

Democratic Wars

Looking at the Dark Side of Democratic Peace

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1

Introduction: the Theoretical Challenge of Democratic Wars

Lothar Brock, Anna Geis and Harald Müller

1.1 Democratic peace and democratic war involvement

Democracies do not go to war with each other; this democratic peace hypothesis has become a commonplace not only in international relations theory but also in the mindsets of Western politicians and diplomats. Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, Tony Blair and Condoleezza Rice, to name but a few, have all referred to this international virtuous cycle: promote freedom and liberty in the world, which is equivalent to promoting democracy, and we will have international peace. But the road to democracy may involve war. Thus, while the acceptance of the democratic peace proposition 30 years after the rediscovery of Immanuel Kant's famous hypothesis in Germany (Czempiel, 1972) and more than 20 years after its revival in the United States (Doyle, 1983a, b) is on the rise, democratic peace increasingly seems to be linked to war. Obviously, there is a dark side to democratic peace, and this is the subject of the present volume.

Most research in this area supports dyadic democratic peace theory, with its twin finding of the 'separate peace', that is, democracies are peaceful *towards each other* but *in general* they are as war-prone as any other regime type. However, monadic peace theory has recently gained ground; an increasing number of voices claim that democracies are in general more peaceful than non-democracies. They are slightly less involved in war, initiate wars and militarized disputes less frequently, and tend to seek negotiated conflict resolution more frequently (cf. Benoit, 1996; Ray, 2000, pp. 300–4; Russett and Oneal, 2001, pp. 95–6, 116, 122; MacMillan, 2003; Hasenclever, 2003). The proponents of monadic democratic peace theory concede that the statistical proof of these findings is

weaker than the proof relating to inter-democratic peace. Democracies *do* fight wars against non-democracies, and they *do* initiate such wars and other militarized conflicts with them from time to time.

Even though this democratic war involvement constitutes a tremendous challenge to theory building on democratic peace, it has so far only been a minor element in this field of research. Most of the studies published have been dedicated to establishing and explaining peace among democracies, not the involvement of democracies in war. This is hardly surprising, because democratic peace theory evolved as an effort to overcome, with the help of research on international cooperation and regime building, the dominant realist assumptions about war as a regular feature of politics in an anarchical system. From this perspective, the puzzle to be made visible and explained was and still is cooperation and peace, not defection and war. However, the theory of democratic peace remains fragmentary as long as it fails to account for the practice of war on the part of democracies.

1.2 Quantitative research and its discontents

The present volume is motivated by unease about the prevalence of quantitative studies on democratic peace. Most of the research efforts over the last 15 years have been focused on hypothesis-testing within one of the established approaches, but we still have no coherent theory. Statistical tests do not inquire into causal mechanisms, they establish correlations that can plausibly be interpreted as causation. They do not trace the cause-effect chains that lead from the independent variable (democracy) to the dependent variable (external [non]violent behaviour). Quantitative studies have produced a rich store of statistical data which spell out regularities in the behaviour of democracies; their pay-off, however, is limited when it comes to *explaining* war. The regularities are derived from correlations, and in order to proceed from correlation to causation, quantitative studies produce more correlations. The respective findings produce hypotheses which formulate a supposed fixed cause-effect relationship. The statistics, however, confirm the hypotheses only in a probabilistic way.

If we look at single cases, probabilistic hypotheses are of little help. Countries do not initiate a 75 per cent military dispute, and they do not go to war 81 per cent. They either go to war or they do not. Thus, two questions arise:

- How can democracies decide for *and* against military dispute initiation or war, and which intrinsic capabilities or attributes enable them to

choose one or the other option (though with different relative frequency)?

- What are the conditions under which one or the other option is chosen?

Probabilistic formulations which rely on statistical findings have a propensity to self-immunization. Counter-examples can be disposed of with the 'anecdotal evidence' argument. This is quite problematic – if the theory has any validity, it should stand the test of 'salient cases' as well as random evidence. Salient cases, in our understanding, are those major events involving the use of military force that have a decisive impact on the course of history.

It would be necessary to explain, case by case, 'anecdotal' failures in order to regain confidence that the respective probabilistic theory is likely to contribute to our understanding of the relation between democracy and war. Pointing to the fact that a theory whose causal assumptions are formulated in deterministic terms is inductively reformulated in probabilistic terms is not good enough to refute counter-arguments that are derived from salient cases. If statistical results are employed to reconstruct the incentives of actors, the importance of deviant salient cases tends to be downplayed. If we want to explain, for example, the behaviour of political leaders since 1815, it is not feasible to give an account of their rational calculations based on future experiences which only come to light in statistical analyses conducted 180 years later. But this is exactly what is done when it is claimed that the high probability of democratic victories in wars motivates their potential adversaries to refrain from entering hostilities. No earlier political decisions on war and peace can be assumed to have been taken in the light of future statistical studies on democracies' better fighting records.

The methodology of such statistical studies excludes path dependency, and treats every single data point as equivalent and as independent from earlier events. The problem with this can be easily highlighted by the case of the Second World War; treating this war as merely another single data point is rather absurd since this war had a tremendous impact on domestic societies and global politics. It is thus far more convincing to suppose that political leaders' calculations are decisively shaped by their knowledge about salient experiences of their time.

More importantly, probabilistic approaches to democratic peace conceal the considerable variance in the behaviour of democracies towards peace, war and militarized disputes. The statement 'democracies

are peaceful to each other and bellicose in general' is an aggregate statement about the behaviour of democratic states. This average is an academic artefact and obscures the fact that some democracies are quite frequently involved in military actions which they sometimes initiate, while others are apparently at eternal peace, and a third group of democracies is somewhere in between (cf. Chojnacki, 2003).

1.3 Shifting the focus: studying democratic wars as the dark side of democratic peace

Given the now vast amount of statistical studies on democratic peace, it is the aim of this volume to argue for a shift of focus in research. Rather than seeking explanations for an assumed average behaviour of democracies, we want to account for the marked differences between democratic states (Müller, 2004b). Inquiries into the reasons for the varying bellicosity of democracies will lead to enhanced knowledge about the causal mechanisms of democratic peace. Why do some democracies choose the military option in a given case, while others do not? Why, for example, have democracies like the United Kingdom, France and the United States been involved rather frequently in unilateral military actions during the past 50 years, while Finland and Austria have not? These two small states stand out because of their frequent involvement in peacekeeping activities, and their military capabilities would have made it quite possible for them to participate in the various coalition interventions after the end of the Cold War. Why did Germany not take part in the Gulf War of 1991, why did it get involved in the Kosovo War of 1999 but then again refuse to join the US in the recent Iraq War? This variance in behaviour makes it especially difficult to theorize democratic war involvement.

If one looks more closely, by way of comparative in-depth case studies, at the several 'roads to war' of those democracies involved and 'roads to opting out' of those not involved, one can compare reasons¹ for participation and non-participation and analyse how and why the assumed causal mechanisms have been suspended in some democracies. By carrying out a larger number of comparative case studies on democratic war involvement, one could specify the conditions under which the causal mechanisms of the democratic peace theory (do not) hold (cf. Elman, 1997; MacMillan, 1998; Owen, 1997).

In order to advance democratic peace theory, research ought to take a qualitative turn and investigate more closely the 'warring' face of

democracies. What is more, the present volume hopes to demonstrate that studying the relationship of democracy, peace and war should not be considered a *domaine réservé* of international relations. Drawing upon insights from other disciplines such as sociological studies or political theory can generate new questions and answers about democratic peacefulness or bellicosity. We propose to expand the conventional democratic peace agenda by outlining a new 'democratic war' research agenda as the dark side of democratic peace theory. It is rather surprising that no systematic linkage between democratic peace and democratic war has been developed so far.

What is meant by 'democratic war'? Actually, a more correct term would be the 'resort to the use of force' by democracies. There are different forms of the use of force with regard to the international set of rules which are supposed to govern states' behaviour in conflict. At one end of the spectrum there is outright aggression; at the other end there would be (but is not yet) collective action based on norm enforcement in the context of due process of law, including decision-making by a duly authorized body, control of the enforcement agencies by this body, and the control of this authority by courts. Between these two poles there is the use of force in the form of individual or collective self-defence, unilateral norm enforcement (humanitarian intervention), individual action authorized by the UN Security Council, and collective action authorized by the Security Council and carried out under UN command.

When we speak in this book of the wars of democracies, we refer to the use of force without due and express authorization by proper authorities, not to collective action in accordance with Chapter VII of the UN Charter. However, as the wide range of possibilities between the poles of outright aggression and collective action demonstrates, there is a substantial grey area between aggression and collective action. Those in power usually claim to be acting in self-defence when they attack other states. Those intervening in ongoing conflicts will claim to be serving universal ends such as protecting minorities from persecution or preventing gross violations of human rights. Occasionally, the use of force without express authorization by the Security Council has even been presented as an act designed to enforce Security Council resolutions, as was argued by the US and the coalition of the willing in the case of the Iraq War in 2003.

Democratic war, then, refers to the unilateral use of force which side-steps collective authorization and action as provided for by Chapter VII of the UN Charter, and/or which is accompanied by attempts to widen

the scope of admissible unilateral force under Article 51 (pre-emptive strikes in self-defence). So 'democratic war' refers to the war involvement of democracies which tends to be based on a broad interpretation of Article 51, rather than collective action as defined in Chapter VII of the UN Charter. The term 'democratic war', however, also has a specific connotation. It refers to specific reasons which democracies, in contrast to non-democracies, have for resorting to the unilateral or semi-unilateral use of force and for broadening the interpretation of the pertinent UN Charter provisions (Article 51) in order to justify this. In analysing democratic war involvement and democratic war, we will therefore not only deal with the question of the circumstances under which the causal mechanisms of democratic peace are suspended but also take up the issue of the extent to which there are specific features of democratic politics or liberal thought which induce democracies to choose military options.

By exploring the troubling question of whether liberal democracy produces special incentives to go to war, the ideas advanced in this book have significance for practical politics as well. Until now democratic peace theory has emphasized only the pacifying effects of democracy. As a result, it increasingly runs the risk of serving as the ideological underpinning of a self-righteous foreign policy of the most powerful bloc of states in world history, the community of Western democracies. Contrary to this, the critical considerations presented here offer an academic antidote to such attitudes and caution against an overly optimistic view of the future development of international politics, even if the number of democracies in the world increases. The further expansion of democracy across the globe is undoubtedly desirable in itself, as it enables people to live in freedom and self-determination. But this should not be taken to be a guarantee of global peace. Despite the optimistic visionary speeches of Western democratic leaders, teleological notions of history culminating in global human freedom and eternal peace are not warranted. The equation 'freedom is democracy is peace' is, unfortunately, more complicated than it is made to seem in the popular theory of democratic peace.

1.4 The chapters of the volume

Despite our critical attitude towards popular assumptions drawn from democratic peace research, the aim of this volume is not to discard democratic peace theory but to advance it. In the following chapters, the authors present critical readings of mainstream democratic peace

literature and offer new interpretations, partly inspired by political and sociological theory.

In Chapter 2, *Sven Chojnacki* presents empirical findings on democratic war involvement since the end of the Second World War. He also re-examines the monadic democratic peace proposition in the light of military interventionism. Empirical evidence indicates that interventions in ongoing armed conflicts are a prominent type of the use of force today. One line of argument is that new security challenges (rogue states, 'new wars', international terrorism) and recent developments in the normative patterns of international order (promotion of democracy, protection of human rights) broaden the strategic motivations of democratic states. This is closely related to the idea of casualty-free warfare. Although democracies generally try to avoid the politically risky and cost-intensive consequences of military interventions, the revolution in military affairs, as well as strategic options such as the use of special forces, private military companies or local ground forces, help to keep the military option open.

In Chapter 3, *Harald Müller* and *Jonas Wolff* offer a comprehensive critique of existing democratic peace explanations. The authors identify serious flaws in all types of explanations, in terms of theoretical coherence and/or their ability to account for the data. In its second part, this chapter presents a reconstruction of the social constructivist approach designed to avoid these flaws. 'Militant' and 'pacifist' versions of the normative imperative on war and peace deriving from liberal thought are identified. While the former deems it justified to use force to bring freedom, democracy and human rights to oppressed fellow human beings, the latter takes issue with the claim that democratic self-determination can be fostered by militant enforcement action from the outside. It regards the (unilateral) use of force as a potential danger to the very rights and liberties which the enforcement action is to protect or to bring about. Liberal norms are characterized by a fundamental ambiguity which comes to bear in mixed dyads (democracies and non-democracies) and is absent only from the relations among democracies: wars against other democracies are excluded from the set of democratic policy options as they do not allow for legitimization compatible with any liberal norm.

In Chapter 4, *Christopher Daase* argues that democratic peace and democratic war are mutually constitutive. The common practice of analysing democratic peace and democratic war separately from one another has so far made it impossible to offer a convincing explanation of the 'separate peace'. As is shown in this chapter, the peaceful

relations of democracies towards other democracies and their war-proneness towards non-democracies are rooted in the very same factors. The same domestic institutions that help to prevent violent conflicts between democracies can enhance conflicts with non-democracies. Moral values and political ideals that are widely shared by democracies reduce conflict between them, but might render conflicts with non-democracies all the more frequent. The search for security made democracies join international security communities, which pacified their relations but also leads them to wage (sometimes preventive) war against outsiders. From this perspective, the 'separate peace' looks less of a puzzle. The peace between democracies is a sociational effect which stems from joint warfare and collective conflict resolution by democracies.

In Chapter 5, *Lothar Brock* proposes the concept of 'wars of enforcement' as an instance of 'democratic war'. Currently, the prohibition of the use of force by the UN Charter together with Chapter VII must be interpreted as calling for the transformation of war into collective action. Since the adoption of the Charter, however, a new type of war has emerged which operates on the borderline between collective action, aggression and self-help. These wars are waged in the name of norm enforcement, but entail a minimum degree of procedural self-binding on the part of the governments involved. The emergence of such 'wars of enforcement' conducted by democracies against non-democracies is explained in terms of a 'triangle of war', which the author deduces in successive steps from the 'triangle of peace' proposed by Bruce Russett and John Oneal. However, such wars are and will remain highly contested among democracies because they combine the 'duty to protect' derived from substantive norms (human rights, the right to democracy) with the logic of the state of emergency. Disagreement interacts with different notions of the liberal mission and accounts for the behavioural variance among democracies.

The following chapters draw upon the history of ideas and political and sociological theory to offer critical interpretations of the relationship between democracy, peace and war. In Chapter 6, *Nicholas Rengger* argues that democratic peace theory has systematically misread the relationship between democracy and war. He traces three responses to the relationship between war and politics in modern history: the 'heroic response', the 'realpolitik response' and the 'compassionate response'. While the heroic response lost its significance long ago, the other two continue to face each other in uneasy tension. The democratic peace thesis is one attempt to bridge this tension. However, this thesis makes claims that are untenable for both internal and external reasons.

It claims that there is a clear and direct relationship between regimes and political behaviour, it lumps together highly diverse types of democracies, and it rests upon a progressivist philosophy of history. In addition, it also provides a reason for using force to create democracies and thus secure international peace and stability – in other words, the 'flip side' of the democratic peace thesis is a democratic war thesis (which was already prefigured in the history of democratic thought and practice).

In Chapter 7, *Anna Geis* takes a closer look at exclusionary discourses and practices in democracies that have been highlighted in the recent rhetoric of evil and the politics of counter-terrorism after the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001. It is argued that the construction of enemy images and the politics of inclusion/exclusion are inherent features of all Western democracies. Drawing on state theory, democratic theory and the sociology of modernity, this chapter points to ubiquitous mechanisms of inclusion/exclusion, some of which imply a decivilizing and thus violent potential. Governments' reclaiming of internal state sovereignty, a democratic politics of identity and mobilization, as well as troubling tendencies of norm erosion within Western democracies all provide reasons why democracies might not be as peaceful as we thought. Recently, we have even been able to observe the tragic paradox that by attempting to spread democracy and freedom abroad, Western governments help to undermine it at home. Democratic peacefulness will thus be contingent upon restoring the micro-foundations of democratic peace, that is to say cultivating civic virtues and inclusive political discourses and practices within the domestic sphere.

The potentially violent outcomes of processes of inclusion and exclusion are also discussed in Chapter 8. *Catherine Götze* employs the relational sociological theory of Pierre Bourdieu to offer a coherent explanation of the 'separate peace' within one theoretical framework. The international sphere can be conceived of as a world society in which structuration processes of social positioning and distinction occur which are similar to those operating in the domestic sphere. Social characteristics such as wealth, power, influence and reputation account for the relations between states. From a Bourdieusian perspective, wars can be considered as part of an ordering process in world society. Democracies possess great material power, and since material and ideational power are intimately linked, their liberal ideas of individual freedom, rationalism and market capitalism have also gained dominance in the world. Inclusion and exclusion from the 'zone of peace' operates along the lines of the material and ideational structure dominated by these democracies, that is to say, the more a group accepts or challenges the

material and ideational position of the dominant wealthy democracies the more it qualifies as an ally or an opponent. The conflicts arise from the inherent tension between the formal equality of all states in the international system and the social reality of vast underlying inequalities.

The *final chapter* summarizes the volume's findings, relates them to the broader setting of changes within the international normative context, and outlines a 'democratic war' research programme. Future research needs to conduct more detailed case studies in order to inquire into the paths that lead democracies to war or induce them to avoid violent conflict, and international relations approaches to these issues need to be complemented by political and sociological theory. With regard to practical politics, our conclusion suggests that more humility and reflexivity are needed on the part of democratic governments and citizens. The self-assertiveness and self-indulgence that inform Western policies towards other countries to a large degree are identified as an extremely risky way of conducting foreign policy. International relations theory has contributed to this attitude since democratic peace theory has become part and parcel of Western political thinking. By introducing a new research agenda based on the idea of a 'democratic war', the editors and contributors hope to advance the refinement and specification of democratic peace theory. At the same time, the discussions in the book caution against an overly optimistic view of the distinct peacefulness of democracies.

Note

1. Note here that speaking of 'reasons' to go to war refers to public justifications for military actions, and not to any individual (private) motivations of democratic governments. The identification and verification of 'true motivations' pose almost impossible methodological problems to researchers. What can be analysed are the manifest justifications that are necessary to persuade democratic publics to assent to a specific case of military action.

In common views on democratic war-making, it has often been surmised that democracies go to war because of vested economic interests, traditional power politics and the like. Whether this really identifies the 'true motives' or mere incidental corollaries to norm-based reasons remains an open question. Fear of an opponent's future behaviour and capabilities nurtured by the nefarious (anti-democratic) character of the adversary create an amalgam of normative liberalism and traditional motivations of defence and survival, as manifested in the enemy image of the 'rogue state' (Brunnée and Toope, 2004, p. 417). Judging by the security discourses within (some) democracies in recent decades, this might be an important factor feeding militancy.