. Refugees from the Sudanese region of Darfur have fled to eastern Chad and have been attacked by government forces alongside their paramilitary allies seeking to eliminate ethno-political rivals.<sup>5</sup> Israel's invasion of Lebanon in 1982 was in large part motivated by the desire to clear refugee camps of Palestine Liberation Organization forces. This resulted in a military occupation of southern Lebanon for two decades. This leads to a second hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 2. Refugee migration between a dyad will increase the probability that the sending country will initiate a militarized interstate dispute (MID) against the receiving country.*

### **Illustrative Case Narratives**

Before proceeding to the large-N quantitative analysis, this section presents a pair of illustrative cases that will help to underscore the theorized causal connections between refugees and international conflict. I have argued that refugee-receiving states and refugee-sending states are both more likely to initiate militarized actions. The Indian invasion of Bangladesh (East Pakistan) in 1971 demonstrates how concerns over refugee burdens serve as a specific trigger prompting a forceful response. Clearly, India and Pakistan had an enduring international rivalry since independence/partition, but the revolt in East Pakistan and the subsequent refugee exodus provided the spark that led to the escalation of conflict. Rwanda's invasion of Zaire is offered as a case where governments have invaded neighboring states in order to attack refugee encampments and flush out militants among them. Along with backing rebel forces against Mobutu Sese Seko in 1996, the Rwandan armed forces attacked refugee camps in Eastern Zaire to force these populations back into Rwandan territory.

#### *India's Invasion of East Pakistan*

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<sup>5</sup> For an account of the Sudan/Chad conflict involving Darfur, see "Violence beyond Borders: The Human Rights Crisis in Eastern Chad", *Human Rights Watch* June 2006.

The modern-day state of Bangladesh seceded from Pakistan in 1971 following years of perceived second-class status. Provincial elections in 1970 brought the pro-independence Awami League to power in East Pakistan, and Bengali nationalists began to more vocally advocate for secession by taking to the streets. In March of 1971, the government of Pakistan, seeking to restore law and order to the region, arrested leaders of the pro-independence movement, including Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Following the arrest, Bengali units in the Pakistani army revolted and, under the leadership of Zia ur Rahman, declared the independent state of Bangladesh on March 26. This led to open clashes between the Pakistani Army and a new rebel force, known as the Mukti Bahini (Sisson and Rose 1990).

The fighting in Bangladesh led to the largest-ever outpouring of refugees. According to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 10 million Bangladeshis fled for India, at a rate of over 100,000 per day (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees 2000). These migrants fled to the conflict-prone Indian regions of West Bengal, Assam, Meghalaya, and Tripura, where political control and relations with New Delhi were already strained. The refugee influx presented a severe financial and human toll on the Indian government and fell particularly hard on local populations in the border regions.

India suffered several externalities as a direct result of the conflict in Bangladesh. The government estimated that the cost of caring for the refugees for a six-month period was roughly \$175 million. Although some international aid was offered, much of the cost fell on India itself; on October 22, the government imposed new taxes on rail and air travel, postage, and periodicals to cover the cost of the refugee flow.<sup>6</sup> In addition, the refugee crisis led to a major outbreak of cholera in the camps, severely jeopardizing public health conditions (United Nations High

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<sup>6</sup> Keesings Record of World Events. "Mass Influx of East Pakistani Refugees into India" and "Effect on Indian Economy-International Aid to Refugees" [www.keesings.com](http://www.keesings.com) (access date March 10, 2007)

Commissioner for Refugees 2000: 64). One doctor in the region indicated that, "... many of the refugee camps were flooded in ankle-deep water and millions of people spent the night squatting in mud and slush. Sanitation is non-existent and it is feared that the rain will soon spread cholera and other diseases throughout the region."<sup>7</sup> The refugee inflow also caused frictions with local populations as refugees sought work to supplement their rations (Sisson and Rose 1990: 180). According to one report, refugees "...living outside camps are being employed by landowners as farm laborers on wages much lower than those that must be paid to laborers from the locality... This is creating resentment among the local working force."<sup>8</sup>

As Sisson and Rose (1990: 179-181) argue, the refugee influx severely disrupted local politics in affected regions. Relations between the Indian central government and West Bengal—where the Communist party was recently included in the regional governing coalition—had previously been tense, and the refugee crisis was a "major factor in India's decision to dismiss the West Bengali coalition government in mid 1971" (Sisson and Rose 1990: 179). Tribal regions in the north-east were also seriously affected as ethnic minorities in Assam, Tripura, and elsewhere felt threatened by the influx of foreigners (Sisson and Rose 1990: 181; see also Weiner 1978). India called on the government of Pakistan to end the conflict and accept repatriation. In a letter to Pakistan issued on May 14, 1971, the Indian government declared, "This deliberate expulsion of such a large number of people from their homes has created a human problem of unparalleled magnitude which is capable of producing serious repercussions in the area, leading to a threat to peace in the region."<sup>9</sup> Yet Pakistan found it difficult to comply with Indian demands as recognizing the opposition and ending the imposed state of emergency

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<sup>7</sup> Quote obtained from Keesings Record of World Events. "Mass Influx of East Pakistani Refugees into India." [www.keesings.com](http://www.keesings.com) (access date March 10, 2007)

<sup>8</sup> Keesings Record of World Events. "The Refugee Situation." [www.keesings.com](http://www.keesings.com) (Access date March 10, 2007).

<sup>9</sup> Keesings Record of World Events. "Mass Influx of East Pakistani Refugees into India." [www.keesings.com](http://www.keesings.com) (Access date March 10, 2007).



would mean resigning itself to Bangladeshi independence. Relations between the two states became even more strained after Pakistan accused India of harboring Mukti Bahini militants and launched several counterinsurgency strikes in the border region.<sup>10</sup>

Fearing the prospect of a protracted rebellion and a long-term refugee situation, on December 3, 1971, India sent an invasion force into Bangladesh in support of the independence movement. On December 16, Pakistan surrendered and Bangladesh won its independence. Anxious to ease the refugee burden, India then declared that all refugees must return to Bangladesh by the end of February 1972, and began to make the necessary preparations in conjunction with the UNHCR. Thus, although relations between India and Pakistan had long been tense, particularly over the status of Kashmir, the influx of 10 million refugees from East Pakistan precipitated a major conflict between the two countries as India sought a solution to the refugee crisis. The refugee issue was certainly not the only reason for India's invasion, yet it was a major factor that contributed to the war and a trigger that prompted the Indian response.

#### *Rwanda's Invasion of Zaire*

The Rwandan genocide in 1994 shocked the world for its level of brutality, but beyond the immediate human toll, it contributed to long-term instability across the Great Lakes region of Africa. The Arusha accords signed between the Tutsi-dominated Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) and the Hutu-led government was viewed by some members of the Hutu elite as granting too much power to the RPF. Yet, before the accords could be implemented, Rwandan President Juvénal Habyarimana was assassinated, providing the excuse Hutu extremists needed to begin a campaign of genocidal violence against Tutsis and moderate Hutus. To put an end to the genocide, the RPF re-invaded the country from their bases in Uganda and toppled the

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<sup>10</sup> Keesings Record of World Events. "Indo-Pakistan Border Tension." [www.keesings.com](http://www.keesings.com) (Access date March 10, 2007).

government in Kigali, which in turn prompted an enormous refugee exodus as millions of Hutus fled the country fearing RPF reprisals. This mass emigration was encouraged and orchestrated by the ex-Rwandan Armed Forces (ex-FAR) and the interahamwe militias, who sought to establish a government-in-exile and regroup as a rebel force across the border (Lischer 2005).

At the peak of the refugee crisis, Zaire and Tanzania hosted over one million Rwandan refugees each. Yet, as Sarah Lischer (2005) explains, while Tanzania took steps to prevent refugee militarization, Zaire's President Mobutu Sese Seko was neither willing nor able to prevent the ex-FAR forces from taking control of the camps. This posed an enormous humanitarian dilemma for aid agencies as the necessity of feeding and sheltering legitimate refugees was complicated by the fact that the camps were largely run by the perpetrators of the genocide (Gourevitch 1998; United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees 2000). Officials on the ground understood the gravity of the situation. Shahrar Khan, the UN Secretary General's representative to Rwanda exclaimed, "we are sitting on a volcano... we must separate the wolves from the sheep."<sup>11</sup>

From inside Zaire, the ex-FAR/Interahamwe forces began to mobilize militarily, while gathering recruits and supplies among the refugees. News reports estimated that roughly 40,000 fighters were present in and around the Zairean town of Goma.<sup>12</sup> Clashes between Hutus and local Zairean Tutsis ensued with the complicity and support of President Mobutu, whose forces were responsible for their own human rights violations against Tutsis. From Rwanda, the RPF leader (and later Rwanda's president) Paul Kagame viewed the refugee situation in Eastern Zaire with alarm. As the international community was unwilling to demilitarize the camps, Rwanda decided to act on its own. As Kagame would relate in an interview, "We were ready to hit

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<sup>11</sup> Quoted in , Bonner, Raymond. "Rwanda Faces New War Unless International Force is Sent, UN Aides Say." *New York Times*. November 6, 1994. Late Edition. Section 1 page 12.

<sup>12</sup> *The Economist*, "Rwandan Refugees: Crime and Nourishment." April 1, 1995. Page 34.

them... and handle three things: first to save the Banyamulenge (Zairean Tutsis) and not let them die... then to dismantle the camps, return the refugees to Rwanda, and destroy the ex-FAR and militias; and third, to change the situation in Zaire” (Quoted in Gourevitch 1998: 296).

In October 1996, Rwanda began its offensive against Mobutu. First, it armed Zairean Tutsis to fight back against Hutu refugee militants and Mobutu’s forces. Second, it armed and supported Laurent Kabila and the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of the Congo (ADFL) to lead the charge against Mobutu, and later, to govern the country. With support from Rwandan troops, rebels took over the town of Goma by November.<sup>13</sup> The Zairean army quickly crumbled as the ADFL continued its offensive westward towards the capital; by May 1997, Kinshasa was taken by Kabila’s forces. Meanwhile, Rwandan troops invaded eastern Zaire and began to clear the refugee camps; most of the refugees had been moved to the Mugunga camp, which Rwandan forces began to dismantle. The Rwandan army began to fire upon the refugees in order to force people back into Rwanda, and worked to cut off humanitarian aid and disperse the ex-FAR militants (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees 2000: chapter 10). With food aid cut off, the refugees had no choice but to return home. By mid-November, the largest camps had been cleared and over 700,000 refugees returned home.<sup>14</sup> As UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Sadako Ogata commented, “The link between refugee problems and peace and security is perhaps nowhere more evident than in the Great Lakes region in Africa” (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees 2000: 262).

Thus, the refugee crisis was not simply a humanitarian issue, but spread conflict between the Rwandan government and armed dissidents into neighboring states. It led to both instability in Zaire (see Lischer 2005; Salehyan and Gleditsch 2006) and a military invasion by

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<sup>13</sup> McKinley, James. “Zaire Rebels Take a Town With The Help of Rwandan Army.” *New York Times*. November 3, 1996. Late Edition. Section 1, page 1.

<sup>14</sup> Thompson, Alla. “700,000 in Mass Exodus From Zaire.” *Toronto Star*. November 16, 1996. Page A1.

Rwanda to attack the refugee camps, combat ex-FAR militants, and retaliate against Mobutu for his support. Yet, the 1996-1997 Rwandan invasion of Zaire would not be the first such attack. Kabila would later turn on his former patron and begin to support Hutu refugee warriors, reorganized under the banner of the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR). Rwanda again sent in troops in 1998 to attack the FDLR and Hutu refugees; yet this second invasion was not successful in toppling the government in Kinshasa and prompted states across the region to intervene as well, sparking a war involving several African states, including Uganda, Angola, and Zimbabwe (see Clark 2004).

### **Quantitative Analysis**

Although case narratives are informative, to more systematically test the hypotheses stated above, I conduct a time-series cross-section probit analysis of militarized interstate disputes (MIDs) spanning the period, 1955-2000.<sup>15</sup> International conflict data come from the dyadic version of the MID dataset produced by Maoz (2005). MIDs are events that involve at least two states in which there was a threat, display, or use of military force; this variable is coded one for cases where there was a MID and zero otherwise. Because many pairs of states are unlikely to be involved in military conflicts with one another (e.g. Peru and Tanzania), following convention, I restrict the analysis to politically-relevant dyads where the states are either contiguous or involve at least one major power. Also, as I am mainly interested in conflict onset, subsequent MID-years after the first year are excluded from the analysis; this practice also excludes third states (or more) that join a MID after it begins.<sup>16</sup> All regressions reported below involve directed-dyads, where the dyad A-B is also included as B-A; this allows us to ascertain which state in the dyad initiates the MID. The dependent variable is coded one for whether the

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<sup>15</sup> These years are chosen because of data availability for the full panel.

<sup>16</sup> In practice, the reasons why a MID breaks out between two states may be different from why subsequent states join in.

first state (the initiator) starts a MID against the second state (the target). If there was a MID in the A-B dyad, the B-A dyad is treated as missing. A directed-dyad analysis is appropriate for testing the hypotheses stated above, as they both specify which actor will initiate conflict.<sup>17</sup>

The main independent variable is the number of refugees in a dyad. This data comes from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees<sup>18</sup> (UNHCR) and is supplemented with data from the United Nations Relief and Works Agency and the US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants for figures on Palestinian refugees.<sup>19</sup> The data are organized as annual dyads reporting the stock of refugees from the country of origin in the country of asylum in a given year, provided that there were at least 100 refugees.<sup>20</sup> Thus, there are separate variables for the number refugees *in* the initiator and the number of refugees *from* the initiator to test the hypotheses that both sending and receiving countries begin MIDs. In other regressions, rather than using refugee stock figures, I include an approximation of the refugee flow by taking the difference in the annual stock, truncating negative values at zero.<sup>21</sup> Although this practice is not without flaws, it is the best available estimate of the annual refugee flow. It should be noted that I am agnostic about whether stocks or flows should matter more for conflict dynamics. Large refugee stocks may be costly for the host to absorb and may be more likely to organize into rebel organizations; yet, a large surge of refugees may trigger conflict events.<sup>22</sup> Because the effect may not be strictly linear, I use the natural logs of these refugee variables after adding one to the base. Finally, since international conflict may produce refugees, I use lagged rather than

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<sup>17</sup> There were 1,227 MID initiations in the data, or 1.2% of the directed-dyad/year observations.

<sup>18</sup> I thank Bela Hovy of the Population Data Unit at the UNHCR for providing this data.

<sup>19</sup> The UNHCR does not maintain data on Palestinians.

<sup>20</sup> I acknowledge that refugee data are not perfect and are sometimes subject to political manipulation (see Crisp 1999). In addition, for dyad-years where there were no reported refugees between states, the value of this variable is assumed to be zero although some of these cases may in fact be missing rather than non-events. Despite these caveats, the UNHCR figures are the best available data.

<sup>21</sup> Negative “flows”, or a reduction in the annual stock, may reflect repatriation or third-country resettlement. This approach is also used by Moore and Shellman 2004.

<sup>22</sup> Both the stock and flow figures are scaled by 1,000 (refugees/1,000).

contemporaneous values of the independent variables. This approach is not without costs, as estimates will not reflect MIDs that occur during the first year of a refugee crisis.<sup>23</sup> Yet, reverse causation is likely to be a bigger source of bias and so this conservative approach is preferred.

Table 2 reports descriptive statistics for the refugee stock and flow variables, limited to non-zero observations only; to make these easier to interpret they are given in non-logged terms. The mean refugee stock between a dyad is nearly 94,000 people, no small number. At the extreme, Pakistan and Iran have hosted over 3million Afghan refugees each. The mean refugee flow across dyads is just over 20,000 refugees in a year.<sup>24</sup> However, there were three cases of over 1million refugee crossings in a single year: Afghans to Pakistan, Afghans to Iran, and Rwandans to Zaire. Clearly, refugee crises have the potential to be severe.

--TABLE 1 HERE--

In estimating these regressions, it is important to control for civil war within a state in the dyad. Since civil wars produce refugees and civil wars may also contribute to international conflict for reasons unrelated to forced migration (see Gleditsch, Salehyan, and Schultz 2007), omitting this variable may lead to biased estimates. In the models, I include dummy variables indicating whether the target or initiator had an internal armed conflict; the list of civil wars comes from the Uppsala University/Peace Research Institute of Oslo Armed Conflicts Dataset (Gleditsch et al. 2002) and includes both minor and major internal conflict.<sup>25</sup>

Other control variables include the liberal peace ‘triad’ (Russett and Oneal 2001). First, I include information on regime type from the Polity IV dataset (Marshall and Jaggers

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<sup>23</sup> For instance, the Bangladesh example discussed above is excluded following this method. The refugee flow began in March of 1971 and the Indian invasion occurred in December of the same year.

<sup>24</sup> In the descriptive statistics, this is the refugee flow in either direction. In the regression results, these are disaggregated as flows from A to B as well as flows from B to A.

<sup>25</sup> All regressions were also run using the Correlates of War Intrastate war dataset (Sarkees 2000) as well as the Fearon and Laitin (2003) list of civil wars. Results do not change significantly when using these data.

2005) to account for the well-known democratic peace effect. I create dummy variables indicating whether the target, initiator, or both states were democratic as indicated by a Polity score of 6 or higher on the -10 to +10 Polity scale. Several cases in the Polity data have missing values indicating ‘foreign interruption’ (-66), ‘interregnum’ (-77), or ‘transitional’ periods (-88). Many of these cases of missing data stem from civil wars and/or regime upheavals, and so dropping them would not be appropriate. Another common way of dealing with these missing data is to replace cases of interregnum with a Polity score of 0 and linearly interpolate the transition periods; however, this approach ignores regime instability in the country, treating stable and unstable polities as equivalent. Instead of dropping cases or interpolating values, observations including transitional or interregnal polities are coded as ‘undemocratic’ and receive a value of zero on the democracy indicator. In addition, I include a dichotomous variable coded one for these cases and zero otherwise; this allows us to directly estimate the effect of regime instability. Variables for instability in the target, initiator, and both are included.

Second, I include a variable for trade dependence to account for the pacifying effect of economic ties. This is created by determining, for each state, the sum of imports plus exports from the other and dividing it by that state’s GDP. Trade data are from Gleditsch (2002b) and GDP data come from Goldstein, Rivers, and Tomz (2007). Third, I include a variable for joint membership in intergovernmental organizations (IGOs). This is a count of IGOs of which both states in the dyad were members. IGO data comes from Pevehouse, Nordstrom, and Warnke (2006).

Other control variables include a dummy variable for territorial contiguity, which is coded one if the states are connected by land or separated by no more than 400 miles of water (Stinnett et al. 2002). Another dichotomous variable for colonial contiguity, taken from the

Correlates of War (COW) data, is included and coded one if the states were contiguous through colonies or dependent territories. Because power preponderance may deter hostilities, I also include data on power disparities, based on the COW project's Composite Index of National Capabilities. This is the stronger side's capabilities over the total capabilities in the dyad. Finally, because allied states may be less likely to fight one another, I include a control variable for the similarity of the two state's alliance portfolios using the weighted S-score developed by Signorino and Ritter (1999).<sup>26</sup>

In estimating these models, I include a count of years since the last MID in the dyad (or independence) to account for possible duration dependence in the data, along with a cubic spline with three knots (see Beck, Katz, and Tucker 1998). Also, because the dyadic observations are not independent of one another, I employ robust standard errors clustered on the dyad. Finally, all of the independent variables are lagged one year to limit biases caused by potential reverse causation, although results do not change significantly with contemporaneous variables.

## **Results**

Table 2 presents the results of the probit regressions. Model 1 reports the results for the regressions using the refugee stock variable while model 2 includes the refugee flow variable. Each model lists columns for the coefficient, robust standard errors, and p-values. To save on space, I will not discuss the control variables in depth here; most of the results confirm the findings of previous studies although shared IGO membership has an unexpected positive sign. Civil wars in the initiator and in the target both raise the probability of a MID, confirming earlier findings by Gleditsch, Salehyan, and Schultz (2007).

--TABLE 2 HERE--

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<sup>26</sup> With the exception of the trade, GDP, and IGO data, these data were created using the EUGene software, version 3.1 (see Bennett and Stam 2000).



Turning to the variables of interest, model 1 provides evidence in support of both hypotheses. Refugees increase the probability that the host country will initiate a MID against the sending country; in addition, they raise the probability that the sending country will initiate a MID against the host. The size of both coefficients are similar and a Wald test of equivalence of coefficients fails to reject the null ( $\chi^2=.000$ ); thus, there is no evidence that refugees from a country have a greater or lesser effect than refugees to a country. Model 2 looks at refugee flows to and from a state rather than the stock. In this model, although the signs on both variables are positive, only refugee flows out of a country have a statistically significant impact on the likelihood of conflict, while refugee inflows have a less consistent effect. It is difficult to say with certainty why a large refugee inflow would have less of an effect than a large refugee outflow, or why refugee stocks in a country would have a more significant effect than refugee flows. Nonetheless, we may conjecture that states experiencing a large outflow are more likely violate the border in ‘hot-pursuit’ of fleeing political opponents while refugee recipients take time to formulate a policy response. Yet, this claim will require further analysis.

Because probit coefficients are difficult to interpret, I compute predicted probabilities of conflict by setting a hypothetical baseline and varying the number of refugees and other variables of interest while holding other values constant.<sup>27</sup> These results are reported in Table 3. The baseline case is a contiguous, non-democratic dyad, with no civil wars, neither are transitional, and all other values are set at their means; moreover, there are no refugees in this hypothetical case. The predicted probability of such a dyad experiencing a MID is approximately 1.2%, which closely mirrors the overall frequency of MIDs in the data (also 1.2%). I then increase the refugee stock in the initiator to 100,000 refugees (in logged terms),

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<sup>27</sup> Predicted probabilities and their standard errors were computed using the Clarify software (Tomz, Wittenberg, King 2003).

which is roughly the mean refugee stock for all non-zero observations. Such an increase raises the predicted probability of a MID initiation to 2.3%; while this may be a low absolute probability, it represents a 96.55% increase in probabilities over the baseline case. Such a shift in refugees nearly doubles the risk of conflict. A similar increase in the refugee stock *from* a country raises the predicted probability of a dispute by over 90%.

To compare this refugee effect with other variables in the model, I also compute predicted probabilities of conflict based on changes in the civil war variables and joint democracy. A civil war in the (potential) initiator raises the predicted probability of a conflict by almost 78%, while a civil war in the (potential) target raises the probability by 40.46%. By contrast, the pacifying effect of joint democracy reduces the estimated probability of a MID by nearly 53%. Clearly, in many cases refugee flows and civil wars coincide with one another and so these effects compound one another. Thus, in statistical and substantive terms, the effect of the dyadic refugee stock is quite large, particularly in comparison with other variables. A similar comparative-statics exercise was conducted with the refugee flow model (model 2). The bottom portion of table 3 indicates that a flow of 20,000 (logged) refugees from the initiator raises the odds of a MID by roughly 85%.

--TABLE 3 HERE--

### **Conclusion**

This paper has argued that refugee migration may trigger conflicts between sending and receiving states. While migration scholars have suggested possible links between refugee flows and international tensions, such dynamics have been largely ignored in the extensive international relations literature on the causes of war and interstate disputes. IR scholars have typically focused on constraints on the use of force between pairs of states, or conflicts over the

distribution of finite resources such as territory. Yet, as suggested by Gleditsch, Salehyan, and Schultz (2007), civil unrest can also lead to conflicts between states. This paper looks at one such connection between civil and international conflict, and finds that both refugee-sending states and refugee-receiving states are more likely to initiate militarized disputes against the other. More generally, it contributes to a broader research agenda which examines the mutually-reinforcing relationship between conflict within and between states. Often, the issues and actors in civil wars span national boundaries and become part of a regional security dynamic, blurring firm distinctions between domestic and international politics. Scholars would do well to focus on complex, interdependent webs of interaction spanning the domestic and international realms. Refugee flows are part of this process, but certainly not the only factor contributing to zones of instability and turmoil in world politics.

The large-N empirical analysis—the first such analysis to explore relationships between refugees and interstate conflict—supports the hypotheses that refugee sending and receiving countries are both more likely to initiate conflicts. This confirms much of the case-study literature on the topic as well as anecdotal claims by the policy community. On the receiving-state end, invasions of Haiti, Kosovo, and East Pakistan have at least in part been motivated by the desire to stem further waves of refugees. For sending states, military violations of neighboring states have occurred in Rwanda (DRC), Israel (Lebanon), and Burma (Thailand), among many others, as countries attack their political opponents among refugee encampments. This paper provides systematic, quantitative testing of such links and confirms these often-speculated relationships.

This discussion has important normative and policy implications. Mass refugee migration is more than a humanitarian issue. Refugee flows may entail important security

consequences for sending countries, receiving countries, and for relations between the two. Yet, this by itself should not detract from legitimate humanitarian concerns and the plight of bona fide refugees. Protecting vulnerable populations from persecution and violence should be of paramount importance and efforts to use refugees as political pawns should be resisted. The international community has tended to respond to refugee disasters in largely humanitarian terms, yet greater attention to the security needs of states and the refugees themselves is needed. Moreover, actions to restrict the entry of refugees are likely to be counter-productive as they may in fact exacerbate political turmoil in the country of origin.

Rather than reacting to refugee crises, preventative measures to keep domestic political unrest from escalating to civil war, ethnic cleansing, and genocide, should be emphasized and strengthened. Civil wars and human rights abuses are not simply matters of domestic politics that can be ignored by states in the region as well as in the wider international community. Too often, states have been reluctant to intervene in internal disputes before they become full-blown crises, citing respect for the sovereignty of others to conduct their own internal affairs. Yet, the negative externalities of civil strife—and refugees are only one such externality—imply that such problems cannot be ignored.

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**Table 1. Refugee Stocks and Flows, Descriptive Statistics**

	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Dev.</b>	<b>Min</b>	<b>Max</b>
Refugee Stock	93,824	285,757	100	3,272,290
Refugee Flow	21,114	80,072	1	1,200,000

**Table 2. Refugees and Militarized Interstate Disputes, Probit Regressions**

	(1)			(2)		
	Coef.	Robust Std. Err.	P> z	Coef.	Robust Std. Err.	P> z
Refugee Stock IN Initiator	0.057	0.019	0.003	--	--	--
Refugee Stock FROM Initiator	0.056	0.013	0.000	--	--	--
Refugee Flow TO Initiator	--	--	--	0.032	0.034	0.344
Refugee Flow FROM Initiator	--	--	--	0.079	0.024	0.001
<i>**Controls**</i>						
Civil War in Initiator	0.228	0.040	0.000	0.231	0.039	0.000
Civil War in Target	0.135	0.045	0.003	0.151	0.043	0.000
Democratic Initiator	-0.024	0.049	0.633	-0.027	0.049	0.578
Democratic Target	0.157	0.055	0.004	0.155	0.055	0.004
Both Democratic	-0.417	0.079	0.000	-0.399	0.078	0.000
Transitional Initiator	-0.189	0.103	0.067	-0.159	0.103	0.124
Transitional Target	-0.030	0.094	0.746	-0.019	0.092	0.836
Both Transitional	0.331	0.249	0.184	0.397	0.277	0.151
Contiguity	0.764	0.064	0.000	0.753	0.063	0.000
Colonial Contiguity	0.309	0.076	0.000	0.303	0.075	0.000
Capability Share	0.275	0.052	0.000	0.277	0.051	0.000
Alliance S-Score	-0.406	0.092	0.000	-0.364	0.090	0.000
Initiator's Trade Dep.	0.023	0.130	0.858	0.032	0.096	0.742
Target's Trade Dep.	-0.672	0.395	0.089	-0.725	0.414	0.080
Shared IGO Membership	0.006	0.002	0.002	0.005	0.002	0.010
Peace Years	-0.205	0.014	0.000	-0.215	0.015	0.000
_spline1	-0.001	0.000	0.000	-0.001	0.000	0.000
_spline2	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.001	0.000	0.000
_spline3	0.000	0.000	0.001	0.000	0.000	0.000
Constant	-1.846	0.102	0.000	-1.771	0.104	0.000
N		86,497			85,318	
Wald Chi-squared		1409.4			1376.39	
Log pseudo-likelihood		-4410.54			-4669.26	

**Table 3. Predicted Probabilities**

	Prediction	Std. Err.	% Change
Baseline	0.012	0.002	
100k Refugees in initiator	0.023	0.006	96.55
100k Refugees from target	0.023	0.004	90.34
Civil war in initiator	0.021	0.003	77.46
Civil war in target	0.017	0.002	40.46
Joint democracy	0.006	0.001	-53.16
Baseline (flow)	0.012	0.002	
20k flow from target	0.022	0.005	84.72

\*Baseline: no refugees, no civil wars, neither democratic, neither transitional, contiguous dyad, all variables others at mean.

Figure 1. Number of Refugees Worldwide, 1961-2002

