How Liberalism Produces Democratic Peace

John M. Owen

$\mathbf{T}$he proposition that democracies seldom if ever go to war against one another has nearly become a truism. The "democratic peace" has attracted attention for a number of reasons. It is "the closest thing we have to an empirical law in the study of international relations," reports one scholar.[1] It poses an apparent anomaly to realism, the dominant school of security studies. And it has become an axiom of U.S. foreign policy. "Democracies don't attack each other," President Clinton declared in his 1994 State of the Union address, meaning that "ultimately the best strategy to insure our security and to build a durable peace is to support the advance of democracy elsewhere." Clinton has called democratization the "third pillar" of his foreign policy.[2]

The democratic peace proposition is vulnerable in at least three ways, however. First, it contains two inherent ambiguities: How does one define democracy? What counts as a war? The slipperiness of these terms provides a temptation to tautology: to define them so as to safeguard the proposition. Indeed, some challengers to the proposition claim that democracies have been at war with each other several times.[3] A second challenge is that the

John M. Owen is a fellow at the Center for International Security and Arms Control at Stanford University.

1. Jack S. Levy, "Domestic Politics and War," in Robert I. Rotberg and Theodore K. Rabb, *The Origin and Prevention of Major Wars* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 88. See also Bruce Russett, *Grasping the Democratic Peace: Principles for a Post–Cold War World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), pp. 3–23; and James Lee Ray, "Wars between Democracies: Rare or Nonexistent?" *International Interactions*, Vol. 18, No. 3 (Spring 1988), pp. 251–276.
2. "Excerpts from President Clinton's State of the Union Message," *New York Times*, January 26, 1994, p. A17; "The Clinton Administration Begins," *Foreign Policy Bulletin*, Vol. 3, No. 4/5 (January–April 1993), p. 5.
3. See for example Christopher Layne, "Kant or Cant: The Myth of the Democratic Peace," *International Security*, Vol. 19, No. 2 (Fall 1994), pp. 5–49; Kenneth N. Waltz, "The Emerging Structure of International Politics," *International Security*, Vol. 18, No. 2 (Fall 1993), p. 78; Jack Vincent, "Freedom and International Conflict: Another Look," *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 31, No. 1 (March 1987), pp. 102–112; and Henry S. Farber and Joanne Gowa, "Polities and Peace," unpublished manuscript, Princeton University, January 11, 1994. Claiming that democracies have never fought one another is Ray, "Wars between Democracies."

lack of wars among democracies, even if true, is not surprising. Wars are so rare that random chance could account for the democratic peace, much as it could account for an absence of war among, say, states whose names begin with the letter K.[4] A third critique points out that the democratic peace lacks a convincing theoretical foundation. No one is sure why democracies do not fight one another and yet do fight non-democracies.[5] That we do not really know the causal mechanism behind the democratic peace means we cannot be certain the peace is genuine. It may be an epiphenomenon, a by-product of other causal variables such as those suggested by realist theories of international politics.[6]

In this article I defend the democratic peace proposition by attempting to remedy the last problem. I do not rebut the argument that the proposition is tautological, although it is worth noting that most democratic peace theorists are meticulous in their definitions, and that their critics are also susceptible to the tautological temptation. I also leave aside the "random chance" argument, except to point out with its proponents that democracies also appear more likely to align with one another. Rather, I argue that liberal ideas cause liberal democracies to tend away from war with one another, and that the same ideas prod these states into war with illiberal states. I derived the argument by testing propositions from existing democratic peace theories[7] on historical cases, then using the results to formulate a new theory.

---

4. David Spiro, "The Insignificance of the Liberal Peace," *International Security*, Vol. 19, No. 2 (Fall 1994), pp. 50–86; John J. Mearsheimer, "Back to the Future: Instability in Europe after the Cold War," *International Security*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (Summer 1990), p. 50. Spiro does not believe random chance accounts for war; he also argues that liberal states do tend to align with one another.

5. Melvin Small and J. David Singer, "The War-proneness of Democratic Regimes," *Jerusalem Journal of International Relations*, Vol. 1, No. 4 (Summer 1976), pp. 50–69. R.J. Rummel maintains that democracies are *generally* less prone to war. Rummel, "Libertarianism and International Violence," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 27, No. 1 (March 1983), pp. 27–71.

6. Mearsheimer, "Back to the Future," pp. 48–51; Farber and Gowa, "Polities and Peace," pp. 3–8. See also Michael Desch, "War and State Formation, Peace and State Deformation?" unpublished manuscript, Olin Institute for Strategic Studies, Harvard University, November 1993.

7. See Immanuel Kant, "Perpetual Peace, a Philosophical Sketch," in *Perpetual Peace and Other Essays*, trans. Ted Humphrey (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1983), pp. 107–143; Michael Doyle, "Kant, Liberal Legacies, and Foreign Affairs, Part I," *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, Vol. 12, No. 3 (Summer 1983), pp. 205–235; Doyle, "Liberalism and World Politics," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 80, No. 4 (December 1986), pp. 1151–1169; Russett, *Grasping the Democratic Peace*; Bruce Bueno de Mesquita and David Lalman, *War and Reason: Domestic and International Imperatives* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), chap. 5; David A. Lake, "Powerful Pacifists: Democratic States and War," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 86, No. 1 (March 1992), pp. 24–37; Randall L. Schweller, "Domestic Structure and Preventive War: Are

The cases are war-threatening crises involving the United States from the 1790s through World War I.[8]

I define a liberal democracy as a state that instantiates liberal ideas, one where liberalism is the dominant ideology and citizens have leverage over war decisions. That is, liberal democracies are those states with a visible liberal presence, and that feature free speech and regular competitive elections of the officials empowered to declare war. I argue that liberal ideology and institutions work in tandem to bring about democratic peace. Liberals believe that individuals everywhere are fundamentally the same, and are best off pursuing self-preservation and material well-being. Freedom is required for these pursuits, and peace is required for freedom; coercion and violence are counter-productive. Thus all individuals share an interest in peace, and should want war only as an instrument to bring about peace. Liberals believe that democracies seek their citizens' true interests and that thus by definition they are pacific and trustworthy. Non-democracies may be dangerous because they seek other ends, such as conquest or plunder. Liberals thus hold that the national interest calls for accommodation of fellow democracies, but sometimes calls for war with non-democracies.

When liberals run the government, relations with fellow democracies are harmonious. When illiberals govern, relations may be rockier. Even then, if war is threatened with a state that the liberal opposition considers a fellow democracy, liberals agitate to prevent hostilities using the free speech allowed them by law. Illiberal leaders are unable to rally the public to fight, and fear that an unpopular war would lead to their ouster at the next election. On the other hand, if the crisis is with a state believed to be a non-democracy, the leaders may be pushed toward war.

This argument improves on previous accounts of the democratic peace in several ways. First, it grounds liberal ideology in an Enlightenment concept of self-interest. Second, it opens the "black box" of the state to show how democratic structures translate liberal preferences into policy even when

---

Democracies More Pacific?" *World Politics*, Vol. 44, No. 2 (January 1992), pp. 235–269; T. Clifton Morgan and Sally Howard Campbell, "Domestic Structure, Decisional Constraints, and War: So Why Kant Democracies Fight?" *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 35, No. 2 (June 1991), pp. 187–211; R.J. Rummel, *Understanding Conflict and War*, Vol. 4 (Beverly Hills: SAGE Publications, 1974).
8. The crises on which I tested the explanations were: U.S.-Britain 1794–96, U.S.-France 1796–98, U.S.-Britain 1803–12, U.S.-Britain 1845–46, U.S.-Mexico 1845–46, U.S.-Britain 1861–63, U.S.-Spain 1873, U.S.-Chile 1891–92, U.S.-Britain 1895–96, U.S.-Spain 1898, U.S.-Mexico 1914–16, and U.S.-Germany 1916–17. See John M. Owen, "Testing the Democratic Peace: American Diplomatic Crises, 1794–1917," Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 1993.

statesmen are themselves illiberal. Third, it takes into account the importance of perceptions. For my argument to hold, liberals must consider the other state democratic. My argument also answers several criticisms of the democratic peace thesis. It shows that the inadequacy of either democratic structures or norms alone to explain democratic peace does not prove that the democratic peace is spurious. It shows how illiberal leaders of democracies can make threats against one another and yet still be domestically constrained from attacking one another. It explains several supposed exceptions to the democratic peace by taking account of actors' perceptions; for example, the War of 1812 was fought at a time when almost no Americans considered England a democracy.

I begin by briefly reviewing previous theories of democratic peace and attempts to test them. I then summarize the foundations of liberalism and the foreign policy ideology it produces. In so doing, I explore the perceptual aspect of the causal mechanism. Next I describe how democratic institutions make it likely that liberal ideology will influence policy during a war-threatening crisis. I then illustrate the argument in four historical cases: the Franco-American crisis of 1796–98, and the Anglo-American crises of 1803–12, 1861–63, and 1895–96. I answer realist critics of the democratic peace proposition, and suggest possible ways to synthesize realism and liberalism. I conclude by cautioning that although democratic peace is real, threats to liberalism itself mean that it is not a certain precursor to perpetual peace.

Previous Attempts to Explain Democratic Peace

Typically, theories of the democratic peace are divided into *structural* and *normative* theories. Structural accounts attribute the democratic peace to the institutional constraints within democracies. Chief executives in democracies must gain approval for war from cabinet members or legislatures, and ultimately from the electorate. Normative theory locates the cause of the democratic peace in the ideas or norms held by democracies. Democracies believe it would be unjust or imprudent to fight one another. They practice the norm of compromise with each other that works so well within their own borders.[9]

---

9. Some explanations, including those of Kant, Doyle, and Rummel (fn. 7), contain both structural and normative elements. However, these writers disagree as to what constitutes a democracy and why they forgo wars against one another; they do not take perceptions into account; and they underspecify how democratic structures work.

On balance, statistical tests of these two theories have yielded no clear winner.[10] Moreover, although quantitative studies provide a necessary part of our evaluation of these theories by identifying correlations, by their nature they cannot tell us the full story. First, they often must use crude proxy variables that are several steps removed from the phenomena being measured.[11] Second, they infer processes from statistical relationships between these variables, but do not examine those processes directly. Overcoming these limitations requires looking at the actual processes in historical cases, or "process tracing."[12] Joseph Nye writes that democratic peace "need[s] exploration via detailed case studies to look at what actually happened in particular instances."[13] One way to carry out such tests is to ask: If the theory is true, then what else should we expect to observe happening?[14]

In carrying out such process-tracing on a dozen cases, I uncovered problems in both structural and normative accounts. I found that democratic structures were nearly as likely to drive states to war as to restrain them from it. Cabinets, legislatures, and publics were often more belligerent than the government heads they were supposed to constrain. I found that the normative theory neglected to take perceptions into account. Often states which today's researchers consider democratic did not consider each other democratic. Thus the anticipated normative check on war was frequently absent.[15]

---

10. Studies favoring some form of structural theory include Bueno de Mesquita and Lalman, *War and Reason;* and Morgan and Campbell, "So Why Kant Democracies Fight?" Favoring normative theory are Zeev Maoz and Bruce Russett, "Normative and Structural Causes of Democratic Peace, 1946–1986" *American Political Science Review,* Vol. 87, No. 3 (September 1993), pp. 624–638; and William J. Dixon, "Democracy and the Peaceful Settlement of Conflict," *American Political Science Review,* Vol. 88, No. 1 (March 1994), pp. 14–32.

11. For example, Maoz and Russett infer democratic norms from regime stability and from levels of internal social and political violence. Maoz and Russett, "Normative and Structural Causes," p. 630.

12. Alexander George and Timothy J. McKeown, "Case Studies and Theories of Organizational Decision Making," in *Advances in Information Processing in Organizations,* Vol. 2 (Greenwich, Conn.: JAI Press, 1985); see also David Dessler, "Beyond Correlations: Toward a Causal Theory of War," *International Studies Quarterly,* Vol. 35, No. 3 (September 1991), pp. 337–345; James Lee Ray, *Democracy and International Conflict: An Evaluation of the Democratic Peace Proposition* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1995), chapter 4.

13. Joseph S. Nye, Jr., *Understanding International Conflicts* (New York: HarperCollins, 1993), p. 40.

14. See Gary King, Robert O. Keohane, and Sidney Verba, *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

15. See Owen, "Testing the Democratic Peace." For a summary of the findings, see Owen, "Is the Democratic Peace a Matter of Luck?" paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, Washington, D.C., September 1993.

These findings do not kill the democratic peace thesis. Logically, that neither structures nor norms by themselves explain the democratic peace does not imply that the two in tandem cannot do so. The structure/norms typology used by the literature is used merely for analytic convenience. If in trying to determine whether an automobile will run I separate its gasoline from its engine, then find that neither component by itself suffices to run the automobile, I cannot then conclude that the car will not run. It could still be that liberal ideology motivates some citizens against war with a fellow democracy, and democratic institutions allow this ideology to affect foreign policy.

Some of the cases suggest such a synergy, I found, but only when the actors' perceptions are taken into account. For example, most Americans in the nineteenth century thought in terms of *republics* and *monarchies* rather than *democracies* and *non-democracies*. When in 1873 the United States nearly went to war with Spain during the *Virginius* affair, many Americans, including the secretary of state, explicitly argued for peace precisely because Spain was at the time a republic.[16] Again in 1892, when President Benjamin Harrison asked Congress to declare war on Chile after the *Baltimore* affair, many Americans expressed opposition based on the fact that Chile was a republic.[17]

These considerations combine with quantitative evidence to suggest that democratic peace is a genuine phenomenon that simply needs a better explanation. Multivariate analysis indicates that it is not the product of some omitted variable. In separate studies, Bremer and Maoz and Russett found that democracy as an independent variable still had explanatory power after controlling for an impressive array of competitors. Variables suggested by realism such as relative power, alliance status, and the presence of a hegemon did not erase the effects of democracy.[18]

---

16. See especially the attitude of Hamilton Fish, the U.S. secretary of state, in Allan Nevins, *Hamilton Fish: The Inner History of the Grant Administration* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1936), pp. 668–674. The fullest treatment of the crisis is in Richard H. Bradford, *The "Virginius" Affair* (Boulder: Colorado Associated University Press, 1980).
17. E.g., in opposing Harrison, Representative William Breckinridge of Kentucky told Congress: "War . . . is only the last resort, especially so when the war must be with a republic like our own, anxious for liberty, desiring to maintain constitutional freedom, seeking progress by means of that freedom." 52d Congress, 1st sess., *Congressional Record*, Vol. 23 (January 26, 1892), p. 550. See also Joyce S. Goldberg, *The "Baltimore" Affair* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986).
18. Stuart Bremer, "Democracy and Militarized Interstate Conflict, 1816–1965," *International Interactions*, Vol. 18, No. 3 (Spring 1993), pp. 231–249; Zeev Maoz and Bruce Russett, "Alliances, Contiguity, Wealth, and Political Stability: Is the Lack of Conflict between Democracies a Statistical Artifact?" *International Interactions*, Vol. 17, No. 3 (Spring 1992), pp. 245–267.

As explained at the end of this article, however, I do not argue that power politics has no force in determining the foreign policies of liberal democracies. Rather, I describe a second force—liberalism—which prods democracies toward peace with each other, and toward war with non-democracies. In looking within the state, I suggest domestic foundations for those studies that have explored the international systemic aspects of the democratic peace.[19]

Liberalism as the Cause of Democratic Peace

Liberal ideas are the source—the independent variable—behind the distinctive foreign policies of liberal democracies. These ideas give rise to two intervening variables, liberal ideology and domestic democratic institutions, which shape foreign policy. Liberal ideology prohibits war against liberal democracies, but sometimes calls for war against illiberal states. Democratic institutions allow these drives to affect foreign policy and international relations.[20]

LIBERAL IDEAS

Liberalism is universalistic and tolerant. Liberal political theory, such as that of Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, and Kant, typically begins with abstract man in a state of nature in which he is equal to all other men. Although beliefs and cultures may differ, liberalism says, all persons share a fundamental

---

19. On the level of the international system, this model is compatible with others which essentially present democracies as constrained (for various reasons) to prevent disputes among themselves from turning into wars. For Bruce Bueno de Mesquita and David Lalman, for example, democracies know each other to be prevented by domestic checks and balances from initiating war. This knowledge makes cooperation the rational choice in the "international interactions game." At the same time, democracies know that non-democracies, which are unconstrained, have the same knowledge and are prone to exploit them for that reason. Democracies thus may find it rational pre-emptively to attack non-democracies for fear of being taken advantage of. See Bueno de Mesquita and Lalman, *War and Reason*, chap. 5; see also William J. Dixon, "Democracy and the Peaceful Settlement"; and D. Marc Kilgour, "Domestic Political Structure and War Behavior: A Game-Theoretic Approach," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 35, No. 2 (June 1991), pp. 266–284.
20. See Judith Goldstein and Robert O. Keohane, *Ideas and Foreign Policy: Beliefs, Institutions, and Political Change* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), pp. 13–17. See also Spiro, "Insignificance," for the importance of liberal conceptions of national interest.

interest in self-preservation and material well-being.[21] There is thus a harmony of interests among all individuals. To realize this harmony, each individual must be allowed to follow his or her own preferences as long as they do not detract from another's freedom. People thus need to cooperate by tolerating one another and forgoing coercion and violence.[22] Since true interests harmonize, the more people are free, the better off all are. Liberalism is cosmopolitan, positing that all persons, not just certain subjects of one's own state, should be free. The spread of liberalism need not be motivated by altruism. It is entirely in the individual's self-interest to cooperate.[23] In sum, liberalism's ends are life and property, and its means are liberty and toleration.

Liberals believe that not all persons or nations are free, however. Two things are needed for freedom. First, persons or nations must be themselves enlightened, aware of their interests and how they should be secured.[24] Second, people must live under enlightened political institutions which allow their true interests to shape politics.[25] Liberals disagree over which political institutions are enlightened. Kant stressed a strict separation of the executive from the legislative power.[26] For most Americans in the nineteenth century,

21. John Locke, for example, writes: "The great and *chief end* therefore, of Mens uniting into Commonwealths, and putting themselves under Government, *is the Preservation of their Property*." Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, chap. 9, para. 124. Locke says "property" includes one's "Life, Liberty, and Estate"; ibid., chap. 7, para. 87. In Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, ed. Peter Laslett (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 350–351, 323.

22. Immanuel Kant, who deduced a zone of peace among republics in the 1790s, argues that over time, the devastation of conflict teaches them that it is best to cooperate with others so as to realize their full capacities. See for example Kant, "Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Intent," in *Perpetual Peace*, pp. 31–34. See also Locke, *Second Treatise*, chap. 2, para. 5, p. 270. By "harmony," I do not imply that uncoordinated selfish action by each automatically results in all being better off (a "natural" harmony). All individuals are interested in peace, but enlightenment, the right institutions, and cooperation are necessary to bring peace about. On the distinction between uncoordinated harmony and cooperation, see Robert O. Keohane, *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), pp. 49–64.

23. Kant says a republic is possible "even for a people comprised of devils (if only they possess understanding)." Kant, *Perpetual Peace*, p. 124. See also Alexis de Tocqueville, "How the Americans Combat Individualism by the Doctrine of Self-interest Properly Understood," *Democracy in America*, ed. J.P. Mayer, trans. George Lawrence (New York: Harper and Row, 1988), part 2, chap. 8, pp. 525–528.

24. See Kant, "An Answer to the Question: What Is Enlightenment?" in Kant, *Perpetual Peace*, pp. 41–48.

25. For a brief history of the view that selfish rulers rather than ordinary people are responsible for war, see Michael Howard, *War and the Liberal Conscience* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1978), pp. 14–18.

26. Kant, "Perpetual Peace," pp. 112–115. Kant calls such states "republics," but by his definition monarchies may be republics.

only republics (non-monarchies) were "democracies" or "free countries."[27] Today, Westerners tend to trust states that allow meaningful political competition. Central to all these criteria is the requirement that the people have some leverage over their rulers. That is, nineteenth-century republics and today's liberal democracies share the essential liberal goal of preventing tyranny over individual freedom.

LIBERAL FOREIGN POLICY IDEOLOGY

Liberalism gives rise to an ideology that distinguishes states primarily according to regime type: in assessing a state, liberalism first asks whether it is a liberal democracy or not.[28] This is in contrast to neorealism, which distinguishes states according to capabilities. Liberalism, in looking to characteristics other than power, is similar to most other systems of international thought, including communism, fascism, and monarchism.[29]

Liberalism is, however, more tolerant of its own kind than these other systems. Once liberals accept a foreign state as a liberal democracy, they adamantly oppose war against that state. The rationale follows from liberal premises. *Ceteris paribus*, people are better off without war, because it is costly and dangerous. War is called for only when it would serve liberal ends—i.e., when it would most likely enhance self-preservation and well-being. This can only be the case when the adversary is not a liberal democracy. Liberal democracies are believed reasonable, predictable, and trustworthy, because they are governed by their citizens' true interests, which harmonize with all individuals' true interests around the world. Liberals believe that they understand the intentions of foreign liberal democracies, and that those intentions are always pacific toward fellow liberal democracies.

---

27. See for example David M. Fitzsimons, "Tom Paine's New World Order: Idealistic Internationalism in the Ideology of Early American Foreign Relations," unpublished manuscript, University of Michigan, 1994.
28. I have benefited from conversations with Sean Lynn-Jones on many of these points. For an attempt to reformulate liberal international relations theory based on distinctions among domestic political orders, see Andrew Moravcsik, "Liberalism and International Relations Theory," Working Paper, Center for International Affairs, Harvard University, 1992.
29. Traditional realists such as E.H. Carr and Hans Morgenthau, ancient Greeks, medieval Muslims, and communists all see state-level distinctions as important. Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis* (London: Macmillan, 1946), p. 236; Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations*, 3d ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1965), p. 131; Sohail Hashmi, "The Sixth Pillar: Jihad and the Ethics of War and Peace in Islam," Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 1994; Robert Jervis, "Hypotheses on Misperception," *World Politics*, Vol. 20, No. 3 (April 1968), p. 467.

Again, it is not necessary that liberals be motivated by justice, only by self-interest.[30]

Illiberal states, on the other hand, are viewed *prima facie* as unreasonable, unpredictable, and potentially dangerous. These are states either ruled by despots, or with unenlightened citizenries. Illiberal states may seek illiberal ends such as conquest, intolerance, or impoverishment of others. Liberal democracies do not automatically fight all illiberal states in an endless crusade to spread freedom, however. Usually, they estimate that the costs of liberalizing another state are too high, often because the illiberal state is too powerful.[31] Liberal democracies do not fully escape the imperatives of power politics.

THE IMPORTANCE OF PERCEPTIONS. That a state has enlightened citizens and liberal-democratic institutions, however, is not sufficient for it to belong to the democratic peace: if its peer states do not believe it is a liberal democracy, they will not treat it as one. History shows many cases where perceptions tripped up democratic peace. For example, as Christopher Layne demonstrates, the French after World War I did not consider Germany a fellow liberal democracy, even though Germans were governed under the liberal Weimar constitution. The salient fact about Germany, in the French view of 1923, was not that it had a liberal constitution, but that it was peopled by Germans, who had recently proven themselves most unenlightened and were now reneging on reparations agreements.[32]

Thus, for the liberal mechanism to prevent a liberal democracy from going to war against a foreign state, liberals must consider the foreign state a liberal democracy. Most explanations of democratic peace posit that democracies recognize one another and refuse to fight on that basis; but the researchers never test this assumption.[33] In fact, often it does not hold. The refusal to

---

30. Here my argument differs from that of Michael Doyle, who writes that "domestically just republics, which rest on consent, presume foreign republics to be also consensual, just, and therefore deserving of accommodation." Doyle, "Kant, Part I," p. 230.
31. Compare this with the Union's attitude toward Britain in the Civil War, described below. For explanations that see democratic prudence as more central to the democratic peace, see Schweller, "Democracy and Preventive War"; and Lake, "Powerful Pacifists."
32. See Layne, "The Myth of the Democratic Peace." More research needs to be done on the question of how a state with democratic institutions comes to be regarded by its peers as liberal.
33. For example, Bueno de Mesquita and Lalman assert: "The presence of the constraint is not alone sufficient to ensure cooperation or harmony. However, it is common knowledge whether a given state is a liberal democracy." In *War and Reason*, p. 156. The same assumption is used (less explicitly) by Doyle, "Liberalism and World Politics"; Russett, *Grasping the Democratic Peace*; Ray, "Wars between Democracies"; Lake, "Powerful Pacifists"; Schweller, "Domestic Structure and Preventive War"; and Rummel, "Libertarianism and International Violence."

take this into account keeps the democratic peace literature from understanding apparent exceptions to democratic peace, such as the War of 1812, the American Civil War, and the Spanish-American War.[34] My argument explains these apparent exceptions. As shown below, most Americans did not consider England democratic in 1812 because England was a monarchy. In 1861, Southern slavery prevented liberals in the Union from considering the Confederacy a liberal democracy.[35] Almost no Americans considered Spain a democracy in 1898. To determine which states belong to the pacific union, we must do more than simply examine their constitutions. We must examine how the liberals themselves define democracy.

Skeptics would immediately counter that the subjectivity inherent in terms such as "democracy" and "despotism" means that these concepts have no independent causal force. When leaders want war, they simply define the rival state as despotic; when they want peace, they define the friend as democratic. Thus Joseph Stalin became "Uncle Joe" when Americans needed to justify fighting alongside the Soviet Union against Germany in World War II.

In fact, however, democracy and despotism are not wholly subjective. Liberals have relatively stable conceptions of what a democracy looks like. In the nineteenth century, most Americans applauded when other states became republican, and anticipated friendly relations with those states. More recently, the attitude of the Western democracies toward Russia shows the independent power that liberalization has on expectations of hostility. The failed August 1991 coup and subsequent breakup of the Soviet Union did not cause the vast Soviet nuclear arsenal to disappear. Yet James Baker, then U.S. secretary of state, announced on February 5, 1992:

The Cold War has ended, and we now have a chance to forge a democratic peace, an enduring peace built on shared values—democracy and political and economic freedom. The strength of these values in Russia and the other

---

34. Kenneth Waltz asserts that the War of 1812 and the Civil War were fought between democracies; Waltz, "Emerging Structure," p. 78. David Lake, who argues for the democratic peace proposition, calls the Spanish-American War a war between democracies. Lake, "Powerful Pacifists," p. 33.

35. As the nineteenth century reached its midpoint, slavery came to be seen by such Southern figures as John C. Calhoun as "the most safe and stable basis for free institutions in the world." It mattered a great deal to Northerners that the South was illiberal. Thus the *New York Tribune* in 1855 could write: "We are not one people. We are two peoples. We are a people for Freedom and a people for Slavery. Between the two, conflict is inevitable." See Eric Foner, *Politics and Ideology in the Age of the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), pp. 40–41, 52–53.

new independent states will be the surest foundation for peace—and the strongest guarantee of our national security—for decades to come.[36]

ILLIBERAL DEMOCRACIES. The importance of liberal ideology is evident from other supposed exceptions to democratic peace. It has been considered a puzzle, for example, that ancient Greek democracies waged war against one another.[37] But Thucydides reveals that the ancient Athenians were not liberal. They valued heroism and conquest over self-preservation and well-being. The Corinthians tell the oligarchical Spartans that they are more sluggish than the Athenians, who "are adventurous beyond their power, and daring beyond their judgment, and in danger they are sanguine. . . . Their bodies they spend ungrudgingly in their country's cause . . . and to them laborious occupation is less of a misfortune than the peace of a quiet life."[38] The Athenian good life consisted in what Charles Taylor calls the warrior ethic.[39] In this world view, all persons are not fundamentally the same, and there is no harmony of interests among them.[40] Ancient democracy as a result is a restive, adventurous, conquering regime, to be trusted by no one.

A similar illiberalism is evident in many "democracies" today. Balkan peoples live in popularly-governed polities; yet they define themselves primarily not as abstract individuals, but according to religious categories: Serbs are Orthodox Christian, Croats are Roman Catholic, and Bosnians are Muslim. The lack of commonality means no democratic peace among these peoples. Iranians live in a state with universal adult suffrage and vigorous parliamentary debate, yet they do not view the world through a liberal lens, where all

---

36. On April 21, 1992, Baker declared, "Real democracies do not go to war with each other." Quoted in Russett, *Grasping the Democratic Peace*, pp. 128–129.
37. See Bruce Russett and William Antholis, "The Imperfect Democratic Peace of Ancient Athens," in Russett, *Grasping the Democratic Peace*, pp. 43–71.
38. Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War* I, 70, ed. T.E. Wick, trans. Richard Crawley (New York: Random House, 1982), p. 40.
39. "There is . . . a warrior (and later warrior-citizen) morality, where what is valued is strength, courage, and the ability to conceive and execute great deeds, and where life is aimed at fame and glory, and the immortality one enjoys when one's name lives for ever on men's lips." This ethic, dominant in the era of Homer, was still very much alive at the time of Pericles, as evidenced by Plato's arguments against it. Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), pp. 115–118.
40. As Russett and Antholis write, "the citizens of most democratic cities probably did not think of democracy as a trans-Hellenic project, at least at the outset of the Peloponnesian War. The individual liberties central to liberal democracy were not so universalized in the ancient world." Russett, *Grasping the Democratic Peace*, p. 45. See Aristotle, *The Politics*, trans. Carnes Lord (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), Book I, chaps. 4–6, pp. 39–43 on how certain persons are slaves by nature.

individuals are best off cooperating to pursue self-preservation and well-being. Other new democracies, such as those arising from the ruins of the Soviet Union, may be illiberal as well. If so, democratic peace will not emerge in that area of the world.

DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS
The domestic structures that translate liberal preferences into foreign policy are likewise a product of liberal ideas. Liberalism seeks to actualize the harmony of interests among individuals by insuring that the freedom of each is compatible with the freedom of all. It thus calls for structures that protect the right of each citizen to self-government. Most important for our purposes are those giving citizens leverage over governmental decision makers. Freedom of speech is necessary because it allows citizens to evaluate alternative foreign policies. Regular, competitive elections are necessary because they provide citizens with the possibility of punishing officials who violate their rights. Liberalism says that the people who fight and fund war have the right to be consulted, through representatives they elect, before entering it.[41]

DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS. When those who govern hold the liberal ideology prohibiting war against fellow liberal democracies, then the role of democratic institutions is limited simply to putting these liberals in office. Liberal American presidents have included Thomas Jefferson and Woodrow Wilson. These men sought to implement liberal foreign policies, including harmonious relations with those states they considered liberal and confrontation with those they considered illiberal.

Not everyone in every liberal democracy, however, necessarily holds the liberal ideology. Some may instead be political realists, who view power as more important than freedom. Some others may simply want good relations with economic partners, regardless of regime type.[42] When such illiberals govern liberal democracies, they may lead the nation into disputes with fellow liberal democracies. They can do so because the general public pays little attention to everyday foreign policy.

---

41. "If . . . the consent of the citizenry is required in order to determine whether or not there will be war, it is natural that they consider all its calamities before committing themselves to so risky a game." Kant, "Perpetual Peace," p. 113.
42. An explanation of why not everyone in a regime necessarily holds the dominant ideology is beyond the scope of this article. Here I simply take it as empirically obvious that not all citizens of liberal democracies are liberal, just as not all citizens of communist states are communist.

ELITES AND EVERYDAY FOREIGN POLICY. Day-to-day foreign policy is mostly the province of elites. Ordinary citizens have good reason for ignoring relations with other nations. Since relations with most nations have little perceptible impact on the individual citizen, the expected payoff to each is not worth the time investment.[43] This collective-action problem means that normal foreign policy is delegated to representatives.

In making everyday foreign policy, the main domestic influences on these representatives are elites. Together, representatives and elites form what James Rosenau calls *opinion leaders:* people "who occupy positions which enable them regularly to transmit, either locally or nationally, opinions about any issue to unknown persons outside of their occupational field or about more than one class of issues to unknown professional colleagues." They include "government officials, prominent businessmen, civil servants, journalists, scholars, heads of professional associations, and interest groups."[44] In liberal democracies, these include staunch liberals who always desire to see good relations with fellow liberal democracies, and often desire confrontation with those states they consider illiberal. Without the leverage provided by public attention, the liberal elite has no special advantage over other elites, such as special interests.[45] The state may thereby fall into a crisis with a fellow liberal democracy.

WHEN WAR IS THREATENED: LIBERAL ELITES AND THE PUBLIC. At the point where war is threatened, however, it becomes in the interest of each citizen to pay attention. War costs blood and treasure, and these high costs are felt throughout society. It also requires public mobilization. Those statesmen and elites who want war must persuade public opinion that war is necessary. In democracies, this persuasion typically includes arguments that the adversary state is not democratic. When the prior liberal consensus is that the adversary *is* a liberal democracy, however, these illiberal statesmen find that they cannot mobilize the public.

This is in part because they face strong opposition from liberal opinion leaders. Using the tools allowed them by domestic institutions—the media,

---

43. This reasoning follows that of Anthony Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (New York: Harper and Row, 1957), pp. 207–276.
44. James Rosenau, *Public Opinion and Foreign Policy: An Operational Formulation* (New York: Random House, 1961), pp. 35–39; Michael Leigh, *Mobilizing Consent: Public Opinion and American Foreign Policy, 1937–1947* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1976), pp. 4–5.
45. For a theory of how special interests can "hijack" foreign policy, see Jack Snyder, *Myths of Empire: Domestic Politics and International Ambition* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), pp. 31–55.

public speeches, rallies, and so on—liberal elites agitate against war with fellow liberal democracies. They prevent illiberal elites from persuading the public that war is necessary.[46] Illiberal statesmen find that war with a liberal democracy would be extremely unpopular. Moreover, they begin to fear electoral ouster if they go to war against a fellow liberal democracy. Even illiberal statesmen are then compelled to act as liberals and resolve the crisis peacefully.[47]

Alternatively, there may be times when liberals desire war with an illiberal state, yet illiberal statesmen oppose such a war. Using the same institutions of free discussion and the threat of electoral punishment, liberals may force their leaders into war. Such was the case in the Spanish-American War.[48]

This part of my argument conforms to recent research on public opinion and foreign policy, which indicates a dialectic among elites, the general public, and policy makers. A number of studies indicate that opinion changes precede policy changes, suggesting that the former cause the latter rather than vice versa.[49] Moreover, a recent work finds that in the 1970s and 1980s the greatest influences on aggregate shifts in U.S. public opinion were television news commentators and experts. For example, television commentators' statements on crises in Vietnam in 1969 and the Middle East in 1974–75 and 1977–78 evidently swayed public opinion. Often these media commentators opposed official governmental policy.[50] Together, these findings suggest that, at least in the United States, an opinion elite at times shapes public positions on issues, thus constraining foreign policy.

Figure 1 illustrates the argument. Liberal ideas form the independent variable. These ideas produce the ideology which prohibits war with fellow liberal democracies and sometimes calls for war with illiberal states. The ideas also give rise to democratic institutions. Working in tandem, the ideology and institutions push liberal democracies toward democratic peace.
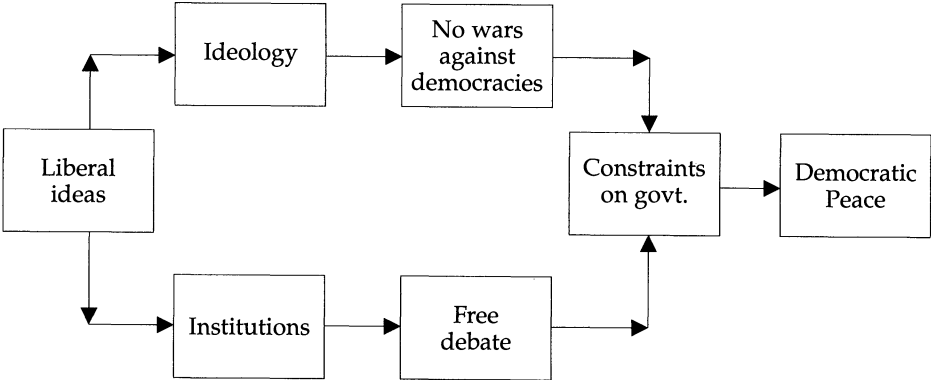
---

46. On the importance of free speech to democratic peace, see Stephen Van Evera, "Primed for Peace: Europe After the Cold War," *International Security*, Vol. 15, No. 3 (Winter 1990/91), p. 27.
47. Works that have used the assumption that elected officials value re-election above all else include Downs, *Economic Theory*; and David R. Mayhew, *Congress: The Electoral Connection* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974).
48. See John L. Offner, *An Unwanted War: The Diplomacy of the United States and Spain over Cuba, 1895–1898* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992).
49. For a summary, see Lawrence R. Jacobs and Robert Y. Shapiro, "Studying Substantive Democracy," *PS*, Vol. 27, No. 1 (March 1994), pp. 9–10.
50. Popular presidents had strong effects, while unpopular ones had little effect. Interestingly, special interest groups usually caused public opinion to move in a *contrary* direction. Benjamin I. Page, Robert Y. Shapiro, and Glenn R. Dempsey, "What Moves Public Opinion," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 81, No. 1 (March 1987), pp. 23–43.

Figure 1.   Causal Pathways of Liberal Democratic Peace.

```
            ┌──────────┐      ┌──────────┐
         ┌─▶│ Ideology │─────▶│ No wars  │────┐
         │  │          │      │ against  │    │
         │  └──────────┘      │democracies│   │
         │                    └──────────┘    ▼
  ┌──────────┐                         ┌──────────┐      ┌──────────┐
  │ Liberal  │                         │Constraints│─────▶│Democratic│
  │  ideas   │                         │ on govt. │      │  Peace   │
  └──────────┘                         └──────────┘      └──────────┘
         │                                    ▲
         │  ┌──────────┐      ┌──────────┐    │
         └─▶│Institutions│───▶│   Free   │────┘
            │          │      │  debate  │
            └──────────┘      └──────────┘
```

Hypotheses on Democratic Peace

To reiterate, I define liberal democracies as those states that are dominated by liberal ideology, and that feature, in both law and practice, free discussion and regular competitive elections. Signs that a state is dominated by liberalism may be institutional, such as equality of all citizens before the law. Or they may be informal, such as the predominance of appeals to personal freedom, self-preservation, and prosperity in debates about public life. Some states with liberal elements may be undemocratic, such as Great Britain before the 1832 Great Reform Act. Some democratic states may be illiberal, such as the Confederate States of America during the Civil War. Not all liberal democracies will forgo war with one another. A liberal democracy will only avoid war with a state that *it believes to be liberal*.

A causal mechanism such as I describe may be logically coherent yet empirically false. I now turn to the search for clues that this liberal mechanism really exists and works. As I did with previous theories of democratic peace, I ask: If this argument were valid, what would we expect to observe in the foreign policy processes in liberal democracies? I check these expectations or hypotheses against real historical cases. If the hypotheses are falsified—if

history does not bear out my expectations—then my argument is like its predecessors inadequate.[51] The hypotheses are:

Liberals will trust states they consider liberal and mistrust those they consider illiberal. I argue that liberal ideology divides the world's states into liberal democracies and illiberal states. Because they share the enlightened ends of self-preservation, material well-being, and liberty, liberal democracies are seen as trustworthy and pacific. States ruled by despots and those populated by unenlightened citizens seek illiberal ends, and are believed potentially dangerous.

When liberals observe a foreign state becoming liberal by their own standards, they will expect pacific relations with it. Although definitions of democracy vary across time and space, these definitions are relatively stable rather than arbitrary. If a state once thought despotic adopts the right institutions, or comes to be dominated by liberals, liberals in other states will begin to trust it more.

Liberals will claim that fellow liberal democracies share their ends, and that illiberal states do not. Specifically, liberals will say that liberal democratic states seek the preservation and well-being of their citizens, that they love peace and freedom, and that they are cooperative. They will say of illiberal states that they seek conquest to the detriment of their citizens' true interests, disdain peace, and are treacherous.

Liberals will not change their assessments of foreign states during crises with those states unless those states change their institutions. When a liberal democracy is embroiled in a dispute with a state it considers a fellow liberal democracy, its liberals will not switch to viewing the state as illiberal. Similarly, when a liberal democracy is in a dispute with a state it considers illiberal, its liberals will not suddenly decide that the state is liberal after all, unless its domestic institutions change. (If this hypothesis is not borne out, the democratic peace is illusory, because power politics or some other force would actually be determining what label liberals attached to foreign states.)

Liberal elites will agitate for their policies during war-threatening crises. In a crisis with a fellow liberal democracy, liberals will use the news media and other fora to persuade leaders and the public to resolve the crisis peacefully. In a crisis with an illiberal state, liberals may agitate in favor of war if they believe it would serve liberal ends.

---

51. See King, Keohane, and Verba, *Designing Social Inquiry.*

During crises, statesmen will be constrained to follow liberal policy. When officials are themselves liberal, they will simply find a way to defuse crises with liberal democracies, or they may escalate them if the other state is illiberal. When officials are not liberal, they will still be pressured by public opinion, which has been aroused by a liberal elite, to forgo war with a liberal democracy; or, if the foreign state is illiberal, they may be spurred into war.

Four Cases

Four historical cases illustrate the argument: Franco-American relations in 1796–98, and Anglo-American relations during 1803–12, 1861–63, and 1895–96. These are four of the twelve cases from which I derived the argument.[52] I chose the twelve original cases because, first, they hold the identity of one state, the United States, constant. The United States has throughout its history been dominated by liberalism and featured free elections. Second, the cases allow the perceptions and governmental systems of the other state in each crisis to vary. In some crises, liberal Americans had previously considered the foreign state liberal; in others, they had not; in still others, opinion was divided. Moreover, in some of the cases the other state was dominated by liberalism and had free elections, and in others it did not. Third, choosing cases from before 1945 allows me to rule out the effects of bipolarity and nuclear weapons, two powerful confounding factors.

I chose these four cases because they have been written about extensively, and my claims are easily tested. The causal factors in my argument also vary across the four. I do not consider France in 1796–98 or Britain in 1803–12 liberal-democratic; but I do consider Britain in 1861–63 and 1895–96 to be so. These cases also point up the importance of perceptions to democratic peace. Most Americans did not consider Britain liberal-democratic in either 1803–12 or 1861–63; and most British did not consider the Union liberal in 1861, but they changed their minds in the fall of 1862. In addition, the three Anglo-American cases have all been cited as evidence *against* democratic peace.[53]

Strictly speaking, one cannot test an argument on the very cases from which it was derived. Such a "test" would be biased in favor of the argument.

---

52. The cases are listed in fn. 8.
53. On the War of 1812, see Waltz, "Emerging Structure"; on 1861 and 1895–96, see Layne, "Kant or Cant."

A true test involves fresh cases. Thus I use the following four cases to illustrate the argument rather than provide a crucial trial of its validity.

FRANCO-AMERICAN RELATIONS, 1796–98

In 1798 the United States initiated what became known as the Quasi-War with France, in which the two nations fought a series of naval battles in the Caribbean Sea. The American action was in response to French seizures of U.S. merchant vessels on the high seas, and to the "XYZ Affair" in which the French government attempted to extort thousands of dollars from three U.S. envoys in Paris. The French, then at war with England, had taken these actions in retaliation for the Jay Treaty, in which the Americans promised the British not to trade with France.[54] Here I argue that liberal ideology in the form of republican solidarity prevented France and the United States from engaging in full-scale war.

The United States in the late 1790s qualifies as a liberal democracy. Although suffrage in most states was limited to white males who owned property, regular elections were mandated by law, and Republican opposition to the Federalist government was lively. Republicans held to liberal tenets. They considered only republics—non-monarchies—to be liberal states, and they viewed France as a sister republic.[55]

They did so even though France does not qualify by my definition as a liberal democracy. The Constitution of the Year III (1795) mandated regular elections, and the French press was free, but the Executive in effect destroyed any institutional claim France had to democracy. In September 1797 and again in March 1798, radicals in the Directory ordered *coups d'état* expelling members of the executive and legislature who opposed them.[56] French foreign policy making is therefore not of direct interest here. Instead, I only

---

54. Accounts of the origins of the conflict may be found in Alexander DeConde, *The Quasi-War: The Politics and Diplomacy of the Undeclared War with France 1797–1801* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1966); Albert Hall Bowman, *The Struggle for Neutrality: Franco-American Diplomacy during the Federalist Era* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1974); William C. Stinchcombe, *The XYZ Affair* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1980); E. Wilson Lyon, "The Directory and the United States," *American Historical Review*, Vol. 43, No. 3 (April 1938), pp. 514–532; and James A. James, "French Opinion as a Factor in Preventing War between France and the United States, 1795–1800," *American Historical Review*, Vol. 30, No. 1 (October 1924), pp. 44–55.
55. See for example Bowman, *Struggle for Neutrality*, pp. 25–30.
56. Georges Lefebvre, *The Thermidoreans and the Directory*, trans. Robert Baldick (New York: Random House, 1964), pp. 176–179; R.R. Palmer, *The Age of the Democratic Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964), pp. 214–217, 255–259.

show that processes in the United States conform to the hypotheses derived from my argument.

U.S. REPUBLICANS TRUSTED FRANCE AND MISTRUSTED GREAT BRITAIN. Even after the French maritime depredations and the XYZ Affair, the Republicans forgave the French even as they excoriated the British. Their rationale was that France remained a sister republic, and England remained a monarchy. One Republican newspaper averred: "There is at present as much danger of an invasion from the French, as from the inhabitants of Saturn."[57] Thomas Jefferson, vice president and leader of the Republicans, applauded rumors of a pending French invasion of Britain, because it would "republicanize that country" so that "all will be safe with us."[58]

REPUBLICANS HAD CHEERED THE FRENCH REVOLUTION AND EXPECTED PACIFIC RELATIONS WITH THEIR SISTER REPUBLIC. In 1789, American support for the French Revolution had been nearly unanimous. With the execution of Louis XVI and establishment of the First Republic in 1793, Federalists turned against the French, but most Republicans remained staunch supporters. One historian writes:

Democratic papers commenced a calculated program of justifying those in power in Paris. This practice was consciously pursued throughout the remainder of the decade and must be acknowledged in order to assess the part of foreign relations in the political propaganda of the period. A defense was found for every French action, from Robespierre's Feast of the Supreme Being to the seizures of American ships.[59]

Republicans did not simply decide in 1798 to oppose war with France and invent an ideological justification for that position; they had been well disposed toward France since 1789.

REPUBLICANS CLAIMED THAT THE FRENCH SHARED THEIR ENDS, AND THAT THE BRITISH DID NOT. The Republicans saw the Anglo-French struggle as one between the principles of monarchy and republicanism more than between two European powers, and thus as part and parcel of the same struggle they had themselves fought only a decade before.[60] During the debate over the

---

57. *Independent Chronicle* (Boston), March 4, 1798, quoted in Donald H. Stewart, *The Opposition Press of the Federalist Period* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1969), pp. 442–443.
58. Stinchcombe, *XYZ Affair*, p. 118.
59. Stewart, *Opposition Press*, p. 120.
60. See Jerald Combs, *The Jay Treaty* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970), pp. 110–111; Samuel Flagg Bemis, *Jay's Treaty: A Study in Commerce and Diplomacy* (New York: Macmillan, 1923; repr. ed., Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1975), pp. 95–96.

Jay Treaty in 1796, one Virginian told his fellow Congressmen: "As it has not been in the power of the United States to assist their Republican allies, *when fighting in fact their battles*, the least they can do . . . must be, that they will not put the enemies [the British] of those allies into a better condition than they were."[61]

REPUBLICANS DID NOT CHANGE THEIR FAVORABLE ASSESSMENT OF FRANCE DURING THE CRISIS, DESPITE FEDERALIST EFFORTS. Much American public opinion of France had soured after the XYZ Affair, but Republican elites stood by France against England. One newspaper declared that "'our Pharaohs' still wishfully looked for the downfall of the Republic and were ready to 'lend a hand to effect it'." Another said of the Federalists: "The tory faction will endeavour to torture fact, in order to excite our feelings against the cause of liberty and the revolution. . . . Let us be calm."[62]

REPUBLICANS AGITATED AGAINST WAR WITH FRANCE. In Congress, the party of Jefferson used all its energy to stave off a war declaration. Accusing President Adams of trying to declare war by himself, they introduced resolutions stating that "it is not expedient for the United States to resort to war against the French Republic."[63] The Republican press shrieked in protest against the possibility of a Franco-American war.[64]

THE PRESIDENT AND THE CONGRESSIONAL FEDERALISTS WERE CONSTRAINED BY THE REPUBLICANS FROM DECLARING WAR ON FRANCE. In the spring of 1798, Adams wanted war with France. In March he drafted a war message to Congress saying, "All men will think it more honorable and glorious to the national character when its existence as an independent nation is at stake that hostilities should be avowed in a formal Declaration of War."[65] Yet the president never presented the message to Congress. He could not do so, because he knew he did not have the votes to obtain a war declaration. Not everyone in Congress opposed Adams: the "high Federalists" had wanted war long before he had. It was the Republicans and the moderate Federalists who would not vote for war.

The Republican motivation is already clear. The moderate Federalists opposed war in part because the nation was so divided—i.e., because Republican opposition was so adamant. Believing only a united effort would enable

---

61. 4th Cong., 1st sess., *Annals of Congress* (April 20, 1796), Vol. 5, p. 1099. Emphasis added.
62. Stewart, *Opposition Press*, p. 286.
63. 5th Cong., 2d sess., *Annals of Congress* (March 27, 1798), Vol. 2, p. 1329.
64. Stewart, *Opposition Press*, pp. 289–290.
65. DeConde, *Quasi-War*, pp. 66–68.

the nation to fight France effectively, the moderates were in effect constrained by a liberal ideology they did not even hold. As one moderate put it after the defeat of a test vote in the House of Representatives in July 1798, "we should have war; but he did not wish to go on faster to this state of things than the people of this country, and the opinion of the world would justify."[66]

ANGLO-AMERICAN RELATIONS, 1803–12

Another Anglo-French war, begun in 1803, likewise entangled the U.S. merchant marine. Both the British and French were again humiliating the United States by seizing U.S. cargoes, and the British were impressing American sailors into service as well. Ultimately, under the presidency of James Madison, the United States went to war.[67] The War of 1812 is often cited by critics of the democratic peace proposition as an example of two democracies at war.[68] By my definition, however, Britain cannot be considered a liberal democracy.[69] Moreover, even a cursory examination of the events leading up to the war shows that very few Americans, and virtually no British, considered Great Britain a democracy at the time. Here again, Republicans in the United States act as my argument would predict.

REPUBLICANS MISTRUSTED ENGLAND, AND SOME STILL TRUSTED NAPOLEONIC FRANCE. Thomas Jefferson, president from 1801 to 1809, wrote privately to a friend in 1810 that the nature of the British government rendered England unfit "for the observation of moral duties," and that it would betray any agreement with the United States. Napoleon, on the other hand, was safe: "A *republican* Emperor, from his affection to republics, independent of motives of expediency, must grant to ours the Cyclops' boon of being the last devoured."[70]

---

66. Ibid., p. 106.
67. See Reginald Horsman, *The Causes of the War of 1812* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1962); Roger H. Brown, *The Republic in Peril: 1812* (New York: Norton, 1971); Bradford Perkins, *Prologue to War* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1961).
68. See for example Waltz, "Emerging Structure," p. 78.
69. Elections in pre-reform Britain were uncompetitive. Many seats in the House of Commons represented tiny boroughs where one patron determined who was elected; other towns were entirely disenfranchised. Votes in the Commons were effectively bought and sold in an open market. The House of Lords, an unelected body, could veto legislation. Moreover, the cabinet, which possessed war powers, was responsible to the king rather than to parliament. See E.L. Woodward, *The Age of Reform 1815–1870* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1938), pp. 18–28.
70. Robert W. Tucker and David C. Hendrickson, *Empire of Liberty: The Statecraft of Thomas Jefferson* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 329–330.

REPUBLICANS CLAIMED THAT ENGLAND DID NOT SHARE THEIR ENDS. With few exceptions, Republicans blasted England for opposing the cause of liberty.[71] One Congressman exclaimed that "the standard of freedom had never been raised in any country without [England's] attempting to pull it down."[72] Republicans believed England was trying to wipe republicanism from the face of the earth. One newspaper asserted:

Not only the rights of the nation, but the character of the government, are involved in the issue. . . . The deliberations of Congress "at this momentous era," will perhaps, do more to stamp the character of genuine republican governments, than has been effected in this respect since the creation of the world.

Republicans feared that continued foreign humiliation would lead to a Federalist government which would align the United States with England and set up a monarchy.[73]

REPUBLICANS DEFINED ENGLAND AS NON-DEMOCRATIC BEFORE AND DURING THE CRISIS. Far from changing their views of the British to suit the moment, Jeffersonians had consistently hated the mother country since before the American Revolution. In 1806 one Congressman rhetorically asked if his colleagues could tolerate "that same monarch [George III] . . . who, instead of diminishing, has added to the long and black catalogue of crimes set forth in our Declaration of Independence."[74]

REPUBLICANS AGITATED FOR WAR. Both Jefferson and James Madison, Republican president from 1809 to 1817, preferred economic sanctions to war. But the 1811 War Hawk Congress decided with Madison that force had to be used to punish the British. Henry Clay, John C. Calhoun, and other young Republican Congressmen demanded war, as did the Republican press.[75]

STATESMEN FOLLOWED REPUBLICAN IDEOLOGY. Since Republicans controlled the executive and Congress, they did not need to be forced by democratic institutions to initiate war. Public support for war was certainly not unanimous; New England in particular was vehemently opposed. But Madison and the War Hawks declared war anyway. One biographer writes of Madison:

---

71. One prominent exception was John Randolph, the eccentric Virginian, who agreed with Federalists that England rather than France was fighting for the liberties of the world. See Brown, *Republic in Peril*, pp. 151–155.
72. 12th Cong., 1st sess., *Annals of Congress*, Vol. 23 (January 6, 1812), p. 688.
73. Brown, *Republic in Peril*, pp. 74–84.
74. 9th Cong., 1st sess., *Annals of Congress*, Vol. 15 (March 7, 1806), pp. 609–610.
75. Horsman, *Causes of the War of 1812*, chapter 13.

To have submitted to [Britain's] unilateral decrees, her discriminatory trade regulations, or her naval outrages would have . . . ratified unjust principles in international law and emboldened antirepublican forces in Britain and the United States, thus threatening, in Madison's opinion, the survival of free government anywhere in the world.[76]

Realists at the time opposed the War of 1812, and in fact realists ever since have had difficulty accounting for it. Morgenthau calls it "the sole exception" to the rule that the United States has followed realist tenets in dealing with Europe.[77] In their 1990 book, Robert Tucker and David Hendrickson chide Jefferson for throwing America's lot in with France rather than Britain during the Napoleonic Wars. The United States would have avoided trouble, had it

publicly recognized that England was in truth engaged in a contest for public liberty and international order, and that by virtue of its own stance against Napoleon Britain protected the United States from the peculiar menace that Bonaparte embodied. . . . Jefferson would not say this because he did not believe it.[78]

That is, the Republican conception of the national interest ultimately required war because Britain was a monarchy.

ANGLO-AMERICAN RELATIONS, 1861–63

Fifty years later, Americans still mainly saw the world's nations as republics and monarchies.[79] Britain remained a monarchy and therefore a despotism. At several points during the American Civil War, Britain and the Union teetered on the brink of war. In none of these crises did liberal affinity for England play much of a role in keeping the Union from attacking Britain. And in the first, the *Trent* affair,[80] British liberal affinity for the Union was

---

76. Ralph Ketcham, *James Madison* (New York: Macmillan, 1971), p. 530.
77. Hans J. Morgenthau, *In Defense of the National Interest* (New York: Knopf, 1951), p. 5.
78. Tucker and Hendrickson, *Empire of Liberty*, pp. 226–227.
79. Sources on this case include Ephraim Douglass Adams, *Great Britain and the American Civil War*, 2 vols. (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1925); Brian Jenkins, *Britain and the War for the Union*, 2 vols. (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1974 and 1980); Howard Jones, *Union in Peril: The Crisis over British Intervention in the American Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992); Norman B. Ferris, *The "Trent" Affair: A Diplomatic Crisis* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1977); Martin P. Claussen, "Peace Factors in Anglo-American Relations, 1861–1865," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, Vol. 26 (March 1940), pp. 511–522.
80. The crisis occurred when a Union ship seized the British mail packet *Trent* as it carried two Southern emissaries to London to try to negotiate formal recognition of the Confederacy. The British were almost unanimously outraged, and clearly would have declared war had Lincoln not apologized and returned the emissaries. See Ferris, *Trent*.

rather weak as well, which in turn fed Union hostility toward England. The resolution of the *Trent* crisis can be explained without reference to democratic peace theory: the administration of Abraham Lincoln backed down to a British ultimatum because it could not afford war with such a powerful foe over such an issue.[81] With the Union fighting for its life against the Confederacy, Lincoln and his cabinet prudently decided that no liberal purpose would be served by an Anglo-American war.

By my definition, Britain in the 1860s was a liberal democracy. The 1832 Reform Act had made elections fairer, and had made the cabinet responsible to parliament rather than to the Crown. This meant the executive was ultimately responsible to the electors, giving the public leverage over war decisions.[82]

British liberal sympathy for the Union was weak during *Trent* because most British took Lincoln at his word that the Civil War was about restoring the Union—a cause uninspiring to the British—rather than abolition.[83] British of all classes had supported the abolition of slavery since the 1830s. Then in September 1862, Lincoln issued the preliminary Emancipation Proclamation, declaring that as of January 1, 1863, all slaves in the rebellious states would be free. Although it was condemned by pro-Confederates as likely to provoke a slave insurrection, the Proclamation cause British opinion to shift to the Union side. This shift helped prevent Britain from intervening in the Civil War. Christopher Layne's account of Anglo-American relations in this time misses this because he only looks at the *Trent* affair.

BRITISH LIBERALS TRUSTED THE UNION. Even before the Emancipation Proclamation, the Union had its staunch supporters among the Philosophical Radicals, notably John Bright and Richard Cobden. Bright told Parliament in early 1862, "there probably never has been a great nation in which what is familiarly termed mob law is less known or has had less influence. . . . Understand, I confine my observations always to the free States of the

---

81. See Layne, "The Myth of the Democratic Peace," Again, I do not argue that liberals will continually seek war against states they consider illiberal. Liberalism determines the ends, but power politics may circumscribe the means.
82. The shift in cabinet responsibility was *de facto* rather than *de jure*; since 1832, no monarch has ever dismissed a ministry. See Robert Livingston Schuyler and Corinne Comstock Weston, *British Constitutional History since 1832* (Princeton: D. Van Nostrand, 1957), pp. 26–44.
83. In his first inaugural address, Lincoln said: "I have no purpose, directly or indirectly to interfere with the institution of slavery in the States where it exists. I believe I have no lawful right to do so, and I have no inclination to do so." Quoted in Adams, *Great Britain and the Civil War*, Vol. 1, p. 50.

North."[84] Bright's view gained wide acceptance after the Proclamation, be-
cause abolitionists viewed slaveholding states as aggressive by nature.[85]

AFTER THE EMANCIPATION PROCLAMATION, LIBERALS WANTED BETTER RELA-
TIONS WITH THE UNION, AND BELIEVED THE UNION SHARED LIBERAL
ENDS. Britain's *Morning Star* newspaper summarized the change in October:
"The inevitable has come at last. Negro emancipation is formally and defin-
itively adopted as the policy in war and peace of the United States."[86] The
Daily News predicted that now "the most audacious Secessionists" in England
would shy away from proposing recognition of the "confederated Slave
States." All through the war the Union had blockaded the Confederacy,
preventing cotton from reaching England and causing extreme distress in
the Lancashire textile region. Yet after the Proclamation, England's working
class newspapers shifted over to the Union's side, proclaiming that the
Union's cause, liberation of the masses, was their cause. One paper said the
most dangerous problem facing Britain was now "the recognition of the
slaveholding Confederate States, and, as an almost necessary consequence,
an alliance with them against the Federal States of America."[87]

LIBERALS AGITATED AGAINST INTERVENTION AFTER THE PROCLAMATION. As
the Proclamation energized evangelical Christian and other emancipation
groups in Britain, Bright stated that the "anti-slavery sentiment" of his coun-
try was finally being "called forth."[88] One historian writes that "there took
place meeting after meeting at which strong resolutions were passed enthu-
siastically endorsing the issue of the emancipation proclamation and pledging
sympathy to the cause of the North."[89] In Manchester, a rally at the end of
1862 approved a missive to Lincoln congratulating him for the "humane and
righteous course" he had taken in furthering America's founding concept
that "all men are created equal." In London during the spring of 1863, a rally
of 2,500 or more workers pledged themselves "to use their 'utmost efforts'
to prevent the recognition of any government 'founded on human slavery'."[90]

THE BRITISH CABINET WAS CONSTRAINED BY LIBERALISM FROM INTERVENING
IN THE CIVIL WAR. Shortly after the Proclamation, the cabinet was considering

---

84. *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 3d Ser., Vol. 165 (February 17, 1862), col. 382.
85. See, e.g., the remarks of Goldwin Smith in the Venezuelan crisis, below.
86. Jenkins, *Britain and the War*, Vol. 2, p. 152.
87. Ibid., p. 216; Philip Foner, *British Labor and the American Civil War* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1981), p. 69.
88. Jenkins, *Britain and the War*, Vol. 2, pp. 209–211.
89. Adams, *Great Britain and the Civil War*, Vol. 2, p. 107.
90. Foner, *British Labor*, pp. 41, 61.

a French proposal to offer joint mediation to end the Civil War. All knew that the Union would almost certainly refuse, and armed intervention would have to follow to enforce mediation. Advocates of intervention, including Lord John Russell and William Gladstone, wanted to end the Union blockade of the South. They were also sickened at the brutality of the war, and supported the Southerners' right to self-determination.[91] Other advocates also argued that a permanently divided and weakened America was in long-term British interests.[92] Viscount Palmerston, the prime minister, had at times supported intervention as well.[93] But in late October, he soured on the prospect.

Palmerston gave many reasons, but significantly, his main obstacle seems to have been the shift in public opinion caused by the Emancipation Proclamation. In October, Palmerston wrote privately to Russell that slavery was now England's "great difficulty" in trying to put together peace terms. Could the cabinet, he asked, "without offence to many People here recommend to the North to sanction Slavery and to undertake to give back Runaways, and yet would not the South insist upon some such Conditions after Lincoln's Emancipation Decree"? The French were readier to intervene, he wrote, because they were freer from the "Shackles of Principle and of Right & Wrong on these Matters, as on all others than we are."[94]

To be sure, Palmerston heard other arguments against intervention. His secretary for war, George Cornewall Lewis, was primarily concerned that British recognition of the Confederacy would set a bad international legal precedent. Lewis also argued that the European powers would have difficulty forcing the Union to accept terms. Also on Palmerston's mind was the progress of the war itself, which had recently not gone well for the South.[95] But as Palmerston had said to the Russian ambassador to London in 1861, there were "two Powers in this Country, the government & public opinion, and that both must concur for any great important steps."[96]

---

91. Jones, *Union in Peril*, pp. 178–179, 184–185, 203; Adams, *Great Britain and the Civil War*, Vol. 1, pp. 212–215; Jenkins, *Britain and the War*, Vol. 2, pp. 168–169.
92. For example, William Lindsay, a member of Parliament, said he desired intervention because he "desired the disruption of the American Union, as every honest Englishman did, because it was too great a Power and England sh'd not let such a power exist on the American continent." Jones, *Union in Peril*, p. 134.
93. Ibid., pp. 150–151.
94. Ibid., pp. 191, 206.
95. Ibid., pp. 210–217.
96. Ferris, *Trent*, p. 158.

After the autumn of 1862, public opinion rendered British intervention impossible. Russell himself stopped Britain from selling ironclad warships to the Confederacy in the spring of 1863, writing privately to a colleague: "If we have taken part in interventions, it has been in behalf of the indepen-dence, freedom and welfare of a great portion of mankind. I should be sorry, indeed, if there should be any intervention on the part of this country which could bear another character."[97] Even Gladstone argued against intervention during the summer: "A war with the United States . . . ought to be unpopular on far higher grounds, because it would be a war with our own kinsmen for slavery."[98]

ANGLO-AMERICAN RELATIONS, 1895–96

Just over thirty years later, Britain and the United States were again close to war.[99] President Grover Cleveland and Richard Olney, his secretary of state, saw a boundary dispute between British Guiana and Venezuela as an op-portunity to assert U.S. power in the New World. Cleveland and Olney demanded U.S. arbitration in the dispute, arguing that England was violating the Monroe Doctrine by trying to expand its territory in the New World. After Lord Salisbury, British prime minister and foreign minister, told Cleve-land that it was no affair of the United States', Congress voted unanimously in December 1895 to fund an American commission to decide the boundary, with its recommendations to be enforced by whatever means necessary. War fever was loose for a few days in America. But the crisis was resolved peacefully over the next few months, and never again would these two nations seriously consider war with each other.

Because both states were liberal democracies, and sizable populations in each state considered the other liberal, I consider the foreign policy processes in both.

AMERICANS HAD OBSERVED BRITAIN DEMOCRATIZING IN THE 1880S AND HAD BEGUN TO EXPECT BETTER RELATIONS. Many Americans in the 1890s still

---

97. Jenkins, *Britain and the War*, Vol. 2, p. 241.
98. *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 3d ser., Vol. 171 (June 30, 1863), cols. 1805–1806.
99. Accounts of this crisis are found in Ernest R. May, *Imperial Democracy: The Emergence of America as a Great Power* (Chicago: Imprint Publications, 1991); Allen, *Great Britain and the United States;* Dexter Perkins, *The Monroe Doctrine 1867–1907* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1937); A.E. Campbell, *Great Britain and the United States 1895–1903* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1960); and Marshall Bertram, *The Birth of Anglo-American Friendship: The Prime Facet of the Venezuelan Boundary Dispute* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1992).

viewed Britain mainly as a monarchy and thus not democratic. But others had begun to challenge this old view after the Third Reform Act in 1884 enormously expanded the franchise in Britain. Andrew Carnegie then proclaimed, "Henceforth England is democratic," and predicted that "British democracy is to be pacific, and that the American doctrine of non-intervention will commend itself to it."[100] On the eve of the Venezuelan crisis, Joseph Pulitzer, publisher of the *New York World*, decried a senator's proposal that the United States align with Russia and wage war against England:

Russia represents the worst despotism that civilization has permitted to survive, except possibly that of Turkey. England represents Anglo-Saxon liberty and progress only in less degree than does our own government. We have much in common with the English. We have nothing whatever in common with Russia.[101]

A liberal elite desired good relations with England precisely because the nation had democratized.

MOST BRITONS NOW SAW THE UNITED STATES AS TRUSTWORTHY. One reason was the end of slavery. The scholar Goldwin Smith wrote during the crisis, "I am firmly convinced that since the abolition of slavery there prevails among them no desire for territorial aggrandizement."[102] Another was democratization in Britain itself. A historian writes, "Anti-Americanism, traditionally associated with a disappearing social order, had long been on the wane . . . Thus in all the tensions of the period, and particularly in the Venezuela dispute, the most important influence for amity and peace was the new English democracy." Fear of Russia and Germany influenced this desire for American friendship, but the point is that the new Britain was more inclined than the old to choose America as friend.[103] William Vernon Harcourt, Liberal leader in the House of Commons, often referred to "we semi-Americans" when writing to his friend Joseph Chamberlain, the Liberal colonial secretary.[104] On both sides of the Atlantic, Anglo-Saxon chauvinism played a strong role in this affinity.[105]

---

100. Andrew Carnegie, "Democracy in England," *North American Review*, Vol. 142, No. 1 (January 1886), p. 74.
101. *Public Opinion*, November 21, 1895, p. 21. One publicist called England "the Crowned Republic." Moncure D. Conway, "The Queen of England," *North American Review*, Vol. 145, No. 2 (August 1887), p. 121.
102. *New-York Times*, December 25, 1895, p. 3.
103. Allen, *Great Britain and the United States*, p. 525.
104. A.G. Gardiner, *The Life of Sir William Vernon Harcourt* (London: Constable and Co., 1923), Vol. 2, pp. 396–397.
105. Campbell, *Great Britain and the United States*, pp. 9–10.

AMERICAN LIBERALS CONTINUED TO SEE ENGLAND AS LIBERAL DURING THE CRISIS. Neither Cleveland nor Olney was part of the liberal pro-British elite in the United States, and much of the American public wanted war at the beginning of the crisis. But the U.S. ambassador to London, Thomas F. Bayard, was a pro-British liberal who viewed the United States and Great Britain as the "two guardians of civilization." During the crisis, Bayard stressed his well-known views that England was to be trusted because, unlike Venezuela, it was governed by law.[106] In Congress, Senator Edward O. Wolcott of Colorado declared Venezuela one of South America's "so-called republics" in which the "rulers are despots and suffrage a farce." He hoped the Venezuelan mines would be governed by "English common law" with its "certainty of enforcement."[107]

Most pro-British liberals were found outside government, however. Prominent among these was Pulitzer, whose *New York World* said on December 21:

There is not a hothead among the jingoes who does not know that England is more likely to become a republic than the United States are to revert to monarchism. The entire trend of government for the past fifty years has been toward democracy. . . . Observe the working of the leaven of democracy in England.[108]

"In a word," commented the *Nation,* "the American Secretary of State's references to Venezuelan republicanism and friendship and English monarchy and hostility have no more to do with the facts than with the planet Jupiter."[109]

BRITISH LIBERALS CONTINUED TO SEE THE UNITED STATES AS LIBERAL THROUGH THE CRISIS. The British press expressed general revulsion at the prospect of war with the United States. The *Standard* gave a typical opinion:

We feel confident that a vast majority of the Americans will soon be profoundly sorry for what Mr. Cleveland has done. He has travestied and damaged a principle that they hold dear, and has made the Republic which we have all honored on account of its supposed attachment to peace and

---

106. Charles Callan Tansill, *The Foreign Policy of Thomas F. Bayard* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1940), p. 716.
107. 54th Cong., 1st sess., *Congressional Record* (December 20, 1895), Vol. 28, Pt. 1, pp. 859–860.
108. John L. Heaton, *The Story of a Page* (New York: Harper and Bros., 1913), p. 114.
109. *The Nation,* January 2, 1896, p. 5.

non-intervention, figure in the eyes of Europe as a gratuitously aggressive and reckless champion of war.[110]

The *Daily Telegraph* calmly stated, "We are perfectly satisfied to rely upon the straightforward, high-bred simplicity of Lord Salisbury's diplomacy and the good sense, widespread honesty, intelligence, and kindliness of the American people."[111]

AMERICAN LIBERALS AGITATED FOR PEACE. Pulitzer led the peace movement, sending cablegrams to influential British asking their opinions on the crisis. On Christmas Day the *World*'s front page featured a selection of responses under the headline "PEACE AND GOOD WILL," expressing horror at the thought of an Anglo-American war.[112] There was, moreover, an interactive effect as Americans observed this British good will. In January 1896 the *Philadelphia Press* asserted, "Nothing in the succession for a month past of discussion, declaration and feeling, personal and public, private and National, has so moved the American Nation as a whole as the sudden revelation which has been made of English horror of war with this country."[113]

BRITISH LIBERALS AGITATED FOR PEACE. Not only the British press, but also Joseph Chamberlain, the colonial secretary who had originally agreed with Salisbury to rebuff Cleveland and Olney, "determined to move heaven and earth to avert conflict between the two English-speaking peoples," one biographer writes.[114] In a speech in Birmingham, Chamberlain proclaimed:

War between the two nations would be an absurdity as well as a crime. . . . The two nations are allied more closely in sentiment and in interest than any

---

110. Quoted in the *New York Times*, December 21, 1895, p. 6. It is also interesting to note that the London *Review of Reviews* took great pains to counter those Americans who claimed England was not democratic. "The superstition that the United States is in a peculiar sense Republican, whereas we are Monarchical, is being utilized for all it is worth in order to bolster up the case for intervention in Venezuela. If British subjects in Guiana would but repudiate their allegiance to the British Empire, and set up in business as a British republic, no American citizen would object to them eating their way into the heart of Venezuela. All the difficulty arises from the prejudice against the monarchy—a prejudice that is as old as George III., and ought to have been buried with him." *Review of Reviews* (London), December 14, 1895, pp. 484–485.
111. *New-York Times*, December 19, 1895, p. 3.
112. Heaton, *The Story of a Page*, p. 114; W.A. Swanberg, *Pulitzer* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1967), p. 199. This is in stark contrast to Pulitzer's behavior two years later in the crisis with Spain, a country few if any Americans considered democratic. In agitating for war, the *World* declared, "War waged on behalf of freedom, of self-government, of law and order, of humanity, to end oppression, misrule, plunder and savagery, is a holy war in itself." Heaton, *Story of a Page*, p. 162.
113. *Public Opinion*, Vol. 20 (January 23, 1896), p. 107.
114. J.L. Garvin, *The Life of Joseph Chamberlain*, Vol. 3 (London: Macmillan, 1934), p. 67.

other nations on the face of the earth. . . . I should look forward with pleasure to the possibility of the Stars and Stripes and the Union Jack floating together in defence of a common cause sanctioned by humanity and justice.[115]

His friend Harcourt made it clear that he would make the crisis a major issue in the upcoming session of Parliament. He urged Chamberlain to grant the Americans all they wanted.[116]

RESOLUTION OF THE CRISIS. Especially in the United States, liberals had a difficult task. Not only were Cleveland and Olney unimpressed by British democratization, but much of the American public, especially Irish-Americans, roared its approval at this "tweaking of the lion's tail." One cannot prove what drove officials on either side of the Atlantic defuse the crisis. What can be said is that on January 2, 1896, Cleveland appointed a distinguished commission to adjudicate the Venezuelan-British Guianan border, with only one member who could be construed as anglophobic. Since the president could have appointed a much more inflammatory commission, this must be seen as a conciliatory step.

The British cabinet voted on January 11, over the objections of Salisbury, to accept the U.S. commission's jurisdiction. It was the liberals on the cabinet, led by the pro-American Chamberlain, who favored the settlement. Salisbury, a realist with no affinity for American democracy, would have accepted war, and he nearly resigned in protest when the cabinet outvoted him.

The resolution of the Venezuelan border crisis was the beginning of the apparently permanent Anglo-American friendship. Today, realists argue that Britain appeased the Americans here and elsewhere because it could no longer sustain its "splendid isolation" in the face of rising threats from Germany and Russia.[117] That argument begs the question of why the British aligned with the United States rather than with Germany. Germany threatened British interests in Africa, but the United States threatened British interests in the New World. Liberalism offers an answer: British liberals trusted the democratic United States more than imperial Germany. During the Venezuelan crisis, the German emperor sent the infamous Krüger telegram congratulating the Boers in southern Africa for repelling the British Jameson raid. In a striking contrast to its calm reaction to Cleveland and

---

115. May, *Imperial Democracy*, pp. 44–45, 53–54.
116. Ibid., p. 49; Gardiner, *Life of Harcourt*, pp. 396–397; Garvin, *Chamberlain*, p. 161; Bertram, *Anglo-American Friendship*, p. 83. Harcourt had always admired the United States, and argued vigorously against British intervention in the U.S. Civil War.
117. Layne, "The Myth of the Democratic Peace."

Olney's provocations, the British public was outraged. One historian writes, "when 'Yankee Doodle' was cheered and 'Die Wacht am Rhein' hissed in London, it demonstrated clearly how utterly different was popular feeling towards the two countries."[118]

Appeasement of the United States was no arbitrary choice. Now that Britain was more democratic than ever, its government and people trusted democratic America more than ever.[119]

Democratic Peace and the Realist Challenge: The Liberal Response

Many realists have declared democratic peace a fantasy. Permanent peace between mutually recognized liberal democracies, they argue, is not possible. Liberal states, like all others, must base foreign policy on the imperatives of power politics. Some realists argue that there is no theoretically compelling causal mechanism that could explain democratic peace. Others claim that even if there were, the foreign policy processes of democracies show that such a "mechanism" is empirically impotent.[120] Realist skeptics make a number of claims:

First, they claim that if neither democratic structures nor norms alone can explain the democratic peace, then there is no democratic peace.[121] I have already pointed out the logical fallacy behind this claim. The structural/normative distinction is epistemological, not ontological. I argue that structure and norms work in tandem: liberal ideas proscribe wars among democracies, and democratic institutions ensure that this proscription is followed.

Realists claim that if there were a democratic peace, then liberal democracies would never make threats against one another.[122] The claim is that the logic of the democratic peace proposition implies that liberal democracies will never try to coerce one another. But of course, there is no inherent

---

118. Allen, *Great Britain and the United States*, p. 354.
119. Stephen Rock writes: "Englishmen, who could agree on practically nothing else, were in fact almost unanimous in their distaste for the German political system, its ideology, and its methods. . . . Both [Germany and the United States] were rising imperial powers with growing navies. . . . Yet Britons, while they detested and feared Germany, almost universally admired the United States and felt minimal apprehension at her ambitions." Rock, *Why Peace Breaks Out: Great Power Rapprochement in Historical Perspective* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), pp. 86–87.
120. See Mearsheimer, "Back to the Future"; Waltz, "Emerging Structure"; Layne, "The Myth of the Democratic Peace"; Farber and Gowa, "Polities and Peace."]
121. Layne, "Kant or Cant."
122. Ibid.

"logic" of democratic peace independent of an explicit argument about how it works. My argument answers realism in two ways. First, liberal democracies do not always consider each other liberal. What a scholar in 1994 considers democratic is not always what a statesman in 1894 considered democratic. Second, liberal democracies are sometimes governed by illiberal leaders who are somewhat autonomous in implementing foreign policy. Such leaders may make threats; they are simply unable to mobilize the nation for war, due to the constraints of democratic institutions.

Realists claim that if there were democratic peace, then public opinion in liberal democracies would never want war with a fellow liberal democracy.[123] Like the previous claim, this one makes two assumptions: that all citizens of liberal democracies are liberal, and that they agree on which foreign states are also liberal. Neither assumption is true, and neither is necessary for democratic peace to occur. All that is necessary for statesmen to be constrained is that they believe war would be too unpopular. For this, a nation's population need not all be liberal.

Realists claim that when power politics requires war with a democracy, liberals will redefine that state as a despotism; when power politics requires peace with a non-democracy, they will redefine that state as a democracy.[124] That is, ideological labels are sugar-coating to make otherwise bitter policies easier to swallow. Statesmen's public rationales for foreign policy are solely rhetorical; one must look at their confidential statements to understand their true motives. In this article, however, I have shown that in crises liberals hang fast to the ideological labels they previously gave foreign states. Republicans stood by France after the XYZ Affair. They mistrusted England from the time of the American Revolution up to the end of the War of 1812 (and beyond). Many Americans began to see England as democratic in the 1880s, and continued to do so during the Venezuelan crisis. Britons began admiring the United States well before the rise of Germany "forced" them to make friends in the late 1890s. The one case where liberals changed their opinion of a foreign state during a crisis was in the Civil War. There, British opinion shifted to the Union side after the Emancipation Proclamation. The cause of this shift was not power politics, but the Emancipation Proclamation,

123. Ibid.
124. This is implied in Hans Morgenthau's argument that Woodrow Wilson led the United States into World War I "not to make the world safe for democracy," but because "Germany threatened the balance of power. . . . Wilson pursued the right policy, but he pursued it for the wrong reason." Morgenthau, *National Interest*, pp. 25–26.

which signified that the Union was fighting for abolition, a liberal cause the British had long supported.

Realists claim that "strategic concerns and the relative distribution of military capabilities . . . should crucially—perhaps decisively" affect the outcomes of crises between liberal democracies, and moreover that "broader geopolitical considerations pertaining to a state's position in international politics should, if implicated, account significantly for the crisis's outcome."[125] I do not contest the relevance of power politics to the foreign policies of liberal democracies. These realist hypotheses, however, imply that during a crisis, statesmen will be able either to ignore liberals or to persuade them to change their minds. But liberal ideology and institutions clearly had independent power in 1798, when John Adams could not ask Congress for war against France due to staunch Republican opposition. In 1862, Palmerston privately admitted to being constrained by pro-Union opinion from intervening in the Civil War. Realism would and did counsel the British to work to keep the United States divided and weak, but they passed up the opportunity. In 1895–96, war would clearly have been highly unpopular, especially in England, and Salisbury was thwarted by Liberals in his own cabinet from confronting the United States.

Realists claim that states that view each other as liberal-democratic will still balance against each other.[126] Realists who posit that states balance solely against capabilities must explain why Britain conciliated the United States rather than Germany. As explained below, a more nuanced realism, such as balance-of-threat theory, could account for this outcome. In assessing whether a foreign states is a threat, liberals such as Chamberlain look at, among other things, the state's regime type.

Realists claim that Wilhelmine Germany was a democracy, and therefore democracies fought one another in World War I.[127] There is not the space to address this claim fully, but two things may briefly be said. First, even before the war, most British and Americans saw Germany as undemocratic. The British abhorred German ideology, and although many Americans admired Germany's progressive social policies, most viewed the country as politically backward. "Germany is mediæval," said one magazine in 1912. "'Divine

---

125. Layne, "Kant or Cant."
126. Waltz, "Emerging Structure," pp. 66–67, predicts that Japan and Germany will acquire nuclear capabilities to balance against the United States.
127. Layne, "The Myth of the Democratic Peace."

Rights' is written on the brow of the Kaiser. . . . This is the trinity that rules Germany: a mediæval king, a feudal aristocracy, and the pushing parvenus of coal dust and iron filings."[128] Second, the chancellor was responsible to the Emperor William rather than the legislature. The electorate had little leverage over war decisions. The press was not wholly free, as illustrated when William suppressed an antiwar book in 1913. The emperor also controlled the upper chamber of the legislature, the Bundesrat, which had veto power over the legislation of the lower house.[129] Thus, by neither the standards of its time nor those of this study can Germany be called a liberal democracy in 1914.

IS A REALIST-LIBERAL SYNTHESIS POSSIBLE?
Both realists and liberals who have written about democratic peace have been loath to cede any ground to the opposing side. Yet my argument and evidence suggest that both camps are describing real forces in international politics, namely, power politics and liberal ideas. It is conceivable that these two forces sometimes push in different directions in a particular case, yielding a weak effect in favor of one or the other. Jon Elster discusses such dynamics in a very different context: suppose a weak aggregate tendency was discovered for people to donate more to charity when others do so. The weak tendency may well be due to the existence of two different types of people with opposite tendencies: one, slightly dominant, that gives much more when observing others give (following a norm of reciprocity), and one that gives less (following a utilitarian norm). The combined effect conceals two strong mechanisms working at cross purposes.[130] Similarly, it could be that *Realpolitik* pushes policy into one direction and liberalism in another, and that the combined effect weakly favors one or the other. Consistent with this, my cases indicate that some actors are realist, some liberal.

A key to synthesizing the two theories would seem to be that liberals define national interest in such a way that cooperation with fellow liberal

---

128. *World's Work*, June 1912, p. 146.
129. John L. Snell, *The Democratic Movement in Germany, 1789–1914* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1976), pp. 165, 212–219, 237–238, 343, 366; *Literary Digest*, June 14, 1913, pp. 1332–1333. For an argument that the German political system contributed to the coming of war, see Paul Kennedy, "The Kaiser and German *Weltpolitik*," in J. Rohl and N. Sombert, eds., *Kaiser Wilhelm II: New Interpretations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp. 143–168.
130. Jon Elster, *Political Psychology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 2–7. I thank David Dessler for bringing this source to my attention.

democracies is required. Given this premise, two synthetic approaches seem promising. First, the balance-of-threat theory of Stephen Walt could incorporate states' estimates of regime type. Walt writes that a state's alliance decisions are based not only on the aggregate and offensive power and geographic proximity of foreign states, but also on how aggressive their intentions are. He cites the Eyre Crowe memorandum of 1907, which stated that the British welcomed the growth of German power *per se*, but were concerned about German intentions.[131] My argument holds that liberals judge foreign states' intentions in part based on whether those states are liberal democracies. Had Eyre Crowe considered Germany liberal, he would not have been so worried.

A second approach would use the ideational framework of Alexander Wendt, David Lumsdaine, and others. Essentially, this approach postulates that international anarchy does not necessarily lead to self-help and power politics. Rather, these features are derivative of states' practices, particularly the ways they define themselves and their interests. That is, even absent a world sovereign, states must hold certain beliefs about each other before they fear each other.[132] Neorealism posits that these beliefs are always a product of power factors and thus not an independent variable. But the evidence that there is democratic peace and that it is a product of liberal ideas suggests neorealism is wrong. Power would not drop out of a framework that claims ideational sources of national interest. It would simply be one of several forces, filtered through an ideational lens.

Conclusion

That no one has directly observed a causal mechanism preventing democracies from going to war against one another has damaged the democratic peace thesis. In this article, I have argued that there is indeed such a mechanism. Fundamentally it is the liberal ideas undergirding liberal democracies. Liberalism says that all persons are best off pursuing self-preservation and material well-being, and that freedom and toleration are the best means to

---

131. Stephen M. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), pp. 21–25.

132. See Alexander Wendt, "Anarchy Is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics," *International Organization*, Vol. 46, No. 2 (Spring 1992), pp. 391–425; and David Halloran Lumsdaine, *Moral Vision in International Politics: The Foreign Aid Regime, 1949–1989* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), pp. 3–29.

these ends. The liberal commitment to individual freedom gives rise to foreign policy ideology and governmental institutions that work together to produce democratic peace.

Ideologically, liberals trust those states they consider fellow liberal democracies and see no reason to fight them. They view those states they consider illiberal with suspicion, and sometimes believe that the national interest requires war with them. In different countries at different times, liberals have differed on the form of a liberal democracy, but the essential ideology is the same. Institutionally, liberalism brings about democratic structures that give citizens leverage over governmental decisions. Sometimes liberals run the government and simply implement their view of the national interest. Even when they do not, the institutions of free speech and regular, competitive elections allow liberal elites to force even illiberal leaders of democracies to follow liberal ideology. When a liberal democracy is in a war-threatening crisis with a state it considers liberal-democratic, its liberal elites agitate against war. Illiberal leaders find they cannot persuade the public to go to war, and moreover fear they will lose the next election if they do go to war. By the same process, they may be goaded into war with states that liberals believe to be illiberal.

This model was illustrated in four war-threatening crises involving the United States. In three of these, liberalism helped to prevent war. In one (Anglo-American relations from 1803–12), liberalism helped bring on war. Among other things, these cases illustrate the importance of perceptions.

Although I argue that realists are wrong in denying the existence of the democratic peace, I do not argue that power politics has no role in liberal-democratic foreign policy. The balance of power matters to liberals as well as to realists, but liberals view it as part of a larger picture of international politics. It appears that a synthesis of realism and liberalism is possible, as least concerning democratic peace.

The democratic peace provides strong evidence that ideas matter in international relations, both as shapers of national interest and as builders of democratic institutions. Thomas Paine claimed that the American Revolutionaries "have it in our power to begin the world all over again."[133] He may have been overreaching: the hostile relations between France and the United States in the 1790s, sister republics of the first democratic peace, show how

___

133. In "Common Sense," January 1776, quoted in Michael H. Hunt, *Ideology and U.S. Foreign Policy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), p. 19.

the world of power politics can stymie the harmonious plans of liberals. Yet it looks as though a force does rise up within liberal democracies capable of steering conflict off of its usual trajectory.

Still, this study does not show that the democratic peace necessarily leads to perpetual peace. Threats to liberalism itself should engender caution. Historically, one threat has come from liberalism's inability to fulfill the material expectations it raises. When peace does not bring prosperity, as in Weimar Germany, war begins to look more attractive and liberalism may collapse. A second threat may lie in liberalism's tendency to destroy traditional ways of life and sources of meaning. Islamic fundamentalists, for example, simply reject the individualism that undergirds the democratic peace, and there are signs that many within the West itself reject it also.[134] Despite its stunning recent successes,[135] and arguments that it has triumphed over its philosophical competitors,[136] it is not at all clear that liberalism has brought an end to History.

---

134. For a synopsis of threats to liberalism and thus to democratic peace, see Samuel P. Huntington, "No Exit: The Errors of Endism," *The National Interest*, No. 17 (Fall 1989), pp. 3–11.
135. For a theoretical treatment of the spread of democracy, see Samuel P. Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991).
136. See Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: The Free Press, 1992).