● Article ●

Democracy and Peace

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Introduction

Judging by the intensity and persistence of the interest shown in the subjects by governments and peoples around the world, democracy and peace must be two of the most universally popular ideas, or ideals, in today's and, possibly, even tomorrow's world.

Robert Dahl observed a decade-and-a-half ago: "[T]oday, the idea of democracy is universally popular" (Dahl 1989, 2). Moreover, the idea appears to have been translated into practice to a remarkable extent. Freedom House, which has been tracking progress of freedom and democracy on an annual basis since the early 1970s, reports that the number of "free countries" doubled in thirty years between 1973 and 2003 from 44 to 88, or from 29% to 46%, and that of those "not free" declined from 65 to 49, or from 43% to 25%, of the countries counted in the respective years (Freedom House 2004, pp. 4-5). According to the same source, 117 of 192 countries surveyed in 2002, or 61%, were "electoral democracies" (Freedom House 2004, pp. 7, 725-26). As is well known and as I will soon explain in some detail, however, democracy is not an idea discovered or invented in the last few decades but one with its roots traced all the way back to the fifth century B. C. Greek city-states.

By comparison, peace does not seem to have been as universally and genuinely popular, particularly when it comes to practice. War has not only been a recurrent, indeed constant, phenomenon throughout man's recorded history but has become progressively more extensive and savage in the modern era, culminating in two world wars of unprecedented brutality and destructiveness in the last century. As an ideal or aspiration, however, it has been far more popular and consistently so, at least in the last century, than the record of practice suggests. While largely ignored, if not totally forgotten, in the post-Second World War academic and, it seems, diplomatic discourse on contemporary issues of war and peace, the two International Peace Conferences, convened respectively in 1899 and 1907 in The Hague, and the international conventions that resulted from those conferences unmistakably and powerfully embodied such an aspiration. Article 1 of both conventions thus declares, in virtually identical language: "With a view to obviating, as far as possible, recourse to force in the relations between States, the Signatory ("Contracting" in the 1907 convention) Powers agree to use their best efforts to insure ("ensure" ditto) the pacific settlement of international differences." Nearly as significant as the content of the aspiration the language represents is the fact that all independent and interested states, including, among others, imperial China, India, and Japan, participated in these conferences, although not all signed and ratified both conventions.

The Covenant of the League of Nations signed in 1919 as part of the Treaty of Versailles in the wake of the First World War, a war that had prevented a third Hague Conference from being convened as planned, reflected an even stronger and more urgent aspiration of governments and peoples around the world in the wake of the worst war in history so far "to promote international co-operation and to achieve international peace and security by the acceptance of obligations not to resort to war," as the preamble to the document stated. The Charter of the United Nations, founded in the wake of the second, and even more devastating, world war, began with, not surprisingly, a preamble proclaiming the determination of the "Peoples of the United Nations" to "save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which twice in our lifetime has brought untold sorrow to mankind, . . ." It then went on to spell out, in its Article 1, the first of the organization's purposes as: "To maintain international peace and security, and to that end: to take effective collective measures for the prevention and removal of threats to the peace, and for the suppression of acts of aggression or other breaches of the peace, and to bring about by peaceful means, and in conformity with the principles of justice and international law, adjustment or settlement of international disputes or situations which might lead to a breach of the peace; . . ."

If one assumes that governments, whether of democracies or autocracies, speak individually for their peoples and a majority of them collectively do so for the world in their times, the foregoing chronicle of their commitments to maintaining peace among themselves may be taken as evidence of the universal popularity of peace as an ideal, though hardly as practice. That makes it an ideal nearly equal to democracy in the spatial and temporal reach of its appeal. Attaining both ideals should then be a great boon to the majority, if not the totality, of humanity; attaining them simultaneously would be even better.

The Democratic Peace Thesis

The so-called democratic peace theory, which states that democracies do not fight each other, suggests a way to kill two birds with one stone. Derived originally from a section of Immanuel Kant's 1795 tract seductively entitled *Perpetual Peace*, the theory has gained so much currency, though with considerable ambiguity and confusion, among American political scientists, especially international relations scholars, in the last two decades that it has become something of conventional wisdom in the profession.

In the *locus classicus*, Kant declared: ". . . the republican constitution does offer the prospect of . . . eternal peace. . ." (Wood 2001, 442). As is well understood by most American political science majors and presumably their counterparts in other countries, not to mention their faculty mentors, Kant used the term "republican" in the same sense as his American contemporary, James Madison, did in his much cited Federalist Paper Number Ten, i.e., as a synonym of "democracy" in its contemporary usage. As Madison explained: ". . . a pure democracy, by which I mean a society consisting of a small number of citizens, who assemble and administer the government in person, . . . A republic, by which I mean a government in which the scheme of representation takes place, . ." (Madison 1787, 43-44). The models of the respective types of government that both Madison and Kant had in mind were no doubt fifth century B.C. Athens, on the one hand, and, on the other, Athens' contemporary and major rival, Sparta, republican Rome, the medieval Republic of Venice, and, above all, eighteenth century England with its "marvelously contrived arrangement of monarchy, Lords, and Commons," as Dahl puts it (Dahl 1989, 1, 13, 24-25, 64). The essential difference between the two types of democracy is that, to state the obvious, citizens rule themselves directly in one, while they rule themselves indirectly through their elected representatives in the other. As Madison argued, "direct democracy" is possible and arguably desirable only in a small polity, such as the ancient Greek city-state, while only "republican" form of government, i.e., "representative democracy," is feasible in a much larger modern nation-state. In short, representative democracy is "democracy rendered practicable for a long time and over a great extent of territory" (Dahl 1989, 29).

As suggested above, the Kantian theory about the close causal relationship between representative government and peace has not only survived for more than two centuries but has gained substantially in popularity among American political scientists, as attested to by the long string of studies published on the subject in the last few decades. These studies collectively disprove the simplistic implication of the theory that democracies do not engage in, much less initiate, war as frequently as autocracies, but nearly unanimously endorse the statistical validity of the more qualified proposition that democracies seldom fight each other, a proposition known as the joint democracy theory (Oneal and Russett 1997, 267-69; Remmer 1998, 45; Henderson 1998, 461, n. 2). At least one proponent of the theory goes so far as to declare that democracies never fight wars with each other (Rummel 1983), while some call the assumed causal relationship an "empirical law" (Levy 1989, 88; cf. Hermann and Kegley 1995, 511).

Democracies seldom fight each other, these proponents of the theory argue, because of their shared institutional and cultural characteristics. The former impose significant constraints on their leaders' decision-making options, especially on major foreign policy issues, such as, *inter alia*, initiation of war, while the latter, which appears to be the more important, predispose them to seek peaceful settlement of disputes both at home and abroad (Remmer 1998, 25; Henderson 1998, 461, 463). Moreover, the pacifying influence of democratic culture and norms is found, across both geographical regions and historical periods, to be powerful enough to override the conflict- and violence-provoking impacts of ethnic, religious, or linguistic differences between two or more democracies (Maoz 1997, 181-82; Henderson 1998, 461, 481-82).

If, as the above-cited authors and many others insist, democracy leads to peace or at least significantly contributes to peace, for whatever institutional or cultural reasons, the more completely democratized the world becomes, the more peaceful it must become (Buenos de Mesquita and Lalman 1992; Russett 1993; Singer and Wildavsky 1996). If this simple logic holds, it then follows that those who aspire to universal and perpetual peace should join forces with those who seek to democratize the whole world, so that the two universally popular goals may be both attained one after the other, if not simultaneously. Such a prospect may be too optimistic and even naive, however. As is the case with most other social science "theories," one ought to beware of some important limitations and pitfalls of the democratic peace theory before fully embracing it.

Democracies Do Fight Wars

While, according to the results of a large and growing number of empirical studies, such as those cited above, democracies have been rarely involved in wars with one another, they have been found prone to armed conflict with autocracies (Henderson 1998, 461-62). According to one study, violent conflicts between democracies and autocracies are in fact more common than such conflicts among autocracies (Oneal and Russett 1997, 288).

Another, and more significant, limitation of the theory concerns the behavior of young and immature democracies, especially those in transition from autocracy to democracy. Such states are generally prone to involvement in military disputes with other states, whether they are democracies or autocracies or those in between like themselves (Mansfield and Snyder 2002, 547). If the process of transition is not smooth but characterized by interruptions and/or reversals, the risk of their involvement in violent conflicts with other states of all types substantially increases, as does, not surprisingly, the risk of civil war (Glenditsch and Ward 2000, 2-3, 26; Mansfield and Snyder 2002, 546, 547). A longitudinal survey and sophisticated statistical analysis by Hegre and his colleagues finds a parabolic relationship between degrees of democracy and the frequency of civil war: While archetypal autocracies and democracies are both associated with relatively low levels of civil violence, states halfway between the two archetypes suffer from the highest levels of such conflict (Hegre et al 2001). "Middling" states have been found to be equally prone to involvement in violent international disputes, especially with other "middling" states, as exemplified by India and Pakistan, Greece and Turkey, Ecuador and Peru, etc. (Mansfield and Snyder 2002, 532). The often rocky dyadic relationships found among Mercosur member states may perhaps be regarded as manifestations of the same middling-state syndrome (Remmer 1998, 25).

By comparison, mature democracies are said to be not only largely immune to the insidious effects of that syndrome, consistent with the orthodox interpretation of the democratic peace theory, but also blessed with special abilities to choose their wars wisely, win them and suffer fewer casualties, and rarely fight preventive wars (Mansfield and Snyder 2002, 533). These observations, however, should strike us as rather odd in light of the recent behavior of some of the oldest and, presumably, most mature democracies, notably the U.S. and U.K., as in the ongoing Iraq War. Before discussing particular aspects of that war, however, a brief consideration of a putative reason and justification for wars fought by mature, as well as immature, democracies is in order.

Just War Theory as an Explanation for Democratic War?

A plausible explanation for democracies' involvement in and, especially initiation of, wars against autocracies and, less commonly, against other democracies is that those are "just wars" as the term is defined and understood in the so-called just war theory. With its original formulation attributed to the work of the thirteenth-century Dominican theologian, St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologicae*, the theory has been elaborated during the subsequent centuries by a number of international law scholars and philosophers, including, among others, Hugo Grotius, Samuel von Pufendorf, Emerich de Vattel, and, more recently, Michael Walzer, Barrie Paskins and Michael Dockrill, and Richard Norman. Their opinions have been incorporated in and enriched a body of rules and principles enunciated in a growing number of international agreements, notably the Hague and Geneva conventions and the Charter of the United Nations. While there are considerable variations in the contents of the theory espoused and/or emphasized in its diverse sources, its gist may be summarized in a short list of fairly commonsensical dicta about how a war may be justifiably initiated and conducted.

In order to be judged just, a war must be: (1) initiated justly (*jus ad bellum*), i.e., for a just cause (e.g., in self-defense against physical aggression), for right intentions (e.g., for redressing a wrong already committed), with a formal declaration by a proper authority, and with a reasonable chance of success; and (2) conducted in a just manner (*jus in bello*), i.e., in accordance with the principle of discrimination, which requires that military action target combatants alone with damage to noncombatants kept to an unavoidable minimum, and the principle of proportionality, which requires that the level of retaliatory violent action be proportional to the level of the injustice suffered (McLean 1996, 262).

Can we explain all or most of the wars fought by democracies as just wars as defined above? If we believe news reports and editorial comments in the U.S. media, the current war in Iraq initiated by the U.S. and its allies, for one, seems far from fitting the bill. First of all, it does not meet the most important of the *jus ad bellum* requirements that the initial military action be taken in self-defense against ongoing or imminent aggression. A recent *New York Times* editorial, entitled "How to Skew Intelligence," states:

> It's long been obvious that the allegations about Saddam Hussein's dangerous weapons and alliance with Osama bin Laden were false. . . A report issued Thursday by the senior Democrat on the Senate Armed Services Committee, Carl Levin of Michigan, shows that on the question of an Iraqi-Qaeda axis, Mr. Bush, Vice President Dick Cheney and others offered an indictment that was essentially fabricated in the office of Douglas Feith, the under secretary of defense for policy. . . the Bush administration's claims-- . . . a member of Al Qaeda set up a base in Iraq with the help of Mr. Hussein, that Iraq helped Al Qaeda learn to make bombs and provided it with explosives--. . . those claims were all cooked up by Mr. Feith's shop, . . ." (*New York Times*, 23 October 2004).

In fact, a view of the alleged Iraq-Qaeda alliance just as categorically negative as this editorial had been given in a *Wall Street Journal* article in the summer of 2002, or more than half a year before the U.S. and its allies' invasion of Iraq, by none other than President George H.W. Bush's national security adviser, Brent Scowcroft (Woodward 2004, 159-60). Furthermore, the way Baghdad and other major Iraqi cities with large concentrations of civilian populations have been attacked and destroyed one after another, inevitably at a very high cost in noncombatant death and suffering, makes it extremely doubtful that the war meets either of the two principal *jus in bello* conditions.

This war, moreover, is not an exception or aberration but a fairly common, if not routine, case, according to Hermann and Kegley. They count "nine covert operations by the U.S. against freely elected governments in the 1980s" and "86 instances of military intervention between and among free and partly free governments between 1974 and 1988" (Hermann and Kegley 1995, 514). Even more alarming is Merritt and Zinnes' observation that leaders of democracies not only frequently wage unjust wars but deliberately deceive their own people in order to do so. They bluntly remark: "The frequency with which democratic countries unleash foreign policy actions before consulting popular representatives, and sometimes even after deliberately misleading them, make us question the extent to which the foreign-policy process of democracies differs from that of autocracies" (Merritt and Zinnes 1991, quoted in Guttman and Thompson 1996, 117). Blunt, or even harsh, as this observation may sound, its thrust jibes with that of many an editorial or op-ed comment on recent wars in which the U.S. has been involved.

Democratic Secrecy and Mendacity

In a recent *New York Times* op-ed article, entitled "A Culture of Cover-Up," Paul Krugman remarks: ". . . the flap over Mr. Gross [his appointment as head of the CIA] is only a symptom of a much broader issue: whether the Bush administration will be able to maintain culture of cover-ups. That culture affects every branch of policy, but it's strongest when it comes to the 'war on terror' " (*New York Times*, 26 October 2004). In an earlier op-ed, Daniel Ellsberg of the Pentagon Papers fame reminisces about his Election Day 1964:

> I spent [the day] in an interagency working group in the State Department. The purpose of our meeting was to examine plans to expand the [Vietnam] war - precisely the policy that voters soundly rejected at the polls that day. We couldn't wait until the next day to hold our meeting because the plan for the bombing of North Vietnam had to be ready as soon as possible. But we couldn't have held our meeting the day before because news of it might have been leaked. . . President Johnson might not have won in a landslide had voters known he was lying when he said that his administration sought 'no wider war' " (*New York Times*, 28 September 2004).

So, as Merritt and Zinnes charge, leaders of a democracy often start or expand war not only without consulting their citizens or their representatives but even by deliberately misinforming and lying to them.

This may be due to a sense of crisis that grips leaders contemplating initiating or expanding a war. As Hermann and Kegley comment in reference to a conspicuous tendency associated with decision-making in a crisis, "[T]he institutional and normative restraints usually operative in a democracy diminish, increasing leaders' decision latitude and encouraging them to act in terms of their perceptions of the national interest and their images of public preferences" and, as a result, "the differences between democracies and autocracies narrow under conditions of crisis" (Hermann and Kegley 1995, 515-16). Whether or not crisis mentality is its major, if not the sole, cause of the secrecy and deception which seem to characterize the behavior of many, if not all, leaders of democracies on the brink of war, such behavior does help to explain "democratic war."

Democratic Deficits as an Alternative Explanation

An important clue to the causal link between the secretive and often mendacious behavior of leaders of democracies and the frequency of wars democracies seem to fight is given by Kant in the same passage from which a line was quoted earlier. In the English translation of his seminal work, Kant goes on to explain the reason why a republican (read democratic) constitution offers the prospect of eternal peace:

> If, as is necessarily the case under the [republican] constitution, the consent of the citizens is required in order to decide whether there should be war or not, nothing is more natural than that those who would have to decide to undergo all the deprivations of war will very much hesitate to start such an evil game. For the deprivations are many, such as fighting oneself, paying for the cost of the war out of one's own possessions, and repairing the devastation which it costs, and to top all the evils, there remains a burden

> of debts which embitters the peace and can never be paid off on account of approaching new wars. By contrast, under a constitution where the subject is not a citizen and which is therefore not republican, it is the easiest thing in the world to start a war. The head of the state is not a fellow citizen but owner of the state, who loses none of his banquets, hunting parties, pleasure castles, festivities, etc. Hence he will resolve upon war as a kind of amusement on very insignificant grounds and will leave the justification to his diplomats, who are always ready to lend it an air of propriety (Wood 2001, 442).

When he wrote this passage, he was obviously assuming that leaders of a republic, when faced with the choice between war and peace, will be honest with citizens, providing them with sufficiently accurate and detailed information to enable them to form informed opinions, rather than deliberately misinforming and misleading them. Many contemporary advocates of the democratic peace theory share the same assumption. Mansfield and Snyder, for example, write: "The peace among mature democracies rests on the presence of strong institutions that regulate mass political participation. These institutions guarantee that the officials making foreign policy will be accountable to the median voter, who bears the costs and risks of military conflict" (Mansfield and Snyder 2002, 530). They also count "transparency of facts and preferences in policy debates" as one of the "normative characteristics" distinctive to such democracies" (Mansfield and Snyder 2002, 533).

The Kantian assumption is not only widely shared by contemporary democratic peace theorists but intrinsic to the concept of democracy derived from, as is well known, from the old Greek word, *demokratia*, rule (*kratia*) by the people (*demos*). As is also well known, ancient Athens, which is considered the first democratic polity in the history of the world, was anything but democratic in its treatment of the majority of its population. Its citizenship excluded not only slaves, who accounted for a substantial percentage of the population, but also women and resident aliens, known as *metic*, many of whom were active and even prominent as artisans, merchants, and scholars (Dahl 1989, 22). As a result, no more than a quarter of its population enjoyed the status and privileges of the citizen, including, most importantly, the right to participate in its political life (Fine 1983, 240, 408; Jones 1969, 109). The only sense in which the city-state was a democracy, or so we call it, is that all its citizens, while only a small minority of its residents, had an equal right to participate in decision-making on all important policy issues by attending, speaking at, and voting in the assembly, which "made all decisions on policy, foreign and domestic, military and civil. . ." (Kagan 2003, 9). For example, in the fall of 433 B.C., when it faced the prospect of a war with Sparta and its allies (the war later to be known as the Peloponnesian War), "[E]very argument was made, heard, and discussed before the full assembly. The same men who would be required to fight in any war that might result debated the issues and determined the course to be taken by their own votes" (Kagan 2003, 30).

Athenian democracy was direct rather than representative, to be sure, but, as Abraham Lincoln declared in one of the best known and most frequently quoted presidential pronouncements, the U.S. is supposed to be no less a democracy ruled by "government of the people, by the people, for the people" (Lincoln 1863, 186). A state ruled by a government that deliberately withholds vital information from, not to mention lie to, the people, then, cannot be a fully mature and complete democracy, either institutionally or culturally. Such a state may well be prone to involvement in violent international, as well as domestic, conflicts. As Mansfield and Snyder put it, "[I]mperfectly formed [democratic] institutions, in turn, can facilitate elite's ability to exploit their power in ways that promote a belligerent foreign policy" (Mansfield and Snyder 2002, 534). The elite in such a state should find it easy to avoid, legally or illegally, paying fair shares of the costs of war, such as going to war themselves or having their relatives or close friends sent to war at the risk of losing their lives. In one lighthearted, but thought-provoking, scene of his controversial anti-Bush film, *Fahrenheit 9/11*, Michael Moore accosts several members of the U.S. Congress outside their office to ask if they have any son or daughter serving in Iraq and reports, half facetiously, that only one of the 500 members does.

The foregoing discussion leads us to suggest that an important reason why the democratic peace theory seems to fail to explain many recent wars, especially the ongoing Iraq War, is that the so-called democracies, including "mature democracies," are actually neither as democratic nor as mature in practice as they are presented to be. Considering the fact that, as far as I am aware, no modern international war has ever been initiated democratically, i.e., in accordance with the people's well informed and clearly expressed preferences, there may have been few practicing, as opposed to only formal, democracies in the modern era. It may well be the case, then, that most of the 117 countries declared "electoral democracies" by Freedom House in 2002 are electorally democratic, but not behaviorally, especially when it comes to deciding on whether to start a war or not. On the other hand, if all or most of the so-called democracies were genuine practicing democracies, the democratic peace theory would likely fare much better in predicting prospects of war and peace in the real world.

Epilogue

If the bold, but hopefully not mischievous, views and arguments presented above are basically sound, governments in either so-called autocratic or democratic states in today's world cannot be expected, if left alone, to solve, or even try to solve, all or most international disputes by peaceful means. If the democratic peace theory is essentially correct, as I have suggested, few existing states are democratic enough in practice to make its underlying Kantian assumption realistic. What is logically called for is, then, democratization, or further democratization, of not only so-called autocracies but, just as importantly, so-called democracies.

Since, in light of their well-known track record, few leaders of either type of states are likely to voluntarily invite the public to participate effectively in the process of decision making on vital foreign and national security policy issues, the public must invite itself to participate in the process, if it is to reflect the people's will and effectively incorporate it in key policy decisions. In other words, today's "representative" democracy must be also "participatory" democracy, if it is to remain effectively democratic in practice (Pateman 1970). As Gutmann and Thompson point out, "[T]he electoral verdict itself, . . . should not carry the full burden of reason-giving [i.e., explanatory and justificatory] communication in the political process. Some important issues do not receive sufficient attention either because they are not yet on the political agenda or because other issues dominate" (Gutmann and Thompson, 130). More seriously, as I have pointed out, voters are often not given sufficiently accurate and detailed information on vital issues, such as the initiation of or involvement in a war, to enable them to make intelligent judgment and wisely cast their ballots.

Georges Clemenceau warned that war is too important to be left to generals. I have argued that war is also too important to be left to governments. It follows then that, if war is not only to be fought justly but avoided if at all possible, the democratic deficits discussed above must be overcome by citizens' active and effective participation in decision-making on issues related to war and peace, so that the validity and worth of the democratic peace theory may be tested, proven, and used to guide relevant decisions and actions of governments.

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