Our Freedom & Yours
EURO-ATLANTIC FORUM ON DEMOCRACY AND SECURITY

Selected Issues of Democratic Peace Theory

A Reader

Edited by Łukasz Fyderek

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Introduction

Łukasz Fyderek

The theory of democratic peace confronts us with some of the most intriguing questions in contemporary social sciences. The fundamental thesis that democracies do not fight wars with each other has not been falsified in the course of political events. This allows to treat peace between democracies as one of the few permanent elements in international relations. Empirically observed, the main thesis of the democratic peace theory has yet to be satisfactorily and fully explained. Thus, democratic peace has been one of the enduring elements of international political reality since the beginning of the 20th century, but we still do not know with certainty what mechanisms make democracies not fight each other, and why disputes occurring between them are resolved without the use of large-scale lethal force.

This book is being published at a time when the structure of international relations is undergoing changes related to the erosion of the primacy of the American superpower, the weakening role of international institutions and the intensifying rivalry between authoritarian and democratic powers. The war instigated by Russia against Ukraine or the threat to the freedom of the Republic of China posed by the People's Republic of China show that disputes between authoritarianisms and democracies can

escalate to the most serious forms possible. At the same time, sanctions policies carried out below the threshold of war by the US and its allies against the Russian and Iranian regimes signal the widening dividing lines between authoritarianisms and democracies. The processes observed in the third decade of the 21st century may lead us to rewrite the thesis of Samuel Huntington, who argued forty years ago that: "culture and cultural identities […] are shaping the patterns of cohesion, disintegration, and conflict in the post-Cold War world."[1] Today, it is the regime, or more specifically the existence or absence of a government representative of society, that models patterns of cohesion, disintegration and conflict in the world.

Such a thesis is supported in some of the research on democratic peace theory. Some of the studies presented or discussed in this volume recognize that a phenomenon that co-occurs with peace between democracies is the greater likelihood of wars between authoritarian states and democracies. This reflection, however, is only a starting point for research on better understanding the decision-making and strategy-setting processes of players involved in international conflicts. A better understanding of these existentially relevant mechanisms is one of the main fruits of the research of various strands of democratic peace theory.

From a more general perspective, democratic peace theory raises questions about the relationship between freedom and security, two fundamental values in politics and social life. Its central claim outlines the relationship of outcome between the political freedom of two political communities and their international security, i.e. freedom from war and destruction. The intuitive thought that "our freedom" and "your freedom" of neighboring political communities are intertwined on the grounds of peace

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1 Samuel P. Huntington. (1996). *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*. New York: Simon and Schuster: p. 20.

and war also resounded in the slogan "For our freedom and yours" raised by representatives of the peoples of the former Republic of Poland fighting against Russian imperialism in the 19th century.

References to this slogan, "For our freedom and yours," have become an important part of Polish political culture over time. In recent years of Ukraine's defenses against Russian aggression these words have also become a term often found in Ukrainian discourse about the war. For a group of intellectuals and social activists working within the framework of the Krakow-based Institute for Strategic Studies Foundation, this slogan became the starting point for building the "Our Freedom and Yours" project, one of the results of which is this anthology.

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Democratic Peace: the Theory, Research Agenda and Axis of Debate in International Relations

Łukasz Fyderek

The theory of democratic peace (DPT) has been at the center of the disputes of the liberal and realist schools of thought on international relations for more than 50 years. It also represents an important research field at the intersection of comparative political studies and international relations. In recent decades, its conclusions have been instrumentally used to give grounds for policy decisions made by democratically elected leaders. Democratic peace, the key to the understanding of the modern world of international politics, has only been developed since 1970s, although it had been outlined as early as at the end of the 18th century by a Königsberg Enlightenment professor of philosophy.

In his 1795 essay *Perpetual Peace* / *Zum ewigen Frieden. Ein philosophischer Entwurf* (Kant 1995), Immanuel Kant provided the basis for the theory of democratic peace. He defined both the preliminary and final conditions under which lasting peace between nations is possible. Amongst the requirements, he proposed a free republican system, the definition of which corresponds to

the modern understanding of democracy, respect for the sovereignty of other states, refraining from contracted debts for military needs, mutual sincerity and the development of free international trade, and the establishment of a federation of republics for the resolution of disputes[1]. Modern liberal international relations theorists have indicated three of the six preconditions and three final conditions formulated by Kant to be fundamental in the Kantian concept of perpetual peace, that is: democracy, international institutions and free trade, which are referred to as the Kantian 'tripod' or 'triangle' (Chernoff 2023).

Kant's proposal can be viewed as a visionary link between political freedom at the state level and security in international terms. It is worth noting, that it was formulated at a time when the concepts of international relations and the liberal democratic state had yet to mature. Moreover, the assumptions proposed by the author did not apply to the political reality of the late 18th century. In Kant's time war was perceived as a recurring phenomenon in the world order, a cyclical event, purifying in nature. The Free Republics the philosopher from Königsberg envisioned scarcely existed in the international order of the time that was dominated by monarchies. As Thomas Paine noted, monarchies typically have a drive for imperial conquest (Paine 1986). Also, in 1795, international organizations were a theoretical concept, with no counterpart in political reality. It was not until 1815, when the first of such systems, the Concert of Europe formed, itself an organization consisting of absolutist monarchies. Thus, Kant's theoretical conditions transcended his era, as their partial realization was not to come until the next two centuries.

[1] French commentators of the period saw Kant's statement as a reference to the French Revolution, while Polish authors would conclude that the concept was a reaction to the partition of the Polish Commonwealth and a condemnation of the partitioners who violated Poland's sovereignty by, first, violating its territory through the first two partitions, and then, by depriving the country of its independence (Marulewska 2005:173-185).

The political changes associated with the empowerment of broad sectors of society, initiated during the American Revolution, the French Revolution and the political changes in England, were a transforming factor for the principles of politics in Western countries. The advancement of education and the development of mass armies recruited from states' general male populations helped, first the bourgeoisie, and then the emerging working class to become politically active. Those social strata began articulating their interests more and more effectively, which led to the evolution of the political systems in such states toward representative systems.

Neither the sphere of war and peace nor foreign policy affairs, sometimes referred to as 'high politics', were the primary focus of the newly forming political movements in Western European countries and the United States. However, in the second half of the 19th century, their public involvement led to the formation of several democratic political systems, the features of which corresponded to the vision of 'free republics' set forth by Immanuel Kant as a condition for perpetual peace.

Things were to some extent different in the societies of Central and Eastern Europe, where, given the partitions and disintegration of the multi-ethnic Polish Commonwealth, the leaders of the civil society experienced explicitly enough that individual liberties and the existence of the state and its policies were inextricably linked. This was expressed in the motto: "For our freedom and yours", most likely coined by historian and republican adherent Joachim Lelewel, and used by insurgents during the November Uprising of 1831, the revolutions of 1848 and subsequent independence uprisings and struggles against despotic imperialist regimes (Sternicki 2001:73-101; Bird 2019:133-171). Initially, the motto was intended to demonstrate the union of interests of the Polish insurgents and the other peoples oppressed by the despotic czarist rule of the Russian Empire. To notice that the freedom

of a community involved in a struggle for national liberation is related to a political freedom in an imperial state was an original and important political postulate. While it corresponded to the liberal republican ideals of Immanuel Kant, Jeremy Bentham or Montesquieu, who all saw the pursuit of freedom as a universal human trait, it was, on the other hand, pragmatically motivated by the realities of the political struggle against imperialism which is most effectively fought by advocating the idea of freedom among those who stand at the base of the despot's power.

Initiated by technological change, the processes of urbanization and the massification of politics have led to the gradual democratization of government systems in developed countries. The new technologies of the Industrial Revolution period also led to innovations in military technology. The colonial wars waged by European powers at the turn of the 20th century were asymmetrical conflicts, in which the technological superiority of industrialized states was converted into imperial political control over conquered peoples and their resources. Democratized European states pursued colonial conquests no differently than their absolutist counterparts. The democratization processes in London and Paris failed to result in Britain's and France's more peaceful policies toward colonized societies.

In fact, it was not until after 1918, and only to some extent, that the political conditions for a lasting peace as set out by Immanuel Kant came to exist. The first war of the industrialized powers in 1914–1918 was also the first total war, as entire societies had to go through it and be involved in a war effort which was organized on an industrial scale. The Great War also made the recently empowered popular masses realize that the burden of war fell primarily on the people rather than the elites. Anti-war attitudes became a permanent feature of political programs and ideologies in the following decades. The First World War also led to the collapse of the least democratic of the European imperial

powers, the emergence of new nation states on the map of Europe and the U.S. advancement from a middle power to a global power. The latter development was related to the putting to practice the belief in the superiority of democracy over autocratic regimes and the necessity of armed response to defend the values of political freedom. These reasons could be heard in April 1917, when U.S. President Woodrow Wilson delivered a speech to Congress in which he explained the need for the United States to join the First World War, stating that, "[t]he world must be made safe for democracy." (Wilson 1917).

During the interwar period, the differences between democracies and autocracies in in their approach to governance took on practical significance. However, it was not seen as relevant from a theoretical perspective. The rise of totalitarian regimes, the Second World War and the subsequent formation of a bipolar international order during the Cold War comprised a period of the constant development of scientific thought on political systems, war and peace, although the concept of democratic peace was not taken into account. Both peace and democracy were the values that global powers preached for political purposes in an era of their ideological rivalry. However, it took a long time for political scientists to work out a terminology that would sufficiently and accurately describe these concepts, and start systematic reflection on them.

It was not until 1972 that Dean Babst noticed the correlation between the democratic system and peace (Babst, 1972:55-58). He based his study into the subject on the question of whether similar states with elected governments and stable borders are unlikely to enter into a state of war against each other. Babst used statistical methods to test the available cases, and confirmed his hypothesis. The concept of democratic peace has, ever since, become one of the most widely debated hypotheses in political science and international relations. The question of whether a cause-and-effect

Summary

Selected Issues of Democratic Peace Theory

A Reader

The anthology constitutes a broad study dedicated to the theory of democratic peace. This publication introduces the reader to one of the key issues in contemporary international relations, analyzing the evolution of the theory, its fundamental assumptions, and presenting the main positions in the academic debate. It consists of five thematic chapters, preceded by a theoretical introduction that systematizes perspectives and presents the state of the debate on democratic peace theory.

The first chapter, authored by Łukasz Fyderek, serves as an introduction to the issue of DPT. The author operationalizes the concept of democratic peace theory and proposes a typology of theoretical approaches. Particular attention is given to the rivalry between proponents of liberal and realist approaches, highlighting the fundamental differences in their perceptions of mechanisms stabilizing relations between democratic states. This work organizes existing reflections on democratic peace theory and provides a foundation for further reading.

The following five chapters address the topic of DPT from different perspectives, offering a multidimensional analysis of this concept. In the second chapter, Michael Poznansky examines

the challenge that the use of covert force between democracies poses to democratic peace theory, thereby questioning one of its key assumptions. In the next chapter, Barbara Farnham analyzes the relationship between DPT and threat perception theory, illustrating how democratic regimes formulate their security strategies. In the fourth chapter, Brad L. Le Veck and Neil Narang argue that the process of collective decision-making by a broad group of policymakers reduces the risk of negotiation failure, thus demonstrating the advantage of democracies in crisis situations. The fifth chapter, authored by Gilat Levy and Ronny Razin, asserts that interactions between two democracies significantly increase the likelihood of a peaceful resolution of conflicts, reinforcing the fundamental assumptions of DPT. The final chapter, written by Gil Friedman, focuses on the role of democratic norms as a crucial element of democratic peace, emphasizing their significance for the stability and predictability of international relations.

This book is intended as an essential resource for students of international relations, political scientists, and those interested in the mechanisms of stabilization and conflict in the modern world. Through its interdisciplinary approach and the presentation of diverse perspectives, it makes a valuable contribution to the further development of democratic peace theory, inspiring further research and academic reflection.

Keywords: democratic peace theory, TDP, political science

Contents

The theory of democratic peace confronts us with some of the most interesting questions in contemporary social sciences. The basic thesis that democracies do not fight wars with each other has not been falsified in the course of political events. This makes it possible to treat peace between democracies as one of the few permanent elements in international relations. Empirically observed, the main thesis of the democratic peace theory has yet to be satisfactorily and fully explained. Thus, democratic peace has been one of the enduring elements of international political reality since the beginning of the 20th century, but we still do not know with certainty what mechanisms make democracies not fight each other, and why disputes occurring between them are resolved without the use of large-scale lethal force.

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