Globalization, Liberalism, and Peace

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Abstract

The persistent cycle of civil and international violence characterizes the major paradigms in international relations. Pessimists see in anarchy inevitable conflict while optimists hope for something better. Several recent phenomena offer a stronger empirical basis for optimism, even as they require a robust intellectual synthesis. I seek to relate the (liberal) democratic peace and globalization to a recent decline in interstate warfare. Attributes of globalization and development, rather than democracy per se, account for the shift toward peace among liberal states. Common or compatible national objectives, productive processes that are hard to conquer, and signaling through common economic linkages help to explain the peace. Parts of this process should be generalizable through development and broadening globalization.

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The Future of History

History repeats itself, except when it does not. Warfare is a recurrent, if not exactly regular, fixture of international affairs. Peace occasionally breaks out, but periods of stability have always been followed by instability and intense global or regional conflict. The ubiquity of war, and the desire for peace, frame behavior in the international arena. Similarly, the study of international politics can be characterized by the schism between pessimists who adhere to historical precedent in describing/advocating the politics of nations and optimists who emphasize the necessity of producing something unprecedented. Prevailing wisdom about whether one should be optimistic and pessimistic seems to mirror the ebb and flow of contemporaneous events, with enthusiasm for one faction or another shifting with the tide of history more so than through the force of logical argument. In this respect, the dialectic between traditional paradigms has failed to be dialectical. The tension between normative and positive, between experience and expectation ensures that debate over the nature of global politics is as enduring as conflict itself. Optimistic claims about peace are burdened by past failures, while pessimistic prophesies about the continuity of conflict are challengeable precisely because change involves a departure from previous events.

Recent developments hint at a disjuncture in the historical record, even as novel theoretical insights and methodologies provide the potential for synthesizing disparate elements of the intellectual tradition. Three contemporary phenomena bolster claims that warfare need not be a ubiquitous feature of international relations, the (liberal) democratic peace, globalization, and growing evidence of a decline in interstate warfare in the last decade. Together, these three phenomena characterize and differentiate two separate worlds, the developed and the undeveloped. The apparent fact that liberal democracies seldom fight each other has understandably revitalized optimistic interpretations of international affairs, but does the democratic peace reveal a lasting solution to the scourge of war, or do ongoing tensions between civilizations, the threat of terrorism, and so on indicate that reports of the demise of interstate warfare are greatly exaggerated? Understanding the democratic peace and extrapolating its impact looking forward poses special theoretical and empirical challenges. Realists cannot effectively refute the claims of liberals precisely because the evidence of a special peace between democracies lacks precedent. Conversely, it is difficult to have confidence in extrapolations of recent trends that offer a relatively brief basis on which to challenge the long tradition of pessimism. In short, the case for the durability and generality of the democratic peace is not unambiguous.

Extending current empirical findings across time and space requires more robust theoretical substantiation, something I seek to begin to advance here.

The international system is in the midst of significant change even as many features of world politics remain unaltered. The record of false starts and excessive optimism about perpetual peace and the presence of significant continuity in international affairs warrants caution in the treatment of indications of an end to systemic history. Existing claims of a liberal peace are products, not predictions, of promising events. The research community has as yet had limited success in providing robust theoretical accounts linking particular changes in state, dyadic, or systemic attributes to conflict inhibiting changes in interstate behavior. One potential precipitant of peace that has been largely overlooked is economic globalization. The increasing integration of markets and decentralization of productive processes has been associated with both peace and conflict at the civil (domestic) level. Given that globalization and democratization are two secular trends that roughly coincide, and may go hand-in-hand, it seems appropriate to explore the consequences of globalization for international conflict more closely. At the same time, the most recent research on the democratic peace reveals that it is only economically developed democracies that produce less disputatious dyads. Globalization and democratization are also works in progress. The international system is divided, with about half the world's nations liberal, peaceful, increasingly integrated and prosperous, while the balance of countries, with much of the earth's population, persist under brutish conditions.

Fruitful foreign policy in an era of "global change" requires theoretical guidance about cause and effect. I seek to place research on the origins of, and prospects for, change leading to a lasting systemic peace on a more concrete footing. I expect to show that current explanations for the democratic peace in particular are flawed and that the peace is less identified with democracy than generally imagined. There remains reason for optimism, however. Factors generally associated with economic liberalism and more specifically with globalization can account for the special peace among liberal states. Most of the factors responsible for the liberal peace can be sustained and, if understood, extended broadly among countries. Below, I provide a sketch of my argument.

The Democratic Peace

The idea that liberal institutions promote amity among nations is as old as liberal political philosophy. It took statistical analysis, however, to demonstrate that a special peace exists exclusive to liberal states. Recent research has further restricted the domain of the special peace to developed democracies (Hegre 2000, Mousseau 2000, Mousseau, vard Hegre & Oneal 2002). Yet, theories of the liberal peace have failed to provide a convincing rational for the phenomenon. Current thinking about the democratic peace is flawed in at least two ways. First, explaining peace requires a solid account of why most states *do* occasionally resort to military violence. Existing theories of the democratic peace are poorly conceived in terms of the antecedents of war. A preferable approach is to begin by outlining a logic of international disputes (Blainey 1988, Fearon 1995, Gartzke 1999, Wagner 2000). Recent developments in the bargaining theory of war serve as the basis for identifying conditions that can reduce the likelihood of interstate violence. Second, theories of the democratic peace fail to account for the strong dyadic component of the observation. Liberal states appear less warlike largely only dyadically. Conventional norms and institutions arguments suggest that democracies are constrained from fighting each other, without making it clear why (and how) constraints are switched "on" and "off," depending on an opponent's regime type. Even sophisticated theoretical work fails to address the dyadic nature of the democratic peace, offering instead accounts that imply democracies are *generally* less warlike (Fearon 1994, Schultz 1998, Schultz 1999).

The difficulty is a classical one of levels of analysis. Accounting for the democratic peace amounts to explaining why it is that certain *pairs* of societies are better able to resolve differences short of military violence. The phenomenon to be explained is social, requiring a theory of interaction and not just action, and thus one that moves beyond the contribution of constituent (domestic) elements. Domestic political variables can interact internationally, but must do so through an additional set of mechanisms at the international level. Since the dyadic nature of the liberal peace requires linkages between states, it makes sense to evaluate the impact of the interstate linkages that are obvious, valuable, viable, and vary from dyad to dyad. State interests, liberal trade, and globalization provide a set of linkages that can account for the reduction in disputes among liberal states.

Trade and Theft

It is of course not accidental that researchers find the correlation between democratic dyads and a reduction in disputes intuitively appealing. There are important parallels between the conditions needed to facilitate peace and conditions that foster democracy. Politics often involves choices of trade or theft. Externally, states have the options of commerce and conquest as methods to obtain needed resources. Domestically, political factions can similarly pursue political objectives through consent and coercion. Democracy as a political system is defined by the need for competing factions to agree to lose. The incentives to compete are tempered by a utility for the process at the expense of some preferred outcomes. Factions peacefully accept occasional defeat in exchange for limiting political friction. Democracies fail when the stakes involved increase to the point where a faction cannot afford to lose, or when a faction looses too often (ideological polarization, high rents from office, etc.). Similarly, the historical tendency of states to take what they can and pay only for what they must has to be altered to generate peace. Standard answers to the question of pay or take include high costs for conflict, or an increased appeal of cooperation. Each is probably inadequate in explaining the liberal peace.

War costs do not appear to discourage warfare. Hopes were kindled in the 19th and early 20th centuries that the increased lethality of armies would make war prohibitive. Unfortunately, all that seems to have been achieved was greater efficiency in killing. Typically, changes in the cost of fighting will shift the bargaining power of states, leading to different settlements, but not necessarily different probabilities of dispute behavior. An exception involves costs so high that neither side is willing to contemplate fighting. However, prohibitive contests may simply spawn secondary disputes. While the cold war was never hot, nuclear brinkmanship and proxy contests ensured a substantial amount of conflict. Even if one accepts that war costs reduce the frequency of disputes, this is not necessarily comforting if the remaining contests are more intense. States might bundle together sets of policy grievances to justify higher war costs. Rather than campaigning each summer, countries might fight infrequent, but more lethal contests. The modern history of conflict in Europe seems to reflect a trend toward fewer, but more intense, wars. Peace is not really achieved if warfare is simply parsed in a different manner by changing costs. Indeed, since war costs typically involve casualties, increases mean adding to the human toll of conflict.

Axelrod's insight that peace can be achieved by the shadow of the future challenged the realist conviction that zero-sum interactions predominated in the international system and helped to generate a generation of optimistic writing about regimes and cooperation. Unfortunately, work such as that of Fearon (1998) points out that the shadow of the future can actually inhibit cooperation. To the degree that future gains are valuable, the distribution of these gains constitutes a source of new conflict. Just because there is much to be gained from acting in concert does not mean that actors will be able to cooperate, or that they will cooperate about how to cooperate. Nor is it likely that the shadow of the future is significantly longer for modern liberal states (where leaders are regularly replaced) than for stable autocratic governments (where hereditary rulership can span generations).

So what might lead states to prefer to pay rather than take? Governments maintain the peace within their borders by using the power to coerce to sanction the coercive actions of domestic groups or individuals. Citizens can prefer to trade rather than take because they fear punishment or disgrace. Externally, anarchy ensures that no parallel global mechanism exists and that a preference for trade over theft must be consensual. Commerce can be preferred to conquest if there is no effective profit from taking. This occurs if states lack significant differences, if the resources in contention are of relatively little value, or if valuable resources are unconquerable. Finally, war can be averted by increasing the ability of states to realize effective ex ante bargains. Mechanisms that allow credible communication short of military violence may still involve coercion (and thus blur the distinction I have been drawing between taking and paying), but allow exchanges. I explore each of these possibilities further below, but first I briefly discuss the evolving informational bargaining approach to the origins of costly contests.

Beginning with War

A simple rule of thumb in social science is that the theory must be robust to revelation. A subject's knowledge of a causal relationship should not lead to behavior unanticipated by the theory. Unfortunately, much of international relations theory effectively presumes that leaders are unaware of international relations theory. A balance of power, for example, should be more stable only if statesmen ignore implications of the power balance and diplomats refrain from adjusting diplomacy accordingly. Yet, weak states are presumably aware that they are weak and must concede more in negotiations. Whether material factors such as relative power influence the hazard of war then depends on whether states subsume the likely military impact of these variables in their evolving foreign policies, or whether, for various reason, they are unable or unwilling to do so. War and peace are as much (or more) a function of information as about material variables.

We can extrapolate this insight as two symmetries that govern explanations for war. First, wars begin and end. The symmetry of onset and termination means that explaining warfare really involves accounting for why wars are necessary to obtain settlements. Why don't states simply adopt the bargains that eventually resolve contests ex ante (Fearon 1995)?

A general rationale is that states on the verge of war often lack information about the performance of competitors in the contest. Competitors possess incentives to exaggerate (to bluff) in hopes of extracting better terms in bargaining. It follows that war is less likely for states that are least able to bluff and that mechanisms that facilitate credible communication (signaling) decrease the need to fight.

The second symmetry involves power. Theories of international relations often seek to treat dispute onset as the product of power relations. Yet, the relativity of power means that factors affecting one state imply converse changes for the state's challengers. If a state becomes more powerful, its opponents become weaker; if one state is reticent to act through force, its opponents are likely to act more aggressively. When states are free to bargain, changes in relative power that are allowed to lead to changes in the distribution of resources need not result in different dispute propensities. State-level (monadic) relationships between power and conflict appear dyadically only when states fail to respond strategically to the second symmetry. To account for the dyadic effects associated with the observation, the causes of the liberal peace must also be dyadic, not monadic.

Warfare can also vary because precursors to conflict are absent. States can lack the precipitant factors—differences of interest or capabilities—responsible for crises. Few states at any time lack the capability to use force if necessary. Certainly, major democratic states are as well equipped militarily as any powers in history. The origins of the special peace among democracies cannot be due to an absence of military might. Existing developed democracies do, however, exhibit a lack of serious animosity. Norms and institutions may be unnecessary as elements of constraint if there is nothing to constrain. Similarly, the two symmetries mentioned above do not apply to peace borne of a mutual absence of malice. Still, it remains to be explained why it is that liberal democracies agree on so much. (Russett & Oneal 2001) argue that democracies share a common purpose in democracy. It seems to me that this is placing too much emphasis on the instrumental in international politics, and little on the substance. Further, it can be demonstrated that democratic affinity is insufficient to explain the effect of affinity generally on the democratic peace (Gartzke 2000).

Getting to Peace

The bargaining logic of war and my previous comments suggest three complementary explanations for the scarcity of war in liberal dyads. First, states may share common or similar international objectives. Western liberal democracies appear to have similar state preferences. Dyadic variation in preference similarity accounts for variation in the motives to fight. Second, states share common economic linkages and productive processes that make it difficult for states with modern economies to capitalize on conquest. Post-industrial economies are much more difficult to coerce. Conversely, states with agricultural or industrial economics can still benefit from conquest by extracting wealth from more traditional sectors of post-industrial economies. Finally, economic linkages allow integrated states to signal and provide the means and incentives to compete non-violently. Globalization allows states to signal but also increases states' ability to coerce one another, implying that the impact of integration on conflict behavior is dyadic.

Similar Preferences

States will not fight if they lack differences worthy of dispute. We might think of states as possessing (aggregate) preferences over outcomes in the international system. Broadly, these can be divided between preferences over productive resources (land, labor, capital, mineral wealth, etc.) and preferences over policy (political autonomy, influence over the affairs of other nations, regulation of the commons, etc.). Preferences over resources are inherently zero-sum. My possession of mineral wealth or territory denies you access to these same resources. The zero-sumness of resource preferences has historically lead to a significant portion of international conflict. As I discuss in the next section, changes in economic conditions devalue many of the traditional sources of friction over resources between states while making other productive assets effectively unconquerable. Preferences over policy, on the other hand, need not be zero-sum. States may share common or compatible policy objectives. As this portion of state preferences becomes relatively more important, there is more room for international cooperation. There are also historical periods (such as post-World War II) when the policy preferences of a number of states significantly coincide.

In previous research, I show that the liberal peace can be accounted for by the similarity of policy preferences among western democracies (Gartzke 1998, Gartzke 2000). Some argue that similar interests are an artifact of the cold war (Farber & Gowa 1995, Farber & Gowa 1997). Others claim that preferences derive from regime type (Oneal & Russett 1999, Russett & Oneal 2001). While the origins of preferences are murky, it can be shown that the special peace depends on similar interests only partly accounted for by regime type. Rather than being inhibited by domestic norms or institutions, western democracies appear to lack substantial disagreement. This lack of disagreement allows for an absence of attempts at coercion in the present and among liberal democracies, but probably cannot be extrapolated to other states and other time periods. Democratization of non-western cultures stands to increase cleavages among democratic states. Further, the relations of existing industrial democracies are already showing an increase in strain following the common objectives of the cold war. While it is unlikely that the Western democracies will experience war in the foreseeable future, minor confrontations on the high seas, at border checkpoints, and over environmental issues have already been registered. European integration also continues to challenge US economic and political objectives.

Nothing Left to Steal

Several features of post-industrial development and economic integration contribute to a reduction in the valuation of conflict over zero-sum resource preferences. Wealth in modern societies is increasingly a function of financial and intellectual capital. The liquidity of global capital means that states have trouble encouraging investment as long as investors face risk. Boix (2003) shows that mobile capital facilitates democratization as holders of capital have an exit option should liberalizing domestic politics encourage redistribution of wealth. Landed elites face a commitment problem that cannot be readily remedied and so resist democratization. The commitment problem is resolved for holders of mobile capital who can flee redistribution, forcing democratic governments to institutionalize protections against redistribution. Again, the domestic and dyadic are linked. A conqueror engaged in subduing a society will find it difficult to convince risk averse investors that he will safe-guard their assets. Capital flight rapidly depreciates the value of technologically sophisticated productive assets. Similarly, knowledge can be coerced, but doing so discourages innovation, degrading productive assets acquired through conquest. The Soviet Union found itself unable to maintain a post-industrial economy, denied access to intellectual and financial capital by the coercive structure of Soviet government. China refrained from occupying Hong Kong, delaying possession of the city for over four decades, despite an overwhelming military superiority. During the same period, the PRC engaged in numerous serious territorial disputes with India, the Soviet Union, Vietnam, fought a conflict in Korea, and conquered Tibet. Restraint in the case of Hong Kong appears to reflect the special status of the city, not patience or restraint inherent to the leadership of the PRC. Acquisition and maintenance of intellectual and financial capital through coercion is problematic. Unlike assets of the past, one cannot conquer a stock market without depriving the market of much of its value.

A second way in which integration discourages conflict is through decentralization. Wars fought to acquire productive assets involve conquest of territory, either to capture resources directly, or to barter for other assets of greater value to an aggressor. Agricultural societies increase wealth and the prestige of government as a function of tillable acreage. Important economies of scale exist in being big; geometric additions to acreage result in only linear increases in the length of borders. Constant low-level warfare (raiding) can be justified by even marginal changes in holdings. With the development of cities, conquest required greater investment for finite territorial gain, but the assets acquired offered considerably more productive benefit. Cities concentrate wealth and protection. Early cities were also entire production systems. As the history of industrialization is one of increasing complexity and geographic scope, so too the evolution of warfare sees broader clashes aimed at the conquest of larger regions. It makes little sense to conquer part of a productive process, only to be forced to purchase the proceeds of the remainder. Today, conquest of far flung productive processes would involve subduing multiple states. Conquest is thus limited to resources that are geographically concentrated, such as mineral wealth.

A final way in which development discourages conquest is through the devaluation of commodities. The 20^{th} century has seen a secular decline in commodity prices and a commensurate increase in the price of skilled labor. Contrary to conditions for most of the history of civilization, relatively little of the world's wealth is a function of agriculture. Unlike circumstances in the developing world, most of wealth in the richest countries has become increasingly difficult to capture through rent-seeking. Much of global wealth, in fact, is concentrated in financial assets, cities, and in corridors between cities. Much of the territory of developed countries is less densely populated today then in the mid-19^{th} century. Sudden, rapid, and large scale decolonization in the 1950's and 60's coincided the downward spiral of commodity prices and the increasing labor costs of governments dependent on armies of occupation for maintaining colonial possessions. While cold war conditions mandated a capital-intensive force structure of tanks, ships and aircraft, the shift away from labor-intensive armies was in part due to a decline in valuation for the traditional roles of colonial militaries. Why sit on Burma with battalions of future pensioners when the price of jute kept sinking below the Andaman sea? Since the assets that are easily conquerable and easily extracted through coercion are of ever lower value, while the assets that resist occupation and conquest are increasingly central to development in modern societies, relatively little incentive exists for developed countries to use their military capabilities for the capture of economic resources. There remains an incentive to use military force to coerce adherence to preferred policies, but fighting for territory is old-fashioned in a globalizing world.[1]

Signaling Through Globalization

The interaction of integrated states also provides non-militarized mechanisms to resolve conflict. States may be reticent to fight if warfare interferes with commerce, but bargaining theory suggests instead that it is the informational effect of economic linkages that reduces warfare. The bargaining approach explains war as the product of uncertainty. If so, then economic linkages reduce dispute behavior if they inform. "Cheap talk" signaling through domestic political constituents or opposition groups reveals relative resolve and so can explain why prosperous democracies fight each other less often. To account for the unique dyadic nature of the observation, however, signals must be confined to liberal dyads. This is possible in two ways. First, trade and other direct linkages between states tie the fate of dyads together. Conditions that harm one state do so for its parter. Integrated, liberal economies possess significant economic interdependence with other liberal states, while many developing countries do not. Second, the decision to pursue conflict with a neighbor depends on the degree to which the first criterion obtains. States that expect to suffer significant economic costs from aggression towards a neighbor (because of dependence), while inflicting relatively little harm on the neighbor, reveal resolve through costly signaling but the lack of an ability to punish means that these states obtain little in terms of concessions. Conversely, states that incur minimal cost to themselves while inflicting substantial hardship on the target can anticipate substantial concessions, though the lack of informative signal in the form of costs incurred means that considerable uncertainty exists and war may be necessary before a settlements is obtained. Symmetry (interdependence) encourages the use of economic linkages for coercion while maximizing the revelation of information and reducing the risk of war. Since integration into global capital markets involves linkages *between* states, signaling through common economic linkages and other ties better reflects the special dyadic character of the observation of the liberal peace (Gartzke & Li 2002).

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[1] Historians remark that the "American Empire" is the first to lack significant territorial aggrandisement, at least in the post-World War II period. The vast bulk of land conquered by developed countries in the 20th century has been voluntarily repatriated.

One World

There were three worlds during the cold war, East, West, and South. In the contemporary international system, states are divided between two worlds, Hobbesian and Kantian. My argument here has been that the prospects for political integration into a single Kantian system depend on economic integration, rather than democratization. Regime type may be seen as a byproduct of development. The alternative is to presume that citizens only prefer democracy once they are rich. Global peace in short depends on globalization. Democracy can feed the needs of individual societies for more responsive government, lower rent-seeking, etc. It is less likely that democratization will lead to a broadening of what we think of today as the democratic peace. Even now, there exists significant divergence of opinion among representative democracies. This divergence of opinion will only increase as more states become democratic. It is hard to doubt, for example, that a democratic “Arab street” would be hostile to US moves in the Middle East. Would pressures on an Egyptian democrat be for peace or more aggression toward Israel? Bueno de Mesquita, Morrow, Siverson & Smith (1999) point out that it is easier to run an autocracy through individualized benefits (bribes) than a democracy (which requires “good policy”). Allocation of private goods among a large selectorate leads to small portions. Rather than seeking resources, pressure exists in democracies for leaders to pursue the foreign policy objectives preferred by citizens. One need only extend this insight in a minor way to see what this means for coopting governments. While democracy may contribute to a commonality of goals, the chief function and purpose of democracy is to empower popular political expression. If we cannot deny a divergence of individual human preferences in the world, we cannot deny that democracy will give to this divergence the implements and prerogatives of state power. The critical test of the democratic peace thesis will occur as democratization gives the disgruntled masses of the developing world greater political power in developing states. In the interim, growing evidence exists that the special peace exists largely only for prosperous states. This fact, and the need for a dyadic account grounded in the logic of contests, suggests that economic factors associated with globalization are likely to play a more prominent role in ensuring an end to history than is presently generally recognized.

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