

The Democratic Peace Theory and Its Problems

Munafrizal Manan

Jurusan Ilmu Hubungan Internasional, Universitas Al Azhar Indonesia, Jakarta

E-mail: munafrizal@uai.ac.id

Abstract: This essay discusses the democratic peace theory from the perspective of both its proponents and opponents. The puzzle of the democratic peace theory has long been debated methodologically and empirically. Both have a strong argument to support their views, however. This essay highlights the debate by focusing on the three problems of the democratic peace theory. First, the differences of the definitions of democracy, war, and peace that demonstrates the lack of robustness in the democratic peace theory. Second, democracy by force has often failed to establish peace whether international or domestic peace and therefore the promotion of democracy around the world have been seen as a justification of democratic intervention to other sovereign states. Third, the democratic peace theory does not always apply in new emerging democratic countries. As a result, it raises a question whether the democratic peace theory is an academic theory or an ideology.

Keywords: Democracy, Peace, War, Democratic Peace, Kant.

Abstrak: Esai ini mendiskusikan teori perdamaian demokratik dari perspektif pendukung dan penentang teori ini. Teka-teki teori ini telah lama diperdebatkan secara metodologis dan empiris. Pendukung dan penentang teori ini sama-sama memiliki argumen kuat untuk mendukung pandangan mereka. Esai ini menyoroti perdebatan tersebut melalui fokus pada tiga masalah yang melekat pada teori perdamaian demokratik. Pertama, menyoroti perbedaan definisi demokrasi, perang, dan perdamaian yang menunjukkan kurang kuatnya teori ini. Kedua, menyoroti aspek demokrasi melalui paksaan yang ternyata sering gagal menegakkan perdamaian dalam lingkup domestik maupun internasional, dan karena itu promosi demokrasi ke seluruh dunia dipandang sebagai sekadar justifikasi untuk mengintervensi negara-negara berdaulat. Ketiga, teori perdamaian demokratik tidak selalu dapat diterapkan di negara-negara demokrasi baru. Akibatnya, muncul pertanyaan apakah teori perdamaian demokratis adalah sebuah teori akademik atau sebuah ideologi.

Kata Kunci: Demokrasi, Perdamaian, Perang, Perdamaian Demokratik, Kant.

Introduction

It has long been asked and discussed what the effective ingredient of international peace is. Obviously, there are different views to answer such a question; one of them is the liberal view. Most liberalist strongly believe that democracy is an answer and the only way to establish international peace around the world. Because of that, according to them, it is very important to spread democracy so that international peace can be enforced and maintained. Thus, democracy is seen as a solution for peace and both are mutually reinforcing.

The relationship between democracy and peace has long been debated by as scholars across disciplines such philosophy, political science, sociology, history and law, to mention but a few. Mostly, the debate has been taking place by focusing on the so-called the democratic peace theory.¹²¹ According to Rosato, 'democratic peace theory is probably the

¹²¹ Some authors use different suffix words for this term. Some of them use 'the democratic peace theory', and some others name 'the democratic peace thesis', 'the democratic peace hypothesis', and 'the democratic peace proposition'. Basically, the differences indicate that 'the democratic peace' is contested by scholars and no universal agreement has been achieved on the validity of 'the democratic peace'. The words of 'theory', 'thesis', 'hypothesis', and

most powerful liberal contribution to the debate on the cause of war and peace'.¹²²

For its proponents, the democratic peace theory brings an optimistic view on the future of international peace. For them, to create peace is simply to spread democracy to all countries around the globe. It is believed that the more democratic they are, the more peaceful they will be. This is a reason why 'the idea of a democratic zone of peace is routinely voiced in both academic and policy making circles'.¹²³ However, such a generalization is questioned by its opponents who argue that the reality is not as simple as that. The proponents of this theory have overstated their generalization. The opponents examine critically the claim of the proponents which resulted in theoretical and methodological debates.

The aim of this essay is to overview the democratic peace theory. It is an attempt to answer such questions: What is the democratic peace theory? What is the debate among experts about the democratic peace theory? To what extent the democratic peace theory can be applied?

'proposition' suggest that 'the democratic peace' needs to be examined empirically. In this essay, I prefer to use 'the democratic peace theory', although it is sometimes used interchangeably.

¹²² Sebastian Rosato. 2003. "The Flawed Logic of Democratic Peace Theory", *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 97 No. 4 (November), p. 585.

¹²³ Miriam Fendius Elman. 1997. "Introduction. The Need for a Qualitative Test of the Democratic Peace Theory" in Miriam Fendius Elman (ed.), *Paths to Peace: Is Democracy the Answer?*, CSIA Studies in International Security, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press), p. 7.

This essay is divided into two sections. Firstly, it will view the idea of the democratic peace theory which was firstly coined by Immanuel Kant over two hundred years ago. Secondly, it will discuss the debate of the democratic peace theory. From this point, this essay tries to show the problems of the democratic peace theory.

Kant and Perpetual Peace

Much has been written about the democratic peace theory. It is widely recognized that the democratic peace theory is rooted in the idea of Immanuel Kant through his influential essay entitled *Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch* written in 1795. Kant gave a philosophical justification for the democratic peace theory. Kant 'posited that a republican form of government, exemplifying the rule of law, provides a feasible basis for states to overcome structural anarchy and to secure peaceful relations among themselves'.¹²⁴ Based on this, Kant believed that if all nations in the world were republics, then it would end war since there would be no aggressors who flaming war among them. Such a belief was probably influenced by the condition of Kant's time in which 'Europe was hardly an area in which republics flourished'.¹²⁵

¹²⁴ As cited by Steve Chan. 1997. "In Search of Democratic Peace: Problems and Promise", *Mershon International Studies Review*, Vol. 41, No. 1 (May), p. 60.

¹²⁵ Bruce Russett. 1993. *Grasping the Democratic Peace: Principles for a Post-Cold War World*,

Kant partially emphasized the importance of the so-called “republican/constitutions” which is now often viewed as synonymous with democracy.¹²⁶ Kant himself was rather sceptical about democracy based solely on majoritarian rule and hence would probably reluctant to be called a democrat if democracy was understood as the rule of popular will as today.¹²⁷ Thus, it shows that what is now commonly called democracy by the proponents of the democratic peace theory is slightly different to Kant’s view. However, it is generally agreed that “republican constitution” is compatible with the concept of democracy because the elements of “republican constitution” consists of ‘freedom (with legal equality of subjects), representative government, and separation of powers’.¹²⁸ They are the fundamental elements in the application of democracy today, indeed.

In spite of “republican constitutions”, the other key elements of the perpetual peace that Kant also stressed are “cosmopolitan law” and “pacific union”. The former deals with international commerce and free trade, and the latter relates to treaty in international law among republics.¹²⁹ In this regard, Meierhenrich notes that:

*Kant distinguished three “definitive articles” of peace, which together constituted a tripod of peace. In the contemporary international system, Kant’s definitive articles of peace correspond to the interlocking institutions of democracy (“republican constitution”), economic interdependence (“cosmopolitan right” and “universal community”), and international organization (“pacific federation”).*¹³⁰

Kant believed that these three elements are the basis for perpetual peace. Democracy, interdependence, and international law and organization are essential to achieve perpetual peace. It is believed that democracy prevents international war, economic interdependence reduces international war, and international organizations maintain international peace and security. However, many proponents of the democratic peace theory overemphasize the importance of democracy. They do not see all three elements as an inherent part of peace and hence have to be applied altogether at the same time. In fact, as Oneal and Russett argues, perpetual peace is not only a result of democracy, but also product of trade cooperation among countries and joint membership in international organizations.¹³¹

According to Kant, “republican

(Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press), p. 9.

¹²⁶ Ibid, p. 4.

¹²⁷ Steve Chan, op.cit, p. 64.

¹²⁸ Bruce Russett, op.cit, p. 4.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Jens Meierhenrich, 2007. “Perpetual War: A Pragmatic Sketch”, Human Rights Quarterly, 29, p. 633-634.

¹³¹ John R. Oneal and Bruce Russett. 1999. “The Kantian Peace: The Pacific Benefits of Democracy, Interdependence, and International Organizations”, 1881-1992”, World Politics Vol. 52.1.

constitution” that respect to law is the peaceful form of the state and hence necessary in order to prevent the ruler declaring war easily and unilaterally without considering law and public opinion. As Waltz points out, ‘in a republic the unambiguous test of right is applied to every piece of legislation, and every act of the executive will in turn follow the universally established law’.¹³² Moreover, as Owen argues, ‘the people who fight and fund war have the right to be consulted, through representatives they elect, before entering it’.¹³³ This is the reasons why war never or at least rarely occurs among “republican constitution” states. Eventually, according to Kant, it will lead to perpetual peace.

Michael W. Doyle points out that the notion of Kant on perpetual peace is basically developed from three definitive articles of peace which consists of republican, the pacific union, and cosmopolitan law. For Kant, a liberal peace is not a utopian ideal to be reached if the three definitive articles are fulfilled altogether.¹³⁴ In *Perpetual Peace*, Kant shows us that ‘liberal republics lead to dichotomous international politics: peaceful relations a “pacific union” among similarly liberal states and a “state of

war” between liberals and nonliberals’.¹³⁵

With regard to the significance of Kant’s ideas today, Doyle opines that:

*Perpetual Peace... helps us understand the interactive nature of international relations. Kant tries to teach us methodologically that we can study neither the systemic relations of states nor the varieties of state behaviour in isolation from each other. Substantively, he anticipates for us the ever-widening pacification of a liberal pacific union, explains this pacification, and at the same time suggests why liberal states are not pacific in their relations with nonliberal states.*¹³⁶

Furthermore, Doyle argues that ‘Kant should not and cannot be simply applied. But some of Kant’s ideas can still be inspiring, analytically and normatively, including most centrally his vision of an expanding separate peace grounded in republican institutions, liberal norms and commercial interdependence’.¹³⁷ Such a view suggests that although Kant’s ideas on peace deserves for an appreciation, a critical approach needs to be taken to examine the applicability of his ideas.

A Progressive Debate

The first time Kant published his theory about two centuries ago, not much or even possibly no country could be categorized as democratic country according to today’s standards. Before the

¹³² Kenneth N. Waltz. 2008. *Realism and International Politics*, (New York and London: Routledge), p. 8.

¹³³ As cited by Jens Meierhenrich, *op.cit.*, p. 638.

¹³⁴ Michael W. Doyle, *Liberal Peace: Selected Essays* (London and New York: Routledge, 2012), p. 25-26; 68-70; 207-208.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 151.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 214

late nineteenth century, democratic governments were scarce. As Gowa says, 'no evidence of a democratic peace is apparent before World War I'.¹³⁸ Accordingly, less attention has been paid to Kant's theory because it was probably presumed inapplicable. However, it has changed since the middle of nineteenth century in which the democratic peace theory has been contested by philosophers and social scientists.¹³⁹ In the 1960s, the democratic peace theory was evaluated scientifically by researchers. During 1970s and 1980s, this theory has been attracting more attention from researchers¹⁴⁰ and it remains the same until today.

There are several phrases used by scholars to express the meaning of the democratic peace theory. The democratic peace theory, basically, argues that it never or at least rarely happens that democratic countries are involved in war against each other. Similarly, it also argues that 'democracies have almost never fought each other'.¹⁴¹ Likewise, it is understood that 'members of pairs of democratic states are much less likely to engage each other in serious disputes short of war than are

members of other pairs of states'.¹⁴² Also, 'democracies are more pacific in general than are other types of states'.¹⁴³ According to Russett, such a statement indicates a complex phenomenon of the democratic peace theory. Furthermore, Russett explains that:

(a) Democracies rarely fight each other (an empirical statement) because (b) they have other means of resolving conflicts between them and therefore do not need to fight each other (a prudential statement), and (c) they perceive that democracies should not fight each other (a normative statement about principles of right behaviour), which reinforces the empirical statement. By this reasoning, the more democracies there are in the world, the fewer potential adversaries we and other democracies will have and the wider the zone of peace.¹⁴⁴

To put it simply, the democratic peace theory can be viewed from two propositions. First, it is called the dyadic proposition which argues that democratic states rarely fight each other and it takes two democracies to make peace. Such a view is supported by most scholars.¹⁴⁵ It is usually based on 'a shared culture and shared democratic norms among democracies, or to the institutional constraints on a leader's actions; that is, the structure of a democratic government

¹³⁸ Joanne Gowa. 1999. *Ballots and Bullets: The Elusive Democratic Peace*, (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press), p. 3.

¹³⁹ E. S. Easley. 2004. *The War over Perpetual Peace: An Exploration into the History of a Foundational International Relations Text*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan), p. 2.

¹⁴⁰ Piki Ish-Shalom. 2006. "Theory as a Hermeneutical Mechanism: The Democratic-Peace Thesis and the Politics of Democratization", *European Journal of International Relations*, Vol. 12(4), pp. 575.

¹⁴¹ Bruce Russett, op.cit, p. 4.

¹⁴² Joanne Gowa, op.cit, p. 5.

¹⁴³ Miriam Fendius Elman, op.cit, p. vii.

¹⁴⁴ Bruce Russett, op.cit, p. 4.

¹⁴⁵ Miriam Fendius Elman, op.cit, p. 10-11.

makes it difficult for leaders to make war'.¹⁴⁶ Moreover, 'the dyadic argument suggests that democracies carefully identify the type of state with which they are interacting, and adjust their behaviour accordingly'.¹⁴⁷

Second, it is named the monadic proposition which argues that 'democratic state are less prone to use force regardless of the regime type of their opponents' and it is alleged that 'the more democratic the state, the less violent its behaviour toward other states'.¹⁴⁸ Elman opines that there are two central arguments of the monadic propositions. 'First, democratic states are less likely to see war as a viable foreign policy option. Force is not seen as a legitimate tool of foreign policy, but rather as an option of last resort. Second, the regime type of the opponent is not likely to play a crucial role in democratic states' decisions to go to war'.¹⁴⁹

In the discussion of the democratic peace theory it is often questioned in what way democracy is able to enforce international peace. According to Ish-Shalom, there are two major theories to explain it. First, it is called the structural dimensions of democracy which 'claiming that the division of power, checks and balances, and leaders' accountability to the public, make the decision making process

complex and slow, allowing the leaders of democratic states to reach peaceful resolutions of conflicts between them'. Second, it is named the normative dimensions of democratic societies which 'claiming that the norms of tolerance and openness function at the level of the relations between them'. As a result, according to Ish-Shalom, 'there is more willingness to reach compromises, and conflicts are settled peacefully'.¹⁵⁰ In this regard, 'political conflicts in democracies are resolved through compromise rather than through elimination of opponents'.¹⁵¹

In the literature of the democratic peace theory, according to Gowa, there are three explanations that confirm the role of democracy in enforcing peace. Gowa identifies that 'some studies stress the role of political culture; others emphasize the deterrent effects of trade; and still others point to the ability of democratic regimes to constrain leaders' action abroad'.¹⁵² The first argues that 'a norm of peaceful conflict resolution prevails within democracies. This norm precludes recourse to violence to settle any disputes that may arise within democratic states'. Furthermore, 'the norm that governs conflict resolution within democratic states also regulates the settlement of disputes between them. If the interests of two democracies clash, each

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, p. 11.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid, p. 17.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid, p. 15.

¹⁴⁹ Lo.cit, p. 17

¹⁵⁰ Piki Ish-Shalom, op.cit, p. 575.

¹⁵¹ Maoz and Russett (1993) as cited by Jens

Meierhenrich, op.cit, p. 637.

¹⁵² Joanne Gowa, op.cit, p. 6-7.

country involved expects the other to sit down at the bargaining table rather than to resort to force'.¹⁵³ The second explanation 'emphasizes the role of trade in deterring recourse to force' and the inclination to trade more and maintain lower trade barriers among democratic states.¹⁵⁴ In the last explanation, 'the relatively restricted autonomy of leaders of democratic states plays a central role'. The leaders are constrained and watched by 'opposition leaders, periodic elections, and the presence of a legislature' which are able to sanction them.¹⁵⁵ As a consequence, they cannot decide to go to war based on their own decision. In short, theories and explanations above emphasize the power of democracy to achieve international peace. Democracy is seen as a self-constraint mechanism for war.

There are substantial progresses of the democratic peace theory so far. Chan notes that the attention of the democratic peace theory can be traced to an article published by Dean Babst in a journal namely *Industrial Research* in the early 1970s.¹⁵⁶ In this article, Babst stated that 'no wars have been fought between independent nations with elective governments between 1789 and 1941'.¹⁵⁷ In the same decade, Melvin Small and David

Singer (1976) revealed the same finding that 'democracies participated in fewer wars than non-democracies from 1815 through 1965'.¹⁵⁸ Such conclusions were also supported by Zeev Maoz and Nasrin Abdolali who found that 'based on their analysis of data spanning 150 years, democracies "never" fight each other'.¹⁵⁹

In the late 1970s and the early 1980s, Rudolph Rummel contended such conclusions based on quantitative data. Rummel argued that the democratic peace theory 'was not a statistical artefact' and claimed that 'liberalism reduced international violence'.¹⁶⁰ In response to Rummel's conclusion, Eric Weede noted that 'the democratic peace proposition was subject to some important qualifications growing out of the type of warfare that was studied and the time period that was examined'.¹⁶¹

A number of studies which were conducted in the late 1980 and the early 1990s have come to 'an apparent consensus: although democracies are not generally less warlike than non-democracies (the so-called monadic hypothesis), they rarely (if ever) fight each other (the dyadic hypothesis)'.¹⁶² Most studies above support the democratic peace theory.

During 1980s and 1990s, many more

¹⁵³ Ibid, p. 6.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid, p. 7.

¹⁵⁶ Steve Chan, op.cit, p. 60.

¹⁵⁷ Dean Babst (1972: 55) as cited by Steve Chan, ibid.

¹⁵⁸ As cited by Steve Chan, ibid, p. 61.

¹⁵⁹ As cited by Joanne Gowa, op.cit, p. 5.

¹⁶⁰ As cited by Steve Chan, lo.cit, p. 61.

¹⁶¹ Eric Weede (1984) as cited by Steve Chan, ibid, p. 61.

¹⁶² Ibid, p. 61.

studies on the democratic peace theory have been published by scholars across discipline using different approaches. Chan compressed well these studies as follows:

*In the meantime, a number of studies have appeared that have sought to probe the empirical frontiers of the democratic peace proposition or clarify further its theoretical foundations. Some of this research has explored the proposition's "cosilience" (Olson 1982) by extending its logic beyond the original concern with war to other phenomena such as foreign intervention, dispute mediation, trade practice, civil strife, covert subversion, alliance membership, and international treaties as well as the crisis-management and war-winning capabilities of democratic or democratizing states.... Other studies have offered collateral evidence for the democratic peace proposition using historical, anthropological, and experimental approaches.... Still others have presented various political, economic, psychological, and philosophical perspectives to illuminate why the democratic peace occurs.... Finally, several recent studies have focused on differentiating between the monadic and dyadic hypotheses that compose the democratic peace proposition.*¹⁶³

It is clear so far that the democratic peace is somehow a Janus-faced theory. The democratic peace theory is advocated as well as opposed by scholars from various disciplines. In some cases and in certain times, there is a strong evident to validate the democratic peace theory as some studies have indicated above. However, it is hard to generalize that the democratic peace

theory can be applied universally. That is a reason why some scholars have criticized and opposed the democratic peace theory by showing its problems. In the following paragraphs the essay highlights the problems of the democratic peace theory.

The Three Problems

The first problem with the democratic peace theory is related to the definition. Some scholars argue that the results of the democratic peace theory depend on the definitions of democracy and war which are used to analyse it.¹⁶⁴ Russett suggests that 'we need to define what we mean by democracy and war'.¹⁶⁵ Indeed, it is important to define clearly what is meant by democracy, war and peace. Noticeably, there are different views on the definition of democracy and war as well as peace.

In the literature of democracy, there has been a debate among social scientist, especially political scientists, about what democracy really is as well as which countries should be called democratic and which types of democracies are more peaceful. Speaking generally, the experts agree that the democratic theories can be grouped into two broad paradigms.

The first is elitist, structural, formal, and procedural. It tends to understand democracy in a relatively minimalist way. A regime is a democracy when it passes some

¹⁶³ Ibid, p. 61-62.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid, p. 63.

¹⁶⁵ Bruce Russett, op.cit, p. 11-12.

*structural threshold of free and open elections, autonomous branches of government, division of power, and checks and balances. This state of affairs precludes a tyrannical concentration of power in the hands of the elites. Once this structure is in place, a regime is a democracy. The second paradigm, which is called 'normative', 'cultural', 'deliberative democracy', and 'participatory democracy', tends to focus on other issues and to demand much more of democracy. First, the emphasis is on the society and the individual citizens, not the political system and the regime. Second, there is also a demand for the existence of democratic norms and democratic culture. This implies, among other things, political rights, tolerance, openness, participation, and a sense of civic responsibility.*¹⁶⁶

Nevertheless, there is no a consensus among the democratic peace theoreticians about the nature of democracy in relation to the democratic peace theory. If the democratic peace theory is based on the first paradigm, then there are many countries should be called democratic. Democracy in such a paradigm 'is relatively easy to build, but also relatively easy to dismantle it'.¹⁶⁷ It seems that the democratic peace theory is not strongly supported by the structural paradigm of democratic theory because interstate wars or at least armed conflicts remain taking place in countries that committed to this structural paradigm. The armed conflicts between Russia and Georgia as well as

Thailand and Cambodia in 2008, for example, which were triggered by border disputes, strengthen such a view. Within this context, Chan argues that 'although a large number of countries have recently adopted democratic structures of governance (for instance, universal suffrage, multiparty competition, contested elections, legislative oversight), it is not evident that their leaders and people have internalized such democratic norms as those regarding tolerance, compromise, and sharing power'.¹⁶⁸

Conversely, if it is based on the second paradigm, then there are only a few countries should be classified democratic. It is likely to focus merely on mature democratic countries especially in the regions of North America and West Europe. As a consequence, numerous cases of warring democracies will be excluded.¹⁶⁹ It means that the democratic peace theory is only relevant to countries in this region and hence it cannot be applied to other countries. In other words, the proponents of the democratic peace theory do not have a justifiable reason to spread democracy around the world in order to enforce international peace.

Like democracy, the definition of war is also contested by scholars. The proponents of the democratic peace theory who argue that democratic countries have

¹⁶⁶ Piki Ish-Shalom, op.cit, p. 577.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid, p. 578.

¹⁶⁸ Steve Chan, op.cit, p. 66. Original emphasises.

¹⁶⁹ Miriam Fendius Elman, p. 21.

not involved in wars against each other 'have tended to rely on the definition most widely used in academic research on the causes of war in the last two or three decades'.¹⁷⁰ War is defined as, according to that definition, 'no hostility...qualified as an interstate war unless it led to a minimum of 1,000 battle fatalities among all the system members involved'.¹⁷¹ Such a definition excludes the wars that do not fulfil the 1,000 battle-death threshold and hence minimizes the number of cases that can be categorized war. As Ray observes, 'in any case, there are not numerous incidents having just below 1,000 battle deaths that would otherwise qualify as wars between democratic states'.¹⁷² Moreover, it 'allows democratic peace proponents to exclude some troublesome cases'.¹⁷³ The case of Finland is one of examples for this. The case suggests that 'although democratic peace proponents code Finland as a democracy, Finland's alliance with Germany in World War II is summarily dismissed because fewer than 1,000 Finns were killed in armed combat'.¹⁷⁴ Another example is the 1967 Six Day War between Israel and Lebanon in which Lebanon 'only sent a few aircraft into Israel air space and sustained no casualties'.¹⁷⁵ Obviously, such

an old definition is not adequate to explain the changing character of war in the contemporary era.¹⁷⁶

In addition, by using historical analysis Ravlo, Gleditsch and Dorussen show that the claim of the democratic peace theory that democratic states never get involved in a war against each other is undermined by historical evidence. Their finding demonstrates that 'most of extrasystematic wars have been fought by democracies'¹⁷⁷ and 'only in the postcolonial period are democracies less involved in extrasystemic war'.¹⁷⁸ But in the colonial and imperial periods, wars occurred among democracies.

Similar to democracy and war, the definition of peace is also debated by scholars. Put it simply, according to the realists, peace can be defined as the absence of war. As Waltz argues, 'the chances of peace rise if states can achieve their most important ends without actively using force'.¹⁷⁹ However, 'the absence of war is something temporary' and therefore 'peace is no more than a transient lack of war'.¹⁸⁰ For realists, the absence of war does not simply mean that there will be no war in the

¹⁷⁰ James Lee Ray. 1997. "The Democratic Path to Peace", *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 8.2, p. 52.

¹⁷¹ Small and Singer (1982: 55) as cited by James Lee Ray, *ibid*, p. 52.

¹⁷² *Ibid*, p. 52.

¹⁷³ Miriam Fendius Elman, *op.cit*, p. 22.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid*, p. 22-23; see also Bruce Russett, *op.cit*, p. 18.

¹⁷⁵ Miriam Fendius Elman, *ibid*, p. 23; Bruce Russett,

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid*, p. 18.

¹⁷⁷ Michael Sheehan. 2008. "The Changing Character of War", in John Baylis, Steve Smith and Patricia Owens, *The Globalization of World Politics: An Introduction to International Relations*, Fourth Edition (New York, N.Y.: Oxford University Press).

¹⁷⁸ Hilde Ravlo, Nils Petter Gleditsch, and Hans Dorussen. 2003. "Colonial War and the Democratic Peace", *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 47 August, p. 523-524.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid*, p. 535.

¹⁸⁰ Kenneth N. Waltz, *op.cit*, p. 63.

future and they ridicule people who are happy with such a peace. Realists believe that 'war is the common and unavoidable feature of international relations' and it means that peace as dangerous as war.¹⁸¹ In the view of Waltz, 'in an anarchic realm, peace is fragile'.¹⁸² Thus, for realists, peace is a period to prepare war.

Other definitions of peace highlight different aspects. Brown defines international war as 'violence between organized political entities claiming to be sovereign nation'.¹⁸³ Boulding who rebuts the realist definition of peace defines peace as 'a situation in which the probability of war is so small that it does not really enter into the calculations of any of the people involved'.¹⁸⁴ According to Boulding, peace should be a real peace which means a 'stable peace'. Boulding rejects the realist definition of peace since it is an 'unstable peace'.¹⁸⁵

The second problem with the democratic peace theory is it is inclined to justify pro-democratic intervention. In this sense, 'this thesis can fuel a spirit of democratic crusade and be used to justify covert or overt interventions against each other'.¹⁸⁶ The U.S. foreign policy is the best example to see this case. The faith of

democratic peace theory has been expressed aggressively by the US foreign policy which believes that the promotion of democracy around the world is not only useful to enforce international peace, but also give a positive result on the US national security. This is a reason why 'the promotion of democracy, genuine and otherwise, has been a cornerstone of U.S. foreign policy for much of the twentieth century'.¹⁸⁷ In addition, 'promoting democracy is a vital interest of the United States that justifies that use of force'.¹⁸⁸

The importance of the promotion of democracy has been supported strongly by political leaders from both Republican Party and Democratic Party such as the US Presidents Woodrow Wilson, Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, and Barack Obama. As Chan notes, 'their statements often suggest that democracy is the best antidote to war'.¹⁸⁹ President Wilson who well-known as the liberal internationalism believed that 'a steadfast concert for peace can never be maintained except by a partnership of democratic nations' and 'the world must be made safe for democracy'.¹⁹⁰ Similarly, President Clinton assured that 'the best strategy to ensure our security and to build a durable peace is to support the

¹⁸¹ Piki Ish-Shalom, op.cit, p. 576.

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Kenneth N. Waltz, op.cit, p. 60.

¹⁸⁴ Seyom Brown (1994: 1) as cited by Piki Ish-Shalom, op.cit, p. 576.

¹⁸⁵ Kenneth Boulding (1979: 13) as cited by Piki Ish-Shalom, ibid.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ Forsythe (1992); Kegley and Hermann (1995) as cited by Steve Chan, op.cit, p. 59.

¹⁸⁸ Jens Meierhenrich, op.cit, p. 646.

¹⁸⁹ Piki Ish-Shalom, op.cit, p. 566.

¹⁹⁰ Steve Chan, op.cit, p. 59.

advance of democracy elsewhere. Democracies don't attack each other'.¹⁹¹ Likewise, President Bush who is often called the neoconservative internationalism stated firmly that 'the reason why I'm so strong on democracy is democracies don't go to war with each other...I've got great faith in democracies to promote peace'.¹⁹² Such statements has been used by President Wilson to justify war against Imperial Germany in 1900s, by President Clinton to justify 'aid to Russia and intervention in Bosnia and Haiti' in 1990s¹⁹³, and by President Bush to justify war against terrorism by invading Afghanistan and Iraq in the early 2000. Also, under the Administration of Obama the US democracy promotion tradition in foreign policy remains pivotal, although its application using somewhat different approaches compared to his predecessors. As Bouchet says, 'for the Obama administration as for its predecessors, America's security, prosperity and predominant international status are all viewed as going hand in hand with democratization abroad'.¹⁹⁴ All this clearly show that, using the words of Doyle,

'liberal peace is definitely part of the rhetoric of foreign policy'.¹⁹⁵

In fact, the promotion of democracy by force has encouraged war rather than resulted in peace. Some studies have succinctly shown that the attempts to create democracies by external force have often failed. Based on their empirical analysis, Gleditsch, Christiansen and Hegre concludes that in the short term democratic intervention is indeed able to promote democratization, but some cases showed clearly that it often created an unstable democratizing country due to internal violence in the form of serious human rights violations or civil wars and therefore in the long run it brought dangerous consequences.¹⁹⁶ According to Mierhenrich, 'the result of pro-democratic intervention is democratic war, internal and otherwise'.¹⁹⁷ Mierhenrich identifies that 'pro-democratic intervention causes war in two ways: (1) by waging war and (2) by provoking war'.¹⁹⁸ Thus democracy by external force is counterproductive for peace. Perhaps what has been occurring in Iraq today shows the truth of such a conclusion.

¹⁹¹ Woodrow Wilson. 1917. "Making the World "Safe for Democracy": Woodrow Wilson Asks for War". <<http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/4943/>>; Jens Meierhenrich, op.cit, p. 646.

¹⁹² Bill Clinton. 1994. "1994 State of the Union Address". <<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/politics/special/states/docs/sou94.htm>>.

¹⁹³ George W. Bush 1994. "President and Prime Minister Blair Discussed Iraq, Middle East". <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2004/11/20041112-5.html>>.

¹⁹⁴ Miriam Fendius Elman, op.cit, p. 2.

¹⁹⁵ Bouchet, Nicholas. 2013. "The Democracy Tradition in US Foreign Policy and the Obama Presidency", *International Affairs*, Vol 89: 1, p. 43.

¹⁹⁶ Michael W. Doyle, op.cit., p. 1.

¹⁹⁷ Nils Petter Gleditsch, Lene Siljeholm Christiansen, and Håvard Hegre. 2004. "Democratic Jihad? Military Intervention and Democracy", paper prepared for the Workshop on "Resources, Governance Structures, and Civil War"; ECPR Joint Session of Workshops, Uppsala, Sweden. 13-18 April 2004. <http://www.prio.no/files/file45238_hegre.pdf>, p.33-34.

¹⁹⁸ Jens Meierhenrich, op.cit, p. 646.

A third problem with the democratic peace is it is not supported by the case of states in the early phases of transitions to democracy. As Mansfield and Snyder argue, these states are more likely become involved in war than other states due to weak political institutions (such as an effective state, the rule of law, organized parties that compete in fair election, and professional news media) which are needed to make democracy work.¹⁹⁹ The advocates of the democratic peace theory are inclined to deny the importance of political institutions because they are likely to believe that the best way to build democracy is just start. For Mansfield and Snyder, ‘this argument is incorrect and dangerously so’ because ‘ill-prepared attempts to democratize weak states—such as the cases of Yugoslavia, Pakistan, Rwanda, and Burundi—may lead to costly warfare in the short run, and may delay or prevent real progress toward democracy over the long term’.²⁰⁰ They conclude that ‘in the short run, however, the beginning stages of transition to democracy often give rise to war rather than peace’.²⁰¹

The path of democracy is not an easy way, indeed. The failure of new emerging democratic countries to achieve a consolidated democracy has a historical

root and hence it is not new phenomena. As Mansfield and Snyder explains:

Since the French Revolution, the earliest phases of democratization have triggered some of the world's bloodiest nationalist struggles. Similarly, during the 1990s, intense armed violence broke out in a number of regions that had just begun to experiment with electoral democracy and more pluralistic public discourse. In some cases, such as the former Yugoslavia, the Caucasus, and Indonesia, transition from dictatorship to more pluralistic political systems coincide with the rise of national independence movements, spurring separatist warfare that often spilled across international borders. In other cases, transitional regime clashed in interstate warfare. Ethiopia and Eritrea, both moving toward more pluralistic forms of government in the 1990s, fought a bloody border war from 1998 to 2000. The elected regimes of India and Pakistan battled during 1999 in the mountainous borderlands of Kashmir. Peru and Ecuador, democratizing in fits and starts during 1980s and 1990s, culminated a series of armed clashes with a small war in the upper Amazon in 1995.²⁰²

Mansfield and Snyder observe that the ‘elite in newly democratizing states often use nationalist appeals to attract mass support without submitting to full democratic accountability and that the institutional weakness of transitional states creates the opportunity for such war-causing strategies to succeed’.²⁰³ For this

¹⁹⁹ Ibid, p. 654.

²⁰⁰ Edward D. Mansfield and Jack Snyder. 2005. *Electing to Fight: Why Emerging Democracies go to War* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press), p. 2.

²⁰¹ Ibid, p. 2-3.

²⁰² Ibid, p. 2.

²⁰³ Edward D. Mansfield and Jack Snyder, 2002. “Democratic Transition, Institutional Strength, and War”, *International Organization* 56,2, p. 297-298.

reason, the establishment of political institutions is needed before promoting democracy in autocratic countries. In the words of Mansfield and Snyder, 'before pressuring autocrats to hold fully competitive elections, the international community should first promote the rule of law, the formation of impartial courts and election commission, the professionalization of independent journalist, and the training of competent bureaucrats'.²⁰⁴ Beside, economic and social modernization is also important in order to build democracy. As Gat shows, democracy in itself is not able to lead to a democratic peace unless such factors have fulfilled in advance. In this regard, 'it has been found that economically developed democracies have been far more likely than poor democracies to be peaceful toward one another'.²⁰⁵

Similar to Mansfield and Snyder, Meierhenrich also has the same conclusion. He argues that 'the new millennium saw further evidence of the dangers of democratization. The pro-democratic intervention in Afghanistan, following the attacks of 11 September 2001, has spurred insurgent warfare not only in that country, but in neighbouring Pakistan as well'.²⁰⁶ Therefore, 'democracy, if not handled with care, can underwrite democratic war-

rather than democratic peace' and 'democratic rights become democratic wrongs, and policies of perpetual peace become prescriptions for perpetual war'.²⁰⁷

In short, some cases have shown that the logic of democratic peace does not work appropriately. In the words of Snyder, 'none of the mechanisms that produce the democratic peace among mature democracies operate in the same fashion in newly democratizing states'.²⁰⁸

Conclusion

This essay has reviewed and discussed the theory of democratic peace. Scholars across disciplines have noticeably contributed to our understanding of the democratic peace theory. They have debated methodologically and empirically the puzzle of the democratic peace theory. It is indeed difficult to simply judge whether the democratic peace theory is only a myth or a fact. Both the proponents and opponents have strong arguments to support their views.

This essay has tried to highlight the three problems of the democratic peace theory. First, there are different definitions of democracy, war, and peace used by scholars and the differences implicated to the lack of robustness in the democratic

²⁰⁴ Ibid, p. 298.

²⁰⁵ Ibid, p. 334.

²⁰⁶ Azar Gat. 2005. "The Democratic Peace Theory Reframed: The Impact of Modernity", *World Politics*, 58 (October), p. 78.

²⁰⁷ Jens Meierhenrich, op.cit, p. 660.

²⁰⁸ Ibid, p. 673.

²⁰⁹ Jack Snyder (2000) as cited by Meierhenrich, ibid, p. 660.

peace theory. The use of certain definitions will affect the portrait of the democratic peace theory. Second, the belief of the proponents of the democratic peace theory that the promotion of democracy around the globe is essential for international peace is viewed as a justification of democratic intervention to other sovereign states. In fact, democracy by force has often failed to establish peace whether international or domestic peace. Third, the democratic peace theory does not always apply in new emerging democratic countries. In such countries, democracy has resulted in armed and bloody conflicts rather than led to peaceful relationship. This is so because the application of democracy is not well-prepared. The three problems have demonstrated that the democratic peace theory tends to be an ideology which has been politicized for international political ends rather than an academic theory which is supported by very strong arguments.

Acknowledgement:

I would like to thank George Vasilev, Ph.D., a Teaching Staff for the subject of "Contemporary Social and Political Theory" in Semester Two 2008 at The University of Melbourne, for his constructive comment on an earlier version of this essay. I also thank to an anonymous Reviewer of this journal who gave a valuable suggestion to enrich the essay.

References

- Bush, George W. 1994. "President and Prime Minister Blair Discussed Iraq, Middle East". <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2004/11/20041112-5.html>>
- Bouchet, Nicholas. 2013. "The Democracy Tradition in US Foreign Policy and the Obama Presidency", *International Affairs*, Vol 89: 1, pp. 31-51.
- Chan, Steve. 1997. "In Search of Democratic Peace: Problems and Promise", *Mershon International Studies Review*, Vol. 41, No. 1 (May), pp. 59-91.
- Clinton, Bill. 1994. "1994 State of the Union Address". <<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/politics/special/states/docs/sou94.htm>>
- Doyle, Michael W.. 2012. *Liberal Peace: Selected Essays* (London and New York: Routledge).
- Easley, E. S.. 2004. *The War over Perpetual Peace: An Exploration into the History of a Foundational International Relations Text*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan).
- Elman, Miriam Fendius. 1997. "Introduction. The Need for a Qualitative Test of the Democratic Peace Theory" in Miriam Fendius Elman (ed.), *Paths to Peace: Is Democracy the Answer?*, CSIA Studies in International Security, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press).
- Gat, Azar. 2005. "The Democratic Peace Theory Reframed: The Impact of Modernity", *World Politics*, 58 (October), pp. 73-100.
- Gowa, Joanne. 1999. *Ballots and Bullets: The Elusive Democratic Peace*, (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press).

- Gleditsch, Nils Petter, Lene Siljeholm Christiansen, and Håvard Hegre. 2004. "Democratic Jihad? Military Intervention and Democracy", paper prepared for the Workshop on "Resources, Governance Structures, and Civil War"; ECPR Joint Session of Workshops, Uppsala, Sweden. 13-18 April 2004. <http://www.prio.no/files/file45238_hegre.pdf>.
- Ish-Shalom, Piki. 2006. "Theory as a Hermeneutical Mechanism: The Democratic-Peace Thesis and the Politics of Democratization", *European Journal of International Relations*, Vol. 12(4), pp. 565-598.
- Mansfield, Edward D. and Jack Snyder. 2002. "Democratic Transition, Institutional Strength, and War", *International Organization* 56, 2, Spring, pp. 297-337.
- Mansfield, Edward D. and Jack Snyder. 2005. *Electing to Fight: Why Emerging Democracies go to War* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press).
- Meierhenrich, Jens, 2007. "Perpetual War: A Pragmatic Sketch", *Human Rights Quarterly*, 29, pp. 631-673.
- Oneal, John R. and Bruce Russett. 1999. "The Kantian Peace: The Pacific Benefits of Democracy, Interdependence, and International Organizations", 1881-1992", *World Politics*, Vol. 52.1, pp. 1-37.
- Ravlo, Hilde, Nils Petter Gleditsch, and Hans Dorussen. 2003. "Colonial War and the Democratic Peace", *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 47 August, pp. 520-548.
- Ray, James Lee. 1997. "The Democratic Path to Peace", *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 8.2, pp. 49-64.
- Rosato, Sebastian. 2003. "The Flawed Logic of Democratic Peace Theory", *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 97 No. 4 (November), pp. 585-602.
- Russett, Bruce. 1993. *Grasping the Democratic Peace: Principles for a Post-Cold War World*, (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press).
- Sheehan, Michael. 2008. "The Changing Character of War", in John Baylis, Steve Smith and Patricia Owens, *The Globalization of World Politics: An Introduction to International Relations*, Fourth Edition (New York, N.Y.: Oxford University Press).
- Waltz, Kenneth N. 2008. *Realism and International Politics*, (New York and London: Routledge).
- Wilson, Woodrow. 1917. "Making the World "Safe for Democracy": Woodrow Wilson Asks for War". <<http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/4943/>>.