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“DEMOCRATIC PEACE THEORY:  
A REVIEW AND EVALUATION”



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According to Jack Levy, the democratic peace thesis is “the closest thing we have to an empirical law in the study of international relations.”<sup>1</sup> This theory refers to the idea that democracies by nature do not go to war with one another, a fact which historically has guaranteed peace between democratic states, arguably without exception. The democratic peace thesis offers a strong empirical attack in the liberal arsenal against the traditional intellectual hegemony of realism in American IR theory. Perhaps for this reason, there has been a spirited debate between proponents of democratic peace theory and critics who level a number of counterattacks. Among others, these include charges that the theory is a statistical artifact, that the terms of its definition (‘democratic’ or ‘liberal’, ‘war’, etc.) are defined in a tautological and self-serving manner, and that insufficient historical evidence is available to make accurate, generalizable conclusions since both war between states and the existence of democracy is historically relatively rare.

Democratic peace is rooted theoretically in the writings of Immanuel Kant, and in particular his work “Perpetual Peace”. Kant claims that peace is a reasonable outcome of the interaction of states with a republican form of government. He believes that the republican constitution “gives a favorable prospect for the desired consequence, i.e., perpetual peace. The reason is this: if the consent of the citizens is required in order to decide that war should be declared (and in this constitution it cannot but be the case), nothing is more natural than that they should be very cautious in commencing such a poor game, decreeing for themselves all the calamities of war.” Contrasting republicanism with other forms of governments, Kant argues, “On the other hand, in a constitution which is not republican, and under which the subjects are not citizens, a declaration of war is the easiest thing in the world to decide upon, because war does not require of the ruler, who is the

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<sup>1</sup> Jack S. Levy, “Domestic Politics in War,” in Robert I. Rotberg and Theodore K. Rabb, eds., *The Origin and Prevention of Major Wars* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 88



proprietor and not a member of the state, the least sacrifice of the pleasure of his table, the chase, his country houses, his court functions, and the like."<sup>2</sup>

Because peace under Kant's paradigm is a function of the form of government of the two potential parties to a conflict, the logical implication is that liberal republicanism must be diffused and made universal in order to achieve perpetual peace among states. Until states share a common liberal perspective, war will be necessary to prevent autocratic and despotic governments from oppressing their own people and from threatening the freedom of citizens in the liberal states themselves. This semi-evangelical view of liberalism may also contribute to strengthening the democratic peace theory. Authoritarian regimes may view liberal states as particularly threatening because of this ideology that values the diffusion of liberalism to other states, which would of course threaten the authoritarian leader's own power. Liberal states, on the other hand, would not feel threatened by the universalistic outlook of other liberal republics since they already share a similar form of government.

It is important to recognize that the term 'democratic peace' is somewhat ambiguous, even misleading, as it tends to conflate democracy (which can be ambiguously defined itself) with other terms. Some scholars prefer to talk about the 'liberal peace theory' instead of democratic peace, saying that this formulation is more relevant and easier to define in empirical analyses.<sup>3</sup> Kant himself notes that democracy (a form of sovereignty) is often confused with republicanism (a form of government). The presence of a republican constitution is one of his primary criteria for attaining perpetual

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<sup>2</sup> Immanuel Kant, "Perpetual Peace." *On History*, trans L.W. Beck, R.E. Anchor, & E. Fackenheim (New York: The Liberal Arts Press, 1957), p. 94-95

<sup>3</sup> See John M. Owen, *Liberal Peace, Liberal War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997); Michael Doyle, *Ways of War and Peace: Realism, Liberalism, and Socialism* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1997)



peace. He claims that "The mode of government is incomparably more important to the people than the form of sovereignty."<sup>4</sup>

Liberal states in Kant's paradigm are characterized by certain criteria that distinguish them from authoritarian and other autocratic, nondemocratic forms of government. These include a republican form of government based on the rule of law that is governed in a representative manner through a separation of powers; respect for human rights; and interdependent social and economic relations. Taken together, these criteria are necessary and sufficient to create stable peace between two states with the expectation that this peace will endure, according to Kant.<sup>5</sup>

An important part of democratic peace is that liberal, democratic states<sup>6</sup> share a common normative dedication to liberal ideals, and they frequently employ liberal justifications for going to war. Michael Doyle argues that quite often, the violent interventions that liberal states engage in "are publicly justified in the first instance as attempts to preserve a 'way of life': to defend freedom and private enterprise."<sup>7</sup> When the potential adversary shares a commitment to the protection of basic freedoms and human rights, and its government truly represents the wishes of the population (as evidenced by free and fair, competitive elections), it is much more

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<sup>4</sup> Immanuel Kant, "Perpetual Peace.", p. 97

<sup>5</sup> Michael Doyle, *Ways of War and Peace: Realism, Liberalism, and Socialism*, p. 286-287

<sup>6</sup> The definitions offered for democracy are varied and contentious, and are very important for the empirical examination of the theory's claim. Bruce Russett gives a typical if slightly broad (by excluding liberal protections of rights from the criteria) definition, which considers democratic states to be those with governments that are popularly selected through periodic contested elections in which a substantial portion of citizens are eligible to vote, and that the possibility exists for the leaders to be defeated and replaced through election and a peaceful transfer of power. Finally, he indicates that democracy must exist and exhibit some minimum level of stability or institutionalization: "some period must have elapsed during which democratic processes and institutions could become established, so that both the citizens of the 'democratic' state and its adversary could regard it as one governed by democratic principles." (p. 16) Bruce Russett, *Grasping the Democratic Peace* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993)

<sup>7</sup> Michael Doyle, "Kant, Liberal Legacies, and Foreign Affairs.", p. 335



difficult for democratic governments to justify war to their own citizens.

Perception is an important component of liberal peace. Put crudely, liberal states are peaceful toward one another because they trust other liberal states to behave rationally and sensibly, whereas they are suspicious that non-liberal states may not behave in this manner. John Owen explains that “liberals view foreign states with prejudice. Prima facie, they believe that, irrespective of physical capability, liberal states are safe and illiberal states potentially dangerous. The ground of this belief is the premise that states whose governments respect their citizens’ autonomy will behave rationally and responsibly, while coercive governments may not.”<sup>8</sup>

By extension, it does not matter whether illiberal states are actually inherently prone to irresponsible or aggressive behavior; if liberal states believe that this is possible, they will act accordingly, basing their foreign policy decisions on the perception that liberal states are to be trusted while autocratic and despotic regimes must be regarded with some suspicion. This can become a self-fulfilling prophesy, in which the liberal state instigates a conflict with the illiberal state (or vice-versa) in an example of what Owen calls ‘liberal war’.

In addition to the enhanced accountability inherent in states with republican constitutions and the perceptions of the citizens and elites of these states which view illiberal states with suspicion, there are several other possible reasons for the peace which prevails between liberal states (and by extension, the fact that this peace does not apply reliably between liberal states and autocratic counterparts). The checks and balances and separation of powers that characterize liberal republics place restraints on the executive in making a decision to go to war. The delays and debate that are natural parts of such republics introduce a period of deliberation in

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<sup>8</sup> John M. Owen, *Liberal Peace, Liberal War*, p. 38



which conflicts are fully examined from a variety of vantage points. Two liberal republics facing a joint conflict, because of their deliberative structures maintained by separation of power, are likely to find any number of opportunities to address the issue before it escalates to the point of war.<sup>9</sup>

In order to create a better 'big picture' of liberal peace, Maoz and Russett condense several of the preceding factors into two explanatory models of liberal peace, which they then test with empirical cases. They describe the normative model and the structural model: "The normative model suggests that democracies do not fight each other because norms of compromise and cooperation prevent their conflicts of interest from escalating into violent clashes. The structural model asserts that complex political mobilization processes impose institutional constraints on the leaders of two democracies confronting each other to make violent conflict unfeasible."<sup>10</sup> Based on their empirical analysis, Maoz and Russett conclude that both models are supported by the data, but that the normative model is stronger, more robust, and more consistent across the data set than is the structural model.

Liberal republics facing conflicts with other liberal states are likely to benefit from the increased credibility of their claims. Stephen Van Evera has argued that war is made much more likely by states' frequent misperception of international conditions, their own capabilities, and the intentions of other states.<sup>11</sup> James Fearon, however, points out that liberal states are much more credible and effective in signaling their intentions to potential rivals, because leaders are held accountable by the electorate for their threats and

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<sup>9</sup> Michael Doyle, *Ways of War and Peace*, p. 281

<sup>10</sup> Maoz and Russett, 'Normative and Structural Causes of Democratic Peace, 1946-1986', *American Political Science Review*, 87 (1993), pp. 624-37.

<sup>11</sup> Stephen Van Evera, *Causes of War: Power and the Roots of Conflict* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999)



statements, and bluffs that are called are likely to lead to the leader's recall as an example of 'domestic audience costs'.<sup>12</sup>

The secrecy of an authoritarian regime, on the other hand, would likely mean that the leader could bluff with impunity, and that other states might easily misperceive his true motives and determination to carry through, unlike a liberal republic, which would be transparent enough in its decision-making process that another democracy would be able to recognize its intention if it were willing to go to war. The result of all this is that war is less likely to occur as a result of a liberal state's misperception that another liberal state is making empty threats or is bluffing.

Much of the strength of liberal peace theory lies in the empirical record that supports the proposition. Michael Doyle has surveyed historical wars from 1790 to 1983, and concluded that "The near absence of war between Liberal states, whether adjacent or not, for almost two hundred years thus may have significance."<sup>13</sup> One of the key elements in the debate over liberal peace is the way liberal republics or democracies are defined (and indeed the actual term used varies among a number of similar concepts, including liberal state, constitutional republic, libertarian state, democracy, polyarchy, and others). Doyle acknowledges the approximate nature of the liberal state concept, but he nonetheless attempts to provide careful and clear criteria for the selection of the states that he lists as liberal, drawing on the theoretical base established by Kant to do so. He explains,

I have drawn up this *approximate* list of Liberal regimes (including regimes that were Liberal democratic as of 1990) according to the four "Kantian" institutions described as essential: market and private property economies; polities

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<sup>12</sup> James Fearon, "Domestic Political Audiences and the Escalation of International Disputes," *American Political Science Review*, 88 (1994), pp. 577-582

<sup>13</sup> Michael Doyle, *Ways of War and Peace*; See also Michael Doyle, "Kant, Liberal Legacies, and Foreign Affairs," Part I, *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, vol. 12, no. 3 (Summer, 1983)





that are externally sovereign; citizens who possess juridical rights; and 'republican' (whether republican or parliamentary monarchy), representative government. This last includes the requirement that the legislative branch have an effective role in public policy and be formally and competitively (either inter- or intraparty) elected. Furthermore, I have taken into account whether male suffrage is wide (that is, 30 percent) or, as Kant would have had it, open to 'achievement' by inhabitants (for example, to poll tax payers or householders) of the national or metropolitan territory. (This list of Liberal regimes is thus more inclusive than a list of democratic regimes, or polyarchies.) Female suffrage is granted within a generation of its being demanded by an extensive female suffrage movement, and representative government is internally sovereign (for example, including and especially over military and foreign affairs) as well as stable (in existence for at least three years)."<sup>14</sup>

Other studies have refined the definitions employed in analysis of wars or have focused on particular intervening variables that may affect the liberalism-peace relationship. Singer & Small, for example, set a definition for war corresponding with that of the Correlates of War (COW) project at the University of Michigan that included only those conflicts with more than one thousand battlefield deaths; this measure has been used frequently by other scholars.<sup>15</sup> Subsequent scholars, however, have also tested the liberal peace thesis using data from the Militarized Interstate Dispute (MID) data set of the COW, which measure interstate conflict at lower levels short of full-scale war. This allows for a more robust test of the proposition that pairs of democracies go to war against each other much less

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<sup>14</sup> Michael Doyle, *Ways of War and Peace*, p. 264

<sup>15</sup> David Singer & Melvin Small, *Resort to Arms* (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1982)



frequently (perhaps not at all) than other state dyads, since there are multiple levels of conflict that are included in the data set. Henry Farber and Joanne Gowa found using MID data that there is a significantly lower chance of lower-level conflict between pairs of democracies than between other sets of states, a finding that is consistent with the conventional conclusion in studies of higher-level conflict (war) and liberal peace.<sup>16</sup>

Farber & Gowa developed the research program further by segmenting the historical time periods in which wars were analyzed, studying separately the conflicts prior to World War I; the First World War years; the period between world wars; World War II, and the Cold War period. This examination produced the potentially interesting result that, although war did not occur between liberal states during these periods<sup>17</sup>, this finding was statistically significant only during World War I, which the authors dismiss as too unique to be relevant or generalizable, and during the post-WWII period of the Cold War.<sup>18</sup> It is important to add the caveat that the empirical evidence does not seem to indicate that liberal states are any less prone to engage in war than other types of regimes; they simply do not go to war against other liberal states.

Most early democratic peace theorists relied on some form of categorical division between liberal and illiberal regimes. This provided ammunition for critics, who alleged that this arbitrary dichotomy made the definition of a liberal state particularly arbitrary

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<sup>16</sup> Henry Farber & Joanne Gowa, "Polities and Peace," *International Security* vol 20, no. 2 (Fall, 1995), pp. 108-132

<sup>17</sup> Farber & Gowa note that the United States and Spain engaged in war during the Spanish-American War, and that Finland was on opposite sides during World War II from a number of democracies that were Allied Powers, both of which could be considered examples of democracies engaging in war against one another. A number of scholars, however, have questioned whether Spain could be accurately defined as a democracy in 1898 and have challenged the Finnish example because Finland was fighting against the Soviet Union, and only indirectly against the liberal allies of the USSR, which calls into question the legitimacy of calling this a war between democracies.

<sup>18</sup> Farber & Gowa, "Polities and Peace"



and open to manipulation. Maoz and Russett, however, attempted to capture sophisticated empirical data by using a continuum to describe a state's level of democracy (vs. autocracy), as well as using the traditional dichotomous measures. The continuum, based on the work of Ted Gurr, Harry Eckstein, and other scholars working on the Polity II data set, measured the degree of democracy on a number of factors, as well as the degree of autocracy, which was expressed as a negative number, then combined the two measures into an aggregate score.

The analysis of Maoz and Russett, which drew on two major data sets which differed somewhat in case selection, definitions, and other details that could serve as a test of the robustness of the authors' models, produced mixed results. The results from one of the data sets showed a strong relationship between democracy and peace for both the dichotomous and continuous measures of democracy, whereas the other data set indicated a significant correlation only for the dichotomous category (in which states were labeled either democratic or not, rather than being assigned a score between democracy and autocracy).<sup>19</sup>

Oneal & Ray attempt to reconcile some of the inconclusive and mixed results of Maoz & Russett and other scholars who utilize continuum scales of democracy rather than dichotomous categories. They claim that these measures fail to capture adequately the important but distinct elements of total level of democracy shared in a particular state dyad and the political distance between the two regimes. Oneal & Ray conclude,

Our pooled analyses of the politically relevant pairs of states, 1950-85, indicate that democracies are more peaceful dyadically and individually, and democracies and autocracies are especially prone to conflict. The prospects for peace are influenced by the level of democracy in a

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<sup>19</sup> See Maoz and Russett, 'Normative and Structural Causes of Democratic Peace, 1946-1986'.



dyad; but they are also significantly affected by the political distance separating the regimes along the democracy-autocracy continuum. Democratic pairs are less conflict-prone than average, all else being equal; but a high level of democracy in one state does not compensate for the dangers associated with autocracy in a strategic partner. Making the less democratic state in a dyad more democratic is unambiguously good; it increases the average democracy score for the pair and reduces the political distance separating the states, lowering the likelihood of conflict. Increasing the level of democracy in the more democratic state, holding the regime score of the other state constant, raises the danger of a dispute, however. The average level of democracy within the dyad increases, but so does political distance...A dichotomous measure of joint democracy yields strong support for the democratic peace because it identifies dyads for which the combined democracy scores are a maximum and political distance is a minimum. Continuous measures produce weaker evidence because the strong influence of political distance is not fully taken into account.<sup>20</sup>

Some liberal peace proponents have advanced the claim that liberal states are inherently less violent, both in their relations with other states and with respect to internal violence. R.J. Rummel, one of the early pioneers of the study of democratic peace, advanced four propositions—that interstate violence will occur only if at least one state is not ‘libertarian’; that the more libertarian two states are, the less likely they will engage in mutual violence; that libertarian states tend to engage less in

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<sup>20</sup> John R. Oneal & James Lee Ray, “New Tests of the Democratic Peace: Controlling for Economic Interdependence, 1950-85,” *Political Research Quarterly*, vol. 50, no. 4 (December 1997), p. 770



interstate violence in general; and that the more libertarian a state is, the less internal violence it will have. Based on empirical tests, Rummel found positive support for all of these propositions, but only the proposition that interstate war will occur only if at least one state is not libertarian could be supported at a level of significance that he called 'robust'. As the subsequent literature has reflected, it is probably not true that liberal states are less likely to engage in war in general or to have lower levels of internal conflict.

#### *Criticisms and Weaknesses of Liberal Peace Theory*

By no means is the liberal peace thesis accepted universally within the field of international relations. It represents a robust and active research program, but like most such groups of theory, it has attracted energetic criticism from several sides. One weakness of liberal peace theory is that there is a fairly small sample from which to draw conclusions. Democracies were quite rare until relatively recently, and combined with the fact that war is actually fairly rare (when considered from the perspective that of all interactions between sets of two countries, or dyads, across time and space, only a few develop into war), the data set is quite limited. Some scholars have alleged that this creates uncertainty about whether the lack of war between democratic states is any more significant than would be a statistical analysis that revealed a lack of war between states whose names begin with a particular letter.

In addition to this criticism, Farber & Gowa concluded from their segmented analysis of historical war periods that most new democracies emerged during the Cold War, and that liberal peace was only significantly different during this period (as opposed to earlier periods, when the difference in the occurrence of war between democracies and that between other types of states was not



significant).<sup>21</sup> This suggests the possibility that liberal peace during this period could have been explained by the need to balance against a hostile and threatening Communist bloc. For this reason, liberal states would have avoided going to war against each other for fear of presenting weakness before the greater perceived threat which was the Soviet bloc. In other words, the statistical evidence for liberal peace could actually be an artifact reflecting alliance factors during the Cold War.

James Lee Ray refutes this attack, saying that it is inconsistent to apply the expectation that opposition to a common enemy leads to peace only to democracies without applying it also to the nondemocratic allies against communism and to the Communist bloc itself, which faced a formidable set of common enemies in the West. He claims,

One might reasonably infer that if the opposition of the communists was sufficient to create common interests guaranteeing peace among the democratic (or anticommunist) states of the world, then the opposition of the 'Free World' (even more formidable, by most measures) should have been sufficient to guarantee peace among the communist states. Yet during the Cold War the Soviet Union invaded Hungary and Czechoslovakia, as well as Afghanistan, and experienced serious border clashes with communist China. Meanwhile, Vietnam attacked and occupied most of Cambodia, provoking a retaliatory attack by communist China. The 'opposition leads to common interests leads to peace' idea would also be hard-pressed to account for the fact that peace did not prevail uniformly on the anticommunist side of the Cold War divide. For example, El Salvador fought a war with Honduras in 1969, Turkey and Greece became embroiled in a war over the fate of Cyprus in 1974, and Great Britain clashed with Argentina

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<sup>21</sup> Farber & Gowa, "Politics and Peace"



over the Falkland/Malvinas islands in 1982. These cases are not anomalies for advocates of the democratic peace proposition; each of those wars involved at least one undemocratic state.<sup>22</sup>

Raymond Cohen argues that democracy is not adequate as an explanation for the phenomenon of 'liberal peace' that has been noted so extensively by scholars. He argues that,

Contrary to received truth, the existence of a general law of behaviour that *democracies as a class do not fight each other* has not been demonstrated. Rather, the soundest conclusion to draw from the evidence is that democratic states in the North Atlantic/Western European area, sharing a particular set of historical circumstances and a common cultural heritage, have avoided going to war. This is in line with Karl Deutch's 1955 observation that a 'security community', a community of nations resolved to settle their disputes peacefully, had come into being in the North Atlantic area. The finding has not been proved to hold throughout history, outside the North Atlantic area, or for non-Western cultures.<sup>23</sup>

Similarly to those mentioned earlier who claim the liberal peace to be an artifact or coincidence attributable to other factors such as time period, Cohen concludes that "No causal mechanism has been shown to exist providing a necessary link between democracies and mutually peaceful behaviour. On the contrary, there is reason to suspect that pacific unions are liable to occur in particular historical

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<sup>22</sup> James Lee Ray, "Does Democracy Cause Peace?" *Annual Review of Political Science* (1998), p. 38

<sup>23</sup> Raymond Cohen, "Pacific Unions: A Reappraisal of the Theory That 'Democracies Do Not Go to War with Each Other'," *Review of International Studies*, vol. 20 no. 3 (July 1994), p. 208



circumstances irrespective of regime type.”<sup>24</sup> If Cohen is correct, then, democracies are just as likely to go to war with one another as with any other type of regime, given similar circumstances and controlling for extraneous variables. The problem with this criticism, of course, is that democracies have not gone to war against one another, and a number of significant empirical studies that have attempted to control for any variable that seems remotely relevant to international war have found that controlling for the extraneous variables does not negatively affect the statistical significance and importance of the absence of war between democracies.<sup>25</sup>

One further weakness exhibited by liberal peace theory is similar to the scientifically questionable action in an experiment of peeking at data before formulating one’s hypotheses. It is possible that some of the power of the empirical support for the liberal peace proposition comes from the careful crafting of the criteria used to define concepts like ‘democracies’ and ‘war’. The Correlates of War project, which has produced much of the empirical data used by scholars on all sides of the liberal peace debate, defines interstate war as being conflict between two independent states resulting in at least 1,000 battlefield casualties. The definition of a ‘liberal’ or democratic state includes several criteria, such as external sovereignty, private property and market economies, juridical rights of citizens and representative government.<sup>26</sup> Both of these definitions are potentially controversial, and they have been subject to charges that they were shaped to fit existing data. The research on liberal peace may be driven to some extent by scholars’ assumptions, which reflect the widespread belief that mutual democratic institutions result in peaceful relations, and that the central research agenda, beyond confirming empirical support for the

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> See Maoz and Russett, ‘Normative and Structural Causes of Democratic Peace, 1946-1986’.

<sup>26</sup> Michael Doyle, “Kant, Liberal Legacies, and Foreign Affairs,”





correlation between peace and liberalism, is to figure out why this phenomenon occurs.

Cohen expands on this criticism, saying that “the only way to eliminate counter-examples of war between democracies is by defining democracy in such a way that it applies only to a handful of states, but a narrow definition of democracy limits the validity of the generalization to the North Atlantic/West European area after 1945. Before 1945 there were few opportunities for democracies to fight. After 1945 many states classified as democratic by early researchers such as Doyle turn out, on closer examination, to possess dubious credentials.”<sup>27</sup>

In addition, Cohen points out that as the international system evolved during the twentieth century, the concept of war also has changed. It is now difficult to define war as being significant only when it is conflict between two independent states resulting in at least 1,000 battlefield deaths. In the wake of World War II, overt war between Great Powers has become essentially nonexistent (possibly due to immense increases in violence interdependence), while Great Powers and other democracies continue to engage in conflict through proxy wars posing as civil conflicts as well as through less bloody conflicts that are still extremely significant from a political standpoint. The significance of new types of conflict that do not fall neatly into either the realist or liberal peace paradigms are borne out by a number of scholars, especially those writing on areas of the world outside of Western Europe and the United States.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Raymond Cohen, “Pacific Unions,” p. 222

<sup>28</sup> See Steven David, “Explaining Third World Alignment,” *World Politics*, vol. 43 (January 1991), pp. 233-56; K.J. Holsti, “International Relations Theory and Domestic War in the Third World: The Limits of Relevance” in Stephanie G. Neuman, ed., *International Relations Theory and the Third World* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1998); Arlene Tickner, “Seeing IR Differently: Notes from the Third World,” *Millenium: Journal of International Studies*, vol. 32, no. 2 (2003), pp. 295-324; Steven David, “Why the Third World Still Matters,” *International Security*, vol. 17 no. 3 (Winter 1992-1993), pp. 127-59



Liberal peace, despite the doubts of its critics, is still a very active and robust set of theories and research programs. It offers perhaps the most comprehensive and persuasive attack on the theoretical hegemony of realism within the field of international relations. Furthermore, the empirical evidence is difficult to deny—liberal states generally do not go to war against each other. The criticism of the theory has mostly focused on questioning the validity of interpreting causal relationships from limited empirical data, not on the actual lack or presence of war between democracies (although there are a couple of exceptions in the literature). This is an important proviso to remember for advocates and critics alike—both democracies and wars are still rather rare, so it may still be somewhat premature to proclaim based on empirical evidence that democratic peace should be considered to have the strength of a law. The combined evidence, however, of the Cold War period when democracies proliferated enormously, plus the past fifteen years after the fall of the Soviet Union, when presumably any intervening variable having to do with alliance effects against the USSR would have collapsed, serve as persuasive support for the theory. Every year that passes in which democracies behave peacefully toward one another simply reinforces the validity of democratic peace theory.



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