

1 Another study of democracy and international conflict?

Introduction

Over the past decade numerous books and countless articles have been published on the theoretical and empirical relationship between democracy and international conflict.¹ The central theoretical claim advanced by scholars is that decisions by state leaders to rely upon either peaceful diplomacy or military force as the means to resolve international disputes are influenced by the political institutions and norms of political competition and conflict resolution within states. As a result, analysts have argued that patterns of international conflict behavior should vary between democratic and non-democratic countries because of differences in the degree of state leaders' political accountability, or the strength of non-violent norms of resolving political conflict among political elites (e.g. Bueno de Mesquita and Lalman 1992; Bueno de Mesquita, Morrow, Siverson, and Smith 1999; Dixon 1993, 1994, 1998; Doyle 1986; Kahl 1998/99; Maoz and Russett 1992, 1993; Owen 1994, 1997; Raymond 1994; Rummel 1983, 1985; Russett 1993; Schweller 1992; Weart 1998).

In empirical research scholars have examined patterns of military conflict between democracies and non-democracies, as well as among the two types of states. Two different conclusions have emerged from empirical findings. The first, more widely accepted, claim is that while democratic states rarely if ever go to war against each other, they do adopt more confrontational diplomatic and military policies towards non-democratic states. Thus, patterns of military conflict between democracies and non-democracies are not very different from patterns of military conflict among non-democracies. Both are characterized by much higher rates of militarized disputes and war than are found between pairs of democratic states (e.g. Chan 1984; Dixon 1993, 1994; Owen 1994, 1997; Maoz 1997; Maoz and Abdolali 1989; Maoz and Russett 1992, 1993; Oneal and Ray 1997; Small and Singer 1976; Weart 1998; Weede 1984,

¹ Reviews of much of the literature can be found in Ray 1995: ch. 1, 1998; Maoz 1997, 1998; Chan 1997; and Rousseau, Gelpi, Reiter, and Huth 1996.

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1992). The second claim, which is more controversial, is that democracies are less likely to resort to the aggressive threat or use of military force against all other states (e.g. Benoit 1996; Bremer 1992; Hart and Reed 1999; Hermann and Kegley 1995; Hewitt and Wilkenfeld 1996; Huth 1996; Leeds and Davis 1999; Morgan and Schwebach 1992; Oneal and Russett 1997a, 1997b, 1999a, 1999b; Rousseau 1996; Rummel 1995a, 1997; Russett and Oneal 2001; Schultz 2001b). As a result, not only are two democratic states very unlikely to become engulfed in military conflicts with each other, but democratic states are also less likely to initiate crises and wars against non-democratic states. Thus, while it may be true that mixed dyads of democratic and non-democratic states have relatively high rates of military conflict, the reason is because the non-democratic states in the dyads are generally escalating disputes to the point of military confrontations, compelling democratic states to resist and defend themselves with counter-threats and the use of force.

We refer to the body of theoretical and empirical work on domestic political institutions and international conflict as the democratic peace literature. The democratic peace literature, broadly understood, advances claims about the international conflict behavior of *both democratic and non-democratic states*, and seeks to test such claims against the historical record of military conflict in the international system involving either type of state. We want to emphasize that when we refer to the democratic peace literature we are not restricting our attention to the specific question of whether democratic states have engaged in military conflict with other democratic states. Instead, we view the debate about the absence of war among democratic states as one piece of a larger research program on the relationship between domestic political systems and international conflict behavior.

We have already alluded to the two main schools of thought within the democratic peace literature. We refer to the first school as the dyadic version of the democratic peace, since some scholars argue that the incidence of militarized disputes and war is greatly reduced only in relations among democratic states. On the other hand, these same scholars maintain that disputes between pairs of non-democratic states or mixed dyads are much more conflictual and include a pattern of aggressive behavior by democratic states towards non-democratic states. Meanwhile, the second school is termed the monadic version of the democratic peace, since other scholars argue that democratic states are less aggressive than non-democratic countries regardless of whether an international opponent is democratic or not. In this book we critically evaluate the theoretical and empirical foundations of both the dyadic and monadic versions of the democratic peace.

Debates over the democratic peace have been extensive. One area of contention lies with empirical research and findings. Scholars raise questions about the empirical strength and robustness of the finding that democratic states are less likely to rely on military force as an instrument of foreign policy. In particular, analysts frequently debate the strengths and weaknesses of various research designs, the methods used to test hypotheses, the measurement of variables, and whether alternative explanations can account for the democratic peace (e.g. Benoit 1996; Bremer 1992, 1993; Cohen 1995; Crescenzi and Enterline 1999; Dixon 1993, 1994; Elman 1997; Enterline 1996; Farber and Gowa 1995, 1997a, 1997b; Gates, Knutsen, and Moses 1996; Gartzke 1998, 2000; Gleditsch and Hegre 1997; Gowa 1999; Henderson 1998, 1999, 2002; Kegley and Hermann 1995, 1997; Layne 1994, 1995; Mansfield and Snyder 1995; Maoz and Russett 1992, 1993; Mitchell, Gates, and Hegre 1999; Mintz and Geva 1993; Mousseau 2000; Mousseau and Shi 1999; Oneal, Oneal, Maoz, and Russett 1996; Oneal and Ray 1997; Oneal and Russett 1997a, 1997b, 1999a, 1999b, 1999c; Rousseau, Gelpi, Reiter, and Huth 1996; Russett 1993, 1995; Senese 1997b, 1999; Snyder 2000; Spiro 1994, 1995; Thompson and Tucker 1997; Turns 2001; Van Belle 1997; Weede 1992). A second source of controversy focuses more directly on theory, as critics question whether a compelling theoretical argument has been developed to explain how domestic political institutions and norms of political competition influence the foreign policy choices of political leaders. This debate is also often linked to a broader discussion about the relative theoretical power of domestic and international conditions in accounting for international conflict behavior (Bueno de Mesquita and Lalman 1992; Bueno de Mesquita, Morrow, Siverson, and Smith 1999; Cederman 2001; Cohen 1994; Doyle 1986; Farber and Gowa 1995, 1997a, 1997b; Forsythe 1992; Gowa 1999; Henderson 1999; Hermann and Kegley 1995; James and Mitchell 1995; Lemke and Reed 1996; Kacowicz 1995; Kahl 1998/99; Mearsheimer 1990; Morgan and Campbell 1991; Morgan and Schwebach 1992; Oren 1995; Owen 1994, 1997; Rousseau 1996; Rummel 1983, 1985; Russett and Ray 1995; Schultz 2001b; Schweller 1992; Thompson 1996; Weart 1998).

Given that both critics and supporters of the democratic peace have had considerable opportunity to make their case, it is reasonable to ask: Do we really need another study on the relationship between domestic political systems and international military conflict? A skeptic might protest that both sides in the debate have posed the fundamental theoretical questions and presented their best counter-arguments in response to the strongest critiques put forth by the scholarly opposition (e.g. Cohen 1994 vs. Russett and Ray 1995; Farber and Gowa 1997b, Gowa 1999 vs.

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Russett and Oneal 2001, Thompson and Tucker 1997; Mansfield and Snyder 1995 vs. Enterline 1996, 1998, Thompson and Tucker 1997, Maoz 1997, 1998, and Oneal and Russett 1999c; Oneal and Russett 1999a, Russett and Oneal 2001 vs. Gartzke 1998, 2000; Spiro 1995, Layne 1994, 1995, Oren 1995 vs. Russett 1995 and Maoz 1997, 1998; Turns 2001 vs. Hermann and Kegley 2001; Weede 1984, 1992 vs. Benoit 1996). Furthermore, this skeptic might insist that by now enough different empirical studies and findings have been produced, dissected, and re-analyzed such that another empirical study is not going to break much new ground. The exasperated skeptic might also say that the debate over the past decade has produced an extensive body of scholarship from which critical observers can draw well-founded conclusions as to the theoretical and empirical veracity of claims about the relationship between regime type and international conflict. As a result, the impact of new work on the subject of the democratic peace may have reached the point of a rather sharply declining marginal rate of return. In short, the skeptic cries out: Please no more!

Alas, while we sympathize with such skeptics, we would in fact argue that there is much more important work to be done on the subject of domestic political institutions and international conflict. Although it is true that a rich literature has developed, several basic questions and puzzles remain to be answered about the existence of and explanation for a democratic peace. Put differently, both the critics (e.g. Cohen 1994; Farber and Gowa 1995, 1997a; Forsythe 1992; Gartzke 1998, 2000; Gates, Knutsen, and Moses 1996; Gowa 1999; Henderson 2002; James and Mitchell 1995; Layne 1994; Mearsheimer 1990; Spiro 1994, 1995; Thompson 1996) and the supporters (Dixon 1993, 1994, 1998; Doyle 1986; Maoz 1997, 1998; Maoz and Russett 1992, 1993; Oneal and Ray 1997; Oneal and Russett 1997a, 1997b, 1999a, 1999b, 1999c; Owen 1994, 1997; Ray 1995, 1998; Raymond 1994; Rummel 1983, 1985; Russett 1993; Russett and Oneal 2001; Russett and Ray 1995; Schweller 1992) of the democratic peace claim that theory and evidence strongly support their position, but neither side's claim is fully persuasive. Nevertheless, while we are not convinced by either side in the democratic peace debate, scholarship over the past decade has clearly advanced our knowledge on the subject and raised new questions. As a result, in this book we address a number of important puzzles and debates and in so doing we draw upon the contributions of both critics and supporters of the democratic peace. In our judgement, more persuasive claims about the democratic peace require both a critical re-examination and development of basic theory as well as the development of new types of statistical tests whose research design and data differ from those commonly employed.

Let's consider a few examples of the general types of arguments advanced by critics and supporters of the democratic peace. Supporters have argued that extensive quantitative tests have confirmed the robustness of the democratic peace finding and that the causal logic which explains dyadic or monadic patterns of behavior has been clearly presented. Thus, while further refinement is possible and even desirable, the basic thrust of the theoretical and empirical analysis has been well established. As a result, useful but marginal returns can be expected from further empirical and theoretical work. Critics, however, have challenged these claims. Case study researchers object that quantitative studies have been long on testing the robustness of statistical results by including various control variables in equations, but short on directly testing the causal process that might link domestic institutions and norms to actual foreign policy choices by state leaders. These scholars argue that empirical research requires more process-tracing of state behavior in specific international disputes in order to assess causal claims about the democratic peace.

A different critique has been offered by scholars who are not empirically oriented, but are more concerned with the logical rigor supporting hypotheses about the democratic peace. Such theorists claim that theory-building efforts have been too inductive and driven by attempts to develop explanations for already-known empirical findings. Instead, they propose a more deductive approach in which analysts try to develop basic theory about the domestic politics of foreign policy choices and then determine if democratic institutions and norms logically result in particular types of dyadic or monadic hypotheses about the democratic peace.

We share the concern of critics that theory-building efforts may have been overly shaped by known empirical results. We also agree that more attention to deductive logic would be desirable and that we should try to ground democratic peace hypotheses in general models that link domestic politics to foreign policy choices. Nevertheless, we think supporters are right that hypotheses about norms of political bargaining or the accountability of leaders to political opposition represent plausible and fruitful theoretical approaches to explaining how domestic political institutions influence the foreign policy choices of state leaders. However, we believe that for both the norms-based and accountability-based approaches, the logical hypotheses to be tested are not adequately established in the existing literature. Through critical re-examination of the theoretical foundations of each approach, we can develop new hypotheses that refine and extend existing arguments.

On the empirical side, we find value in the work of both critics and supporters. For example, case study critics are right in several respects, but

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we still believe a great deal can be gained from further quantitative tests. We agree that empirical tests should attempt to examine more directly the causal pathways linking domestic institutions to decisions regarding military threats and the use of force. We would also disagree with supporters who might claim that the consistency of results in quantitative tests suggests that only marginal gains in knowledge can be achieved through further statistical tests. We would argue that the research design of many quantitative tests significantly limits the range and type of hypotheses that can be tested. As a result, while useful findings have been and will continue to come from such studies, we believe that alternative statistical tests based on different research designs and new data sets are essential. Thus, while we share the desire of case study researchers for more direct empirical tests, we prefer to rely on statistical tests. Our solution is to create a large data set, which is in some ways composed of many case studies. With such a data set we can test for more specific patterns of diplomatic and military behavior, and at the same time have greater confidence that the findings are generalizable and systematic.

In sum, if we re-examine and extend the basic theory of the democratic peace and then couple it with new data sets and alternative research designs for statistical tests, our results can make important and lasting contributions to an already extensive democratic peace literature. Our objective in this book, then, is to identify central puzzles and questions which persist in the democratic peace literature and to answer them with new theoretical and empirical analyses.

Theoretical debates and empirical puzzles

What are the central theoretical questions and empirical puzzles that need to be addressed by scholars studying the democratic peace? We find five areas in which further work is essential.

The debate over norms vs. institutional accountability

One theoretical debate among scholars seeking to explain the democratic peace has focused on the relative explanatory power of domestic norms of political conflict resolution and the political accountability of democratic institutions. Some scholars hold that democratic norms and institutions produce similar causal effects in international disputes. For example, in the dyadic version of the democratic peace, both democratic norms and democratic institutions encourage negotiated settlements and the avoidance of military conflict between democratic states, and both promote more confrontational policies towards non-democratic states. From this point of view, norms and institutions are complementary causes of the

democratic peace and it is very difficult to disentangle their individual causal effects in empirical tests (e.g. Maoz and Russett 1993; Owen 1994, 1997; Ray 1995; Russett 1993). Other scholars, however, insist that while democratic norms and institutions may have similar causal effects, one explanation is in fact more compelling than the other. (Bueno de Mesquita and Lalman 1992; Bueno de Mesquita, Morrow, Siverson, and Smith 1999, and Reiter and Stam 1999a, 2002 favor institutionalist arguments while Dixon 1993, 1994 and Doyle 1986 give greater emphasis to democratic and liberal norms.)

We argue in this book that addressing two broad theoretical problems can advance the debate over the causal effects of norms and institutions. First, we need to develop the basic logic of the norms-based arguments more fully. Norms-based approaches need to ground theoretical arguments more directly in intra-elite patterns of political competition. Then they should develop more carefully the logic of how elite norms of resolving domestic political conflict might influence conflict resolution behavior in international disputes. There is a tendency among scholars, whether critics or supporters of norms-based theories, to argue that democratic norms imply a fairly “dovish” or accommodative approach to conflict resolution in international disputes. This leads both sides in the debate to overstate the strategic weaknesses of democratic states in situations of crisis bargaining with non-democratic adversaries. Our argument, as advanced in Chapter 5, is that a norms-based approach should predict a consistent pattern of “firm-but-flexible” or “tit-for-tat” diplomatic and military policies (Huth 1988) for democratic states in international disputes. Nonviolent norms should socialize leaders to adopt policies of reciprocity in diplomacy and military actions and to reject more extreme policies of unilateral concessions or military aggressiveness.

Second, we re-examine the general consensus in the literature that norms and institutions produce convergent effects. There has not been an adequate dialogue between supporters of the norms-based approach and those scholars who focus on the political accountability created by institutions. As a result, supporters of the norms-based approach have not addressed some recent arguments, which suggest that norms and institutions may in fact exert divergent influences on leaders’ actions in international disputes. For example, the norms literature argues that democratic leaders should be more likely to seek negotiated settlements in disputes (e.g. Dixon 1993, 1994; Maoz and Russett 1993; Raymond 1994; Russett 1993).² Empirically, however, Huth’s (1996) previous research on the settlement of territorial disputes suggests more complex patterns of

² In the dyadic version of the democratic peace this applies to disputes between democratic states, while in the monadic version it applies more generally to all target states in disputes.

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behavior. One of his central findings is that state leaders rarely make territorial concessions for fear of the domestic political consequences of such a policy. Thus, while Huth finds that democratic states are more likely to seek peaceful settlements by offering concessions, it is nevertheless true that in a majority of dispute observations democratic leaders, too, failed to pursue diplomatic initiatives designed to break a stalemate in negotiations (Huth 1996: ch. 6). This suggests powerful domestic political constraints on democratic leaders, which may compete with norms of negotiated conflict resolution. A case in point would be the unwillingness of Indian Prime Minister Nehru either to propose or respond positively to Chinese offers of partial territorial concessions in several rounds of talks from the late 1950s to early 1960s for fear that supporters within his own Congress Party, as well as the leadership of opposition parties, would oppose such policies (Huth 1996: 176). Another example would be the unwillingness of Prime Minister Bhutto in 1972 to sign a treaty in which Pakistan would formally recognize the line of control in disputed Kashmir as the *de jure* international border. Bhutto feared that such a territorial concession would provoke strong domestic opposition from elites in political parties, the military leadership, and the public at large, with the result that the new democratic regime would be toppled (Ganguly 1997: 62–3).

Recent institutionalist arguments may help to explain these empirical puzzles. In models of costly signaling and domestic audience costs, for example, analysts argue that during crises democratic leaders might be particularly worried about compromise for fear of being charged with a diplomatic retreat by political opponents (e.g. Fearon 1994b, 1997; also see Schultz 1998, 1999, 2001a, 2001b). Furthermore, elite and public opinion may strongly support the use of force and oppose compromise as a general policy, in which case democratic leaders would have further reasons to pull back from compromise. Prime Minister Nehru, in fact, was concerned about the domestic political fallout of a territorial exchange with China, while confident that opposition parties would support a firm “forward policy” of military probes in disputed territories (Huth 1996: 176). The broader point derived from these institutionalist models is that democratic accountability may limit the diplomatic flexibility required of state leaders to pursue the peaceful settlement of international disputes. In this book we argue that democratic norms and institutions do not consistently predict the same type of conflict escalation or conflict resolution behavior and that differences in expected behavior should be subjected to empirical tests. In the theory-development chapters later in the book we argue that while democratic norms are expected to produce a consistently moderating effect on diplomatic and military policies, political

accountability can push a decision-maker towards either conflictual or cooperative foreign policy behavior. This is because under different conditions of institutional accountability, democratic leaders will weigh the relative advantages of negotiated compromise, military conflict, and continuing diplomatic stalemate quite differently.

Since norms-based and political accountability-based models do not necessarily produce similar hypotheses, one important avenue for theory development is to identify when norms and institutions generate similar incentives for leaders and, conversely, to explain what behavior is to be expected when they collide. The logic of accountability-based arguments suggests that when norms-based incentives to pursue more cooperative policies conflict with institutional incentives to act more aggressively, the latter would have a stronger impact, since they are more directly linked to the political costs and risks of foreign policy decisions. For example, violations of normative principles of nonviolence and compromise in foreign policy may not be so politically costly for leaders when more hostile and conflictual policies either prove successful, or are directed at long-standing international adversaries. In short, democratic norms of conflict resolution may suffer when weighed against the powerful forces of nationalism and expected military success. In such situations, democratic leaders can expect political support for tougher diplomatic and military policies.

On the whole, the debate over democratic norms and institutions as causes of the democratic peace should focus more on the conditions under which differences in foreign policy behavior are predicted by each approach. New empirical tests can then be devised to assess the explanatory power of each theoretical model more directly. The results of empirical tests in Chapters 8 and 9 provide clear evidence that when these two models predict divergent behavior, the hypotheses of the Political Accountability Model are generally supported by the empirical evidence.

The puzzle of intra-regime variation in conflict behavior

One of the central theoretical puzzles of the democratic peace stems from recent empirical findings, which highlight substantial variation in the conflict behavior of both democratic and non-democratic states. That is, some studies provide evidence that military conflict can be quite rare among both democratic and non-democratic states, while other studies report that at other times both democratic and non-democratic states will pursue aggressive policies of military threats and the use of force (e.g. Benoit 1996; Gowa 1999: ch. 6; Hurrell 1998; Huth 1996: ch. 5; Holsti 1996: ch. 8; Kocowicz 1998, 1999; Leeds 1999; Maoz and

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Abdolali 1989; Mousseau 1998; Oneal and Russett 1997a, 1997b; Rousseau 1996; Weart 1998). The theoretical challenge is to explain this variation within both types of regimes using a common theoretical framework.

Neither the dyadic nor the monadic version of the democratic peace adequately addresses variation in conflict behavior among non-democratic states. Instead, both approaches focus on explaining patterns of conflict behavior for democratic states, while arguing that non-democratic states should follow a pattern of fewer peaceful settlements of international disputes and more frequent military conflict due to the absence of democratic institutions and norms of conflict resolution (e.g. Dixon 1993, 1994; Doyle 1986; Maoz and Russett 1993; Morgan and Schwebach 1992; Raymond 1994; Russett 1993). The variation in conflict behavior within the category of non-democratic states is a particularly interesting theoretical issue, however. While some studies present empirical findings that suggest both peaceful and conflictual relations among non-democratic states (e.g. Peceny, Beer, and Sanchez-Terry 2002), scholars have not directed sustained theoretical attention to explaining this pattern of behavior and its implications for theories of the democratic peace.

Once again, some empirical findings from the study of territorial disputes are illustrative. In an earlier analysis of military escalation and the peaceful resolution of territorial disputes, Huth found that although democratic states were generally less likely to initiate military threats or use force, some non-democratic states were unlikely to engage in military escalation (Huth 1996: ch. 5). Similarly, while we have already noted that some democratic leaders, such as India's Nehru or Pakistan's Bhutto, may feel constrained by domestic opposition to avoid concessions, the same is often true for many non-democratic leaders, who believe that concessions are a risky policy domestically.

The challenge, then, is to develop theoretical models that can explain how domestic conditions in both democratic and non-democratic regimes affect foreign policy choices. In the theoretical section of this book we develop three different domestic-based models, each of which provides an explanation for differences in conflict behavior among both democratic and non-democratic states. For example, in the Political Affinity Model presented in Chapter 6, cross-national differences or similarities in political institutions and ideologies provide a general theoretical framework for explaining various patterns of foreign policy behavior. The hypotheses derived from this model potentially can help to explain a number of patterns: conflict and cooperation among non-democratic states, generally high levels of military conflict between democratic and non-democratic states, and low levels of military conflict between democratic states. The