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**THE DEMOCRATIC PEACE IDEA**

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One of the major tenets of U.S. foreign policy is the encouragement and support of democratization in the world. At the core of this argument is a national security objective of a less war-prone world. The linkage between a more peaceful world and more states with democratic political systems is the belief that democratic states are unlikely to fight wars against each other—what is often called the “democratic peace” proposition. One implication of the democratic peace is that the United States need not be concerned—or, at least, be less concerned—about potential proto-peers and peers that are democratic because such states will not pose a meaningful threat. In other words, if the democratic peace proposition is true, the competitive intent is lacking and a peer will not transform into a peer competitor.

While it has been true historically that democracies have refrained from waging war against each other, the relevance of the democratic peace for intelligence assessment concerning the rise of a peer competitor is less clear. This appendix reviews the literature concerning the three variants of the democratic peace proposition—the institutional, normative, and interdependence strands—and provides several reasons for caution regarding the use of democratic peace in the peer competitor context.

**THE DEMOCRATIC PEACE PROPOSITION**

The democratic peace proposition is perhaps the most widely accepted thesis among international relations theorists today. An immense body of literature in the field has been devoted to exploring

the proposition<sup>1</sup> and, though there is a vocal dissenting minority, the consensus view is summed up in the remark that the “absence of war between democratic states comes as close as anything we have to an empirical law in international relations.”<sup>2</sup> Although the idea is an old one, dating back to Immanuel Kant’s writings in the 18th century, the explosion of scholarly interest in the topic has taken place since 1990.

The primary claim of democratic peace proponents is that democratic states do not wage war against each other, although a number of scholars have modified the claim to the proposition that “democracies are *less likely* to fight wars with each other.”<sup>3</sup> The democratic peace also includes a handful of other claims, such as:

- Democracies tend to prevail in wars they fight with nondemocracies.<sup>4</sup>
- In wars they initiate, democracies suffer fewer casualties and fight shorter wars than nondemocratic states.<sup>5</sup>
- Democratic states locked in disputes with each other choose more peaceful means of resolution than other pairings of states.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>For an evaluation of the current state of the field, see James Lee Ray, “Does Democracy Cause Peace?” *Annual Review of Political Science*, 1 (1998), pp. 27–46.

<sup>2</sup>Jack S. Levy, “The Causes of War: A Review of Theories and Evidence,” in Philip E. Tetlock, Jo L. Husbands, Robert Jervis, Paul C. Stern, and Charles Tilly (eds.), *Behavior, Society, and Nuclear War*, Vol. 1, New York: Oxford University Press, 1989, p. 270.

<sup>3</sup>David A. Lake, “Powerful Pacifists: Democratic States and War,” *American Political Science Review*, 86:1 (March 1992), p. 32 (emphasis added).

<sup>4</sup>David Lake, “Powerful Pacifists”; Dan Reiter and Allan C. Stam III, “Democracy, War Initiation, and Victory,” *American Political Science Review*, 92:2 (June 1998), pp. 377–389.

<sup>5</sup>D. Scott Bennett and Allan C. Stam, “The Duration of Interstate Wars, 1816–1985,” *American Political Science Review*, 90:2 (June 1996), pp. 239–257; Randolph M. Siverson, “Democracies and War Participation: In Defense of the Institutional Constraints Argument,” *European Journal of International Relations*, 1 (December 1995), pp. 481–490.

<sup>6</sup>William J. Dixon, “Democracy and the Peaceful Settlement of International Conflict,” *American Political Science Review*, 88:1 (March 1994), pp. 14–32; Michael Mousseau, “Democracy and Compromise in Militarized Interstate Conflicts, 1816–1992,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 42:2 (April 1998), pp. 210–230.

- Democratic great powers do not initiate preventive wars.<sup>7</sup>

Explanations of the democratic peace typically fall into one—or a combination of—three main categories:

- Democratic *institutions* place constraints on the ability of leaders to fight other democracies, or simply make them reluctant to choose war;
- *Norms* shared by democratic states cause them to view each other as pacific and unthreatening; and
- Democracy tends to foster *economic interdependence*, which reduces the likelihood of war.

### Institutional Arguments

As illustrated in Figure C.1, democratic institutions are believed to cause peace in one of two ways. The most common argument is that the constitutional and legal restraints on executive action in democratic states—as well as the existence of free public debate—are a bulwark against war for several reasons.<sup>8</sup> They give democracies sufficient time to work through disagreements peacefully, democracies are unlikely to fear that other democracies will initiate a surprise attack, and, in general, leaders are limited in their ability to independently launch wars against other democracies.

A more recent institutional argument focuses on the desire of democratic elites to be reelected.<sup>9</sup> Democratic leaders are primarily concerned about retaining office, and they are especially concerned about policy failure. Consequently, they fight harder and are more cautious: They try harder to win wars by spending more resources, and they only engage in fights they anticipate winning. Furthermore,

<sup>7</sup>Randall Schweller, “Domestic Structure and Preventive War: Are Democracies More Pacific?” *World Politics*, 44:2 (January 1992), pp. 235–269.

<sup>8</sup>John M. Owen, “How Liberalism Produces Democratic Peace,” *International Security*, 19:2 (Fall 1994), pp. 87–125.

<sup>9</sup>Bruce Bueno de Mesquita, James D. Morrow, Randolph M. Siverson, and Alastair Smith, “An Institutional Explanation of the Democratic Peace,” *American Political Science Review*, 93:4 (December 1999), pp. 791–807.

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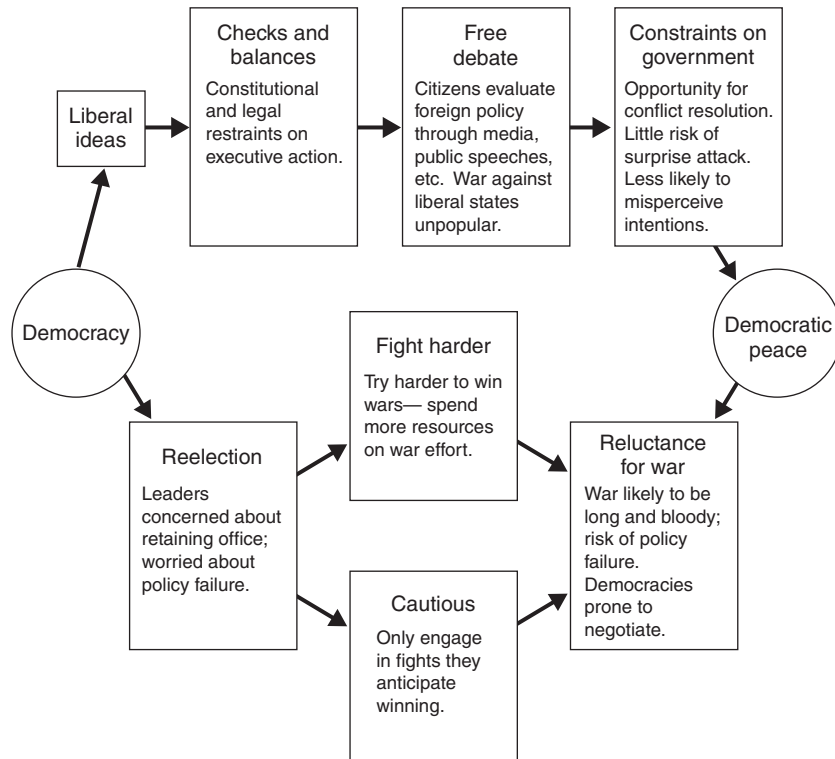


Figure C.1—Institutions and Democratic Peace

since democratic states contemplating war are likely to try harder, war is likely to be long and bloody and there is a greater risk of policy failure. Hence, democratic states are prone to negotiate with each other, rather than fight.

**Normative Arguments**

According to normative arguments, democracies believe that other democracies are reasonable, predictable, and trustworthy, as Figure C.2 highlights. Consequently, they will be disinclined to fight other democracies because they perceive that their intentions will always

be pacific. In other words, democracies establish an atmosphere of “live and let live” with each other that results in a fundamental sense of stability.<sup>10</sup>

### Interdependence Arguments

Democratic states have free-market economies, and, since they are better able to offer credible commitments regarding the terms of trade and capital flows than authoritarian states, they are more inclined to trade with one another.<sup>11</sup> As Figure C.3 exemplifies, interdependence promotes peace by increasing contacts among democracies and contributing to mutual understanding. Trade helps create transnational ties that encourage accommodation rather than conflict. Furthermore, trade is mutually beneficial to its participants, and war may negatively affect a country’s economy because it could potentially cut off critical imports or exports. Finally, trade tends to decrease the benefits of conquest. Thus, the potential loss of trade decreases the willingness of both sides to fight.

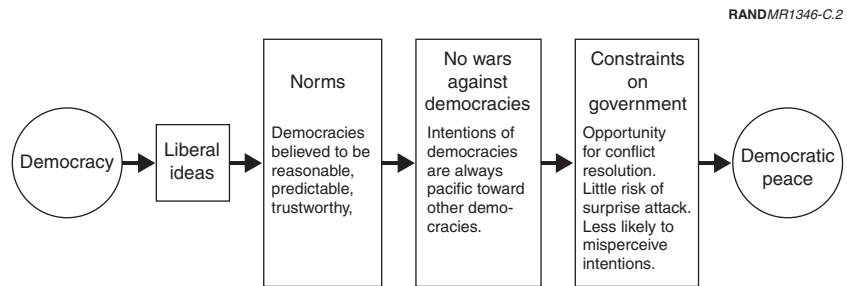


Figure C.2—Norms and Democratic Peace

<sup>10</sup>Zeev Maoz and Bruce M. Russett, “Normative and Structural Causes of Democratic Peace, 1946–1986,” *American Political Science Review*, 87:3 (September 1993), pp. 624–638.

<sup>11</sup>John R. Oneal and Bruce M. Russett, “The Classical Liberals Were Right: Democracy, Interdependence, and Conflict, 1950–1985,” *International Studies Quarterly*, 41:2 (June 1997), pp. 267–294.

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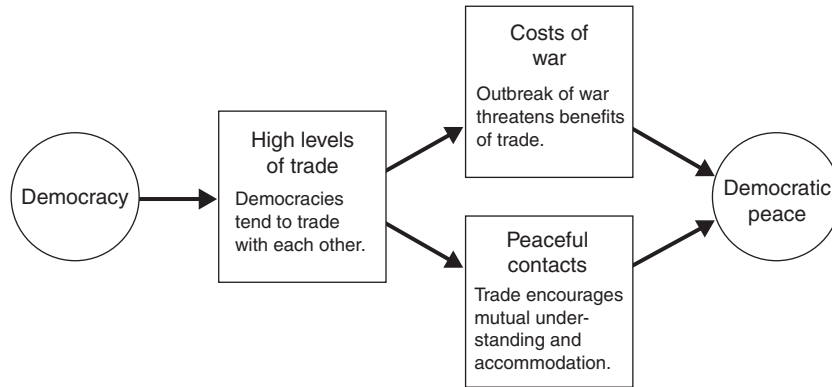


Figure C.3—Interdependence and Democratic Peace

### CAVEATS

Many democratic peace proponents have been careful with their wording in noting that democracies are *less likely* to fight each other. This is, of course, a probabilistic—not a deterministic—statement. War may be unlikely between democracies, but it is nonetheless possible. Since security rests on being prepared for all types of situations, the probabilistic statement removes a good deal of the relevance of the democratic peace proposition in the context of the work on a peer competitor.

For defense intelligence purposes, the following conditions are important caveats to the democratic peace proposition when competition is with democratic peer competitors. In an overall sense, these conditions demonstrate that the prudent course of action for the United States is that it needs to retain concern about the rise of democratic peer competitors, even if the probability of large-scale war between democratic states has historically been very low. After all, during the Cold War there was hostile competition between the United States and the Soviet Union, though direct military conflict between the two was averted. A short list includes six conditions (each examined in greater detail below):

- Democratic states are not immune from security competition and wars with nondemocracies, both of which could bring them into conflict with the United States.
- Democratizing states may be more war-prone.
- Perceptions of other democracies as peaceful and friendly can change if there is substantial security or economic competition.
- Democracies may resort to proxy wars or covert action, rather than direct conflict.
- There have been numerous periods of democratic reversals in history and there may be some in the future.
- Democratic peace may be an example of high correlation rather than causation, making it of questionable utility for intelligence purposes.

### Security Competition

While democratic peace arguments have drawn attention to the statistical fact that democracies have historically not been involved in wars with other democracies, democratic states have engaged in hostile competition with each other. In general, changes in the relative capabilities of rising powers tend to trigger changes in their behavior. Typically, they will want more influence commensurate with their increased power, and they may be less willing to back down during disputes.<sup>12</sup> Consequently, proto-peers that become increasingly powerful relative to the United States—regardless of regime type—are likely to push for increased influence in areas that they consider strategically important. This might take one of two forms.

First, security competition might lead the United States and a democratic proto-peer to clash over influence in a specific region or coun-

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<sup>12</sup>With perhaps a few exceptions, the historical record shows that rising powers generally seek to expand their influence. For instance, an increasingly powerful United States in the latter half of the 19th century implemented the expansionist policy of “Manifest Destiny,” followed by increasing interventionism in Latin America, the Pacific, and East Asia. Great Britain, Weimar and Nazi Germany, Czarist Russia, and the Soviet Union followed this somewhat general pattern: Increases in state power led to an expansion of political interests abroad. Zakaria, *From Wealth to Power*.

try. This would not *ipso facto* lead to war. Given that the United States has strong interest and is involved in the security realm in much of the world, it would hardly be surprising to have security competition in areas where there was a conflict of interest. Second, as many democratic peace proponents freely admit, democracies have fought numerous wars with—and used violence against—authoritarian states.<sup>13</sup> They have been aggressors, pursued imperialistic policies, and built empires; in sum, they are not immune from policies of subjugation and belligerence. It is conceivable that the United States might consider coming to the aid of a nondemocratic state that has been either attacked or intimidated by a rising democratic proto-peer. If such aid were to be extended in areas that were of strategic importance to the United States, the probability of conflict would be greater.

### Democratization

Although this is not an argument accepted universally among democratic peace proponents, some scholars claim that states that are in the process of democratization—and that have not become established, consolidated democracies—tend to be more warlike.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, democratization can be an extremely rocky and tenuous transitional period, and, depending on the definition of a transitional period, there is evidence to suggest that democratizing states are more inclined to fight wars than are states that do not undergo regime change. Several factors seem to affect the probability of war during transition:

- Democratization leads to the establishment of a number of politically significant groups with diverse and sometimes conflicting platforms.
- Threatened elites have an impetus to mobilize allies among the mass population, sometimes along nationalist lines.
- State authority in general is weak and unstable.

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<sup>13</sup>Zeev Maoz and Nasrin Abdolali, “Regime Types and International Conflict, 1816–1976,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 33:1 (March 1989), pp. 3–35.

<sup>14</sup>“Democratization” refers to the process where states have undergone a regime change in a democratic direction.



Specifically, the danger of war increases when elites attempt to retain or increase mass support by utilizing nationalist or populist themes during the democratization process—and trigger mass nationalism and elite logrolling.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, this transition period can also be destabilized by civil war, which often breaks out for many of the reasons listed above.<sup>16</sup>

Since the democratization process can be extremely unstable, and since states that are in this transition period may be more warlike and often suffer destabilizing and bloody civil wars, peers and proto-peers undergoing democratic transitions may be an especially worrisome problem for the United States. Democratization can be a fairly long process—perhaps occurring over several decades—and, even then, the creation of a consolidated democratic political system is by no means inevitable.

### Changing Perceptions

Normative explanations of the democratic peace contend that democratic states externalize their domestic political norms of tolerance and compromise in their foreign relations with other democratic states. As two proponents note: “Political conflicts in democracies are resolved through compromise rather than through elimination of opponents. This norm allows for an atmosphere of ‘live and let live’ that results in a fundamental sense of stability at the

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<sup>15</sup>Edward D. Mansfield and Jack Snyder, “Democratization and the Danger of War,” *International Security*, 20:1 (Summer 1995), pp. 5–38; Edward D. Mansfield and Jack Snyder, “Democratization and War,” *Foreign Affairs*, 74:2 (May/June 1995), pp. 79–97; Jack L. Snyder, *From Voting to Violence: Democratization and Nationalist Conflict*, New York: W. W. Norton, 2000; and Michael D. Ward and Kristian S. Gleditsch, “Democratizing for Peace,” *American Political Science Review*, 92:1 (March 1998), pp. 51–61.

<sup>16</sup>A number of authors have posited that the democratization and war argument is either overstated or that regime change and war involvement are independent of one another. See, for example, William R. Thompson and Richard Tucker, “A Tale of Two Democratic Peace Critiques,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 41:3 (June 1997), pp. 428–454; Reinhard Wolf, Erich Weede, Andrew J. Enterline, and Edward D. Mansfield and Jack Snyder, “Correspondence: Democratization and the Danger of War,” *International Security*, 20:4 (Spring 1996), pp. 176–207.

personal, communal, and national level.”<sup>17</sup> Moreover, borrowing from Immanuel Kant’s Second Definitive Article, democratic peace arguments explain that international law entreats democratic states to harbor mutual respect for each other.<sup>18</sup> Kant notes: “As culture grows and men gradually move towards greater agreement over their principles, they lead to mutual understanding and peace.”<sup>19</sup>

However, recent examples demonstrate that perceptions of other democracies can change rapidly and decisively.<sup>20</sup> For instance, economic competition between the United States and Japan in the late 1980s and early 1990s led to significant tension between them and led to public opinion in both countries shifting to view the other as a competitor. The point here is significant. While democratic states have frequently considered other democratic states unthreatening, norms of respect and perceptions of friendliness can change when states are faced with substantial security—or even economic—competition. This is an important finding for assessing potential peer competitors because it suggests that hostile competition between the United States and another democratic great power is not a remote possibility; democratic norms and perceptions are not infallible.

### Covert Action and Proxy Wars

Democratic peace arguments focus predominantly on the unlikelihood of interstate war between democracies—where war is defined

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<sup>17</sup>Zeev Maoz and Bruce Russett, “Normative and Structural Causes of Democratic Peace, 1946–1986,” *American Political Science Review*, 87:3 (September 1993), pp. 624–638.

<sup>18</sup>Michael W. Doyle, “Liberalism and World Politics,” *American Political Science Review*, 80:4 (December 1996), pp. 1151–1169.

<sup>19</sup>Immanuel Kant, *Kant’s Political Writings*, Hans Reiss (ed.), H.B. Nisbet (trans.), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970, p. 114.

<sup>20</sup>For a historical account of changing perceptions of democracies, see Ido Oren, “The Subjectivity of the ‘Democratic’ Peace: Changing U.S. Perceptions of Imperial Germany,” *International Security*, 20:2 (Fall 1995), pp. 147–184; Joanne Gowa, “Democratic States and International Disputes,” *International Organization*, 49:3 (Summer 1995), pp. 511–522; and Joanne Gowa, *Ballots and Bullets: The Elusive Democratic Peace*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999.

as a minimum of 1,000 battle deaths.<sup>21</sup> One problem with this definition, however, is that it ignores conflict at lower levels of violence, such as covert action and low levels of armed conflict, against democratic and democratizing states.<sup>22</sup> Such examples do show that democratic states are willing to use force against other democracies. This has an important implication *vis-à-vis* future proto-peers and peers because it suggests that United States competitors might engage in covert action, rather than direct conflict.

Another related problem with the democratic peace is that it fails to note the possibility of proxy wars. In a very real sense, the Cold War—the preeminent contemporary version of hostile peer competition—was fought *en masse* as a series of covert operations and proxy wars.<sup>23</sup> Indeed, the future competition between the United States and a potential peer competitor would not *ipso facto* have to lead to direct military confrontation. Instead, conflict could occur on the periphery in third states.

### Democratic Reversals

The number of democratic states has increased exponentially over the course of the 20th century, but the upswing has not been constant. Instead, it should come as no surprise that democracy has progressed in fits and starts, with as many as 70 instances when democratic states have suffered reversals.<sup>24</sup> Democracy, like history, is not unidirectional. As Samuel Huntington notes, the first two waves of democratization (1828–1926 and 1943–1962) were followed by reverse waves (1922–1942 and 1958–1975).<sup>25</sup> There have been cases of democratic great powers that have suffered reversals. Twentieth century examples include Italy in the 1920s and Germany

<sup>21</sup>This benchmark is used by the Correlates of War database at the University of Michigan.

<sup>22</sup>Exceptions include David P. Forsythe, “Democracy, War, and Covert Action,” *Journal of Peace Research*, 29:4 (1992), pp. 385–395.

<sup>23</sup>See, for example, John Lewis Gaddis, “The Long Peace: Elements of Stability in the Postwar International System,” *International Security*, 10:4 (Spring 1986), pp. 99–142.

<sup>24</sup>Robert A. Dahl, *On Democracy*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000, p. 145.

<sup>25</sup>Samuel P. Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*, Norman and London: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991.

and Japan in the 1930s. It is perhaps telling that each of these states subsequently went on an aggressive foreign spree.<sup>26</sup>

The fact that reversals do happen has implications for current debates concerning proto-peers and potential peer competitors to the United States. First, consolidated democratic great powers—states that have established the norms and practices of a strong and grounded civil society, a fully functioning political society, a rule of law that is upheld and respected, a state apparatus that respects, protects, and upholds the rights of citizens, and a market-oriented economic society—appear substantially *less likely* to suffer a democratic reversal.<sup>27</sup> Of course, in the long term no country is ever completely immune from slipping into decline and eventually into authoritarianism. Yet the very fact that democracy has become firmly entrenched in the norms and practices of consolidated states—that it has become “the only game in town”—makes them *de facto* much less vulnerable to reversals.

Second, democratic states that have either begun to slip into decline or are perhaps still in the process of a transition are much more vulnerable to reversals. Indeed, Russia has a recent authoritarian past, and India suffered a democratic setback in the mid-1970s and has democratic institutions that are of questionable effectiveness.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, as the German, Japanese, and Italian cases suggest, democratic reversals can lead to aggressive foreign excursions.

### Causal Logic

While an impressive amount of statistical research has demonstrated that democratic states historically have refrained from waging war on each other, the causal explanations have been much more contentious. Opponents of the democratic peace idea contend that the

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<sup>26</sup>Snyder and Mansfield, “Democratization and the Danger of War,” pp. 30–31.

<sup>27</sup>For work on consolidated democracies see Juan J. Linz and Alfred C. Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America, and Post-Communist Europe*, Baltimore and London, John Hopkins University Press, 1996, pp. 3–15.

<sup>28</sup>Patrick Heller, “Degrees of Democracy: Some Comparative Lessons from India,” *World Politics*, 52:4 (July 2000), pp. 484–519.

phenomenon may simply be a function of high correlation, rather than causation. Such arguments can be put into four groups.

First, if democratic institutions had a pacifying effect on leaders—through constitutional and legal restraints, free public debate, or the desire to be reelected—they would have peaceful relations with *all* states. Second, normative arguments have several deficiencies. As noted earlier, the view that democratic states externalize peaceful norms of behavior with other democracies is contradicted by the fact that they can still engage in security competition, utilize covert action, and change perceptions of other democracies as friendly depending on the context. Moreover, a number of wars between democracies were averted because of adverse distributions of military capabilities and concerns that other states would take advantage of the fight—not because of normative “live and let live” reasons.<sup>29</sup> Third, interdependence arguments in general are suspect because interdependence may very well help promote war, as well as peace. On the one hand, it may help cause peace by augmenting contacts among states and contributing to mutual understanding; on the other, it increases the occasion for conflicts that may promote resentment and even war.<sup>30</sup> Thus, interdependence may be an *effect* of peace—rather than a *cause* of it. Fourth, some scholars claim that statistical evidence suggests that only after 1945 did pairs of democracies become significantly less war-prone. However, peace between democracies during the post-1945 period may have been largely a function of alliance patterns caused by the Cold War, rather than democratic peace explanations.<sup>31</sup>

All of the above arguments continue to be hotly debated. Moreover, probably the most interesting development in the democratic peace area over the last two years has been the emergence of a causal, em-

<sup>29</sup>Christopher Layne, “Kant or Cant: The Myth of the Democratic Peace,” *International Security*, 19:2 (Fall 1994), pp. 5–49.

<sup>30</sup>Katherine Barbieri, “Economic Interdependence: A Path to Peace or a Source of Interstate Conflict?” *Journal of Peace Research*, 33:1 (February 1996), pp. 29–49; Kenneth N. Waltz, “Structural Realism After the Cold War,” *International Security*, 25:1 (Summer 2000), pp. 5–41.

<sup>31</sup>Henry S. Farber, “Polities and Peace,” *International Security*, 20:2 (Fall 1995), pp. 123–146. Also see David E. Spiro, “The Insignificance of the Liberal Peace,” *International Security*, 19:2 (Fall 1994), pp. 50–86. For an argument against this objection, see Thompson and Tucker, “A Tale of Two Democratic Peace Critiques.”

pirically tested linkage between democracy and peace.<sup>32</sup> In short, the argument borrows from all three variants of the democratic peace school and posits that the crucial variable is the presence of a multitude of pacifying mechanisms in democracies that generally do not allow disputes to develop to a point of a crisis. If the disputes actually develop to such a level, then democracy has no independent effect on further escalation to a war, but the presence of the pacifying mechanisms on both sides generally prevents such an evolution. The logic explains why there have been a few isolated cases of democratic states waging war on each other, points out the critical juncture at which democratic political systems have a pacifying effect, and links the incidence of tensions, conflict, and war into one process. Subject to additional statistical testing, the proposition may be the proof needed for democratic peace proponents. However, even if true, the explanation remains probabilistic and does not eliminate the need for caution in U.S. assessments of proto-peers and peers. It is helpful to note the historical paucity of conflict between democracies and it is reassuring that consolidated democracies are less likely to wage war on each other, but it is a different matter to project the behavior of future democratic states based on the evidence presented so far.

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<sup>32</sup>William Reed, "A Unified Statistical Model of Conflict Onset and Escalation," *American Journal of Political Science*, 44:1 (January 2000), pp. 84–93.