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## Democratic Peace - Warlike Democracies? A Social Constructivist Interpretation of the Liberal Argument\*

### Introduction

The liberal argument that democratic political structures form a precondition for stable peace orders in international relations has become conventional wisdom among Western policy-makers. Immanuel Kant's postulate developed in his 'Perpetual Peace' (1795[1991]) has been empirically substantiated. Peace and conflict research has reached a consensus that democracies rarely fight each other (Russett, 1993; Chan, 1993; Bueno de Mesquita et al., 1991). However, the 'democratic peace' only forms one part of the empirical finding. Democracies are Janus-faced. While they do not fight each other, they are frequently involved in militarised disputes and war with authoritarian regimes. Democratic peace despite warlike democracies?

This article does not pretend to add new data to the debate on democracy and peace. It is about theory building. I argue that the two empirical findings on the dyadic level concerning the war involvement of democracies are under-theorised. Most liberal theories of international relations assume that democracies are inherently peaceful, while authoritarian regimes are considered intrinsically aggressive. However, these attempts at theorising about democracy and war-involvement do not capture the different behaviour by democratic states depending with which they are dealing. There is little empirical support for the proposition that war-involvement of democracies mostly results from the need to defend themselves against aggressive dictatorship. How is it then to be explained that, on the one hand, democracies rarely fight each other and build stable peace orders among themselves, but, on the other hand, can be rather belligerent in their interactions with authoritarian regimes? Following Ernst-Otto Czempiel (1986), Michael Doyle (1983, 1986), and Bruce Russett (1993), I start from the so-called 'normative explanation' of the democratic peace. I argue that this explanation can be considerably refined from a social-constructivist perspective. I claim that democracies to a large degree create their enemies and their friends — 'them' and 'us' — by inferring either aggressive or de-

fensive motives from the domestic structures of their counterparts. Therefore, they follow behavioural norms externalising their internal compromise-oriented and non-violent decision rules in their interactions with other democracies. 'Pacific federations' (Kant, 1795[1991]) or pluralistic security communities (Deutsch, 1957) such as the European Union or the transatlantic relationship can be easily created among democratic systems. The presumption of potential enmity, however, creates a realist world of anarchy when democratic states interact with authoritarian regimes. Limited 'co-operation under anarchy' is still possible, but problems of defection and relative gains might hamper co-operative arrangements between democracies and non-democracies.

The article consists of three parts. First, I briefly review the empirical state of the art. Second, I discuss the prevailing theoretical explanations for the dual finding of 'democratic peace' and 'warlike democracies'. I then present a social-constructivist modification of the normative argument. I conclude with suggestions for a research agenda to evaluate the argument presented in this article.

## The Empirical Findings: Democratic Peace - Warlike Democracies?

The empirical findings on the correlation between domestic political structures and foreign policy behaviour can be summarised in two statements:

1. Democracies are involved in as many wars as other types of political systems.
2. Democracies rarely fight each other.

### Warlike Democracies?

Between 1816 (i.e., after the end of the Napoleonic wars) and 1976, democratic political systems were involved in as many militarised disputes, international crises, and wars as authoritarian regimes and proportionate to their percentage among states (Maoz and Abdolali, 1989; see also Small and Singer, 1976; Gleditsch and Hegre, 1995). The result does not change significantly when only 'politically relevant' dyads are looked at, for example, great powers and/or contiguous states (Maoz and Russett, 1991: tables 2 and 3). It is virtually impossible without detailed historical case studies to determine aggressor and defender in the roughly 30 wars since 1816 in which democracies have been involved (Lake, 1992; Gleditsch and Hegre, 1995). It might not even make sense con-

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ceptually to distinguish between challenger and target of aggression except for very rare cases. Aggression and defence is usually in the eye of the beholder. Look, for example, at the four most violent interstate wars since 1816 in which democracies were involved. Only one of them – *World War II* – is a clear case of aggression by a totalitarian regime. The *Korean War* (1950-53) is a case in which the initial attack was undertaken by an authoritarian regime against another non-democracy. A US-led coalition that included many democracies then came to the defence of the target. However, this coalition then escalated the war considerably by crossing the 38th parallel, which led to a – defensively motivated? – countermove in terms of the war involvement of China.<sup>1</sup> It is even more difficult to identify aggressor and defender during *World War I*. As to the *Vietnam War*, the U.S. not only intervened but also escalated it.

In order to establish that democracies are inherently more peaceful than authoritarian regimes, one would need to show that democratic war involvement was mostly provoked by non-democracies. Rudolph Rummel appears to be a dissenting vote from the scholarly consensus that democracies are as war-prone as autocratic regimes (Rummel, 1995). He argues that democratic regimes are less violent in their foreign behaviour than autocratic regimes. His data suggest, however, that the main dividing line is not between democracies and non-democracies, but among the latter, i.e., between authoritarian and totalitarian regimes.<sup>2</sup>

In sum, there is not much evidence that democracies are less frequently involved in military threats and the use of force in international relations or that they are disproportionately more often on the defensive rather than the offensive side in those militarised disputes or wars. The war involvement of democracies has somewhat decreased since the 1970s; there also seems to be a correlation between the stability of democratic systems and their war involvement (Chan 1984; Russett and Maoz 1993). But these negative correlations are not robust enough to infer a general peacefulness of participatory political systems.

### The Democratic Peace

While democracies do not seem to be inherently more peaceful than autocratic regimes, there is nevertheless an island of peace in an ocean of conflicts and wars. Democracies rarely fight each other, at least since 1816.<sup>3</sup> There have been military threats, the mobilisation of troops, and small skirmishes between democracies, but (almost) no inter-state war. Moreover, such militarised disputes among democracies occur significantly less frequently than is to be expected in a random distribution. And those militarised disputes that do occur among democracies almost never escalate into war (Bremer, 1993; Maoz and Abdolali, 1989; Maoz and Russett, 1991). The finding of a ‘democratic peace’ is

robust with regard to the time-period selected, the specific definition of democracy, or the method used (quantitative or qualitative). At least three different data sets — the Correlates of War project, the International Crisis Behaviour project, and the Hamburg-based *Vergleichende Kriegsursachenforschung* project (Gantzel et al., 1986) — have been used to substantiate the claim (Bremer, 1992; Doyle, 1983; Gleditsch and Hegre, 1995; Maoz and Abdolali, 1989; Maoz and Russett, 1991; Nielebock, 1993). There is no other empirical finding in the realm of international relations that has reached a similar consensus among scholars.

Following Kenneth Waltz's earlier attack on the 'democratic peace' proposition, there have been two recent criticisms of the claim (Waltz, 1993; Layne, 1994; Spiro, 1994). Christopher Layne argues on the basis of four serious crises among democratic states that these did not escalate for 'realist' rather than 'liberal' reasons. David Spiro claims that the 'democratic peace' finding is not statistically significant, given that wars occur rarely and that democracies are also pretty rare in the international system. Both attacks miss the mark. First, two of Layne's four cases have been thoroughly investigated by John Owen who insists that the lack of escalation in Anglo-American relations in 1861 (U.S. civil war) and in 1895-96 (Venezuela crisis) had a lot to do with the mutual perception as liberal democracies (Owen, 1993, 1994). As to the 1923 Ruhr crisis, another case of Layne's 'near misses', it is equally questionable whether the French public and elites perceived Germany during the 1923 Ruhr crisis as a liberal democracy, given the instability of the Weimar Republic at the time. This leaves the 1898 Fashoda crisis to support Layne's argument. Not a very convincing data base to challenge the 'democratic peace' proposition!<sup>4</sup>

Second, as to Spiro's claims about the statistical insignificance of the 'democratic peace' finding, Bruce Russett's rebuttal takes care of most points. If data are split in ever-smaller parts, it is mathematically impossible to find statistical significance. Russett then used Spiro's method of year-by-year analysis with regard to the ' Militarised Interstate Dispute' data and confirmed the 'democratic peace' proposition in a statistically significant way (Russett, 1995). In sum, the challenge to the 'democratic peace' proposition rests on rather dubious assumptions and equally doubtful empirical analysis.

Zeev Maoz and Bruce Russett have looked at alternative explanations for the 'democratic peace' hypothesis (Maoz and Russett, 1993). They show that wealth and conflict behaviour are not correlated. While rich democracies are slightly more involved in militarised disputes among each other than poor ones, wealthy authoritarian regimes fight each other far more frequently. While geographic proximity slightly increases the rate of disputes among democracies, this variable is far more significant with regard to autocratic regimes. Economic interdependence also adds to peace, but this finding does not eliminate the effect of democracy (Oneal et al., 1995). The only other variable that correlates

significantly with peacefulness is the stability of the regime measured in years. Stable political systems, whether democracies or autocracies, are less likely to fight each other. This finding implies that stable democratic systems constitute the main inhabitants of the 'island of democratic peace'.

In sum, democracies almost never fight each other, even though they are sometimes involved in militarised disputes and the exchange of threats. They do not automatically form 'pacific federations' (Kant, 1795[1991]) or 'pluralistic security communities' (Deutsch, 1957). But there appears to be a barrier that prevents militarised conflicts among democracies to escalate into war. As William Dixon has shown, third-party mediation is very likely to succeed when democratic systems threaten to use force against each other (Dixon, 1993, 1994). As a result, there is a contrast between the 'democratic peace', on the one hand, and the war involvement of democracies with authoritarian systems, on the other, that requires theoretical explanation.

## Prevailing Explanations

A theoretical explanation of the empirical findings of a 'democratic peace' despite frequent war involvement by democracies must answer four questions:

1. Why is it that militarised disputes are far less likely to occur among democratic dyads than among democratic-authoritarian or autocratic-autocratic dyads?
2. Why is it that militarised disputes among democracies almost never escalate into war?
3. Why is it that democracies are more likely to co-operate in alliances and – maybe - other international institutions than autocratic political systems?
4. Why is there less difference in the general war involvement of democracies as compared to other types of political systems?

These four questions can be summarised in one: Why is it that the 'security dilemma' appears to be far less significant when democracies deal with each other, while it seems to govern their interactions with authoritarian systems?

The 'security dilemma' represents a good starting point for evaluating competing explanations of the empirical findings. It shows why and how even peacefully motivated states in an anarchic self-help system can end up in arms races, escalatory processes, crises and war with each other. To explain war, we do not need to assume aggressive intentions or expansionist motives on either side of the opponents (Herz, 1950; Jervis, 1978). It is not so much intentions that drive the security dilemma, but lack of information and *uncertainty* about

the motives of other states which are then perceived as potential opponents. Of course, arguments about the security dilemma are firmly grounded in realist theory. Structural realism in the Waltzian tradition does not assume power-maximising states to explain war in the international system. Rather, it is sufficient to conceptualise states as defensive positionalists concerned about their survival in a self-help environment in order to explain arms races, crises, and war (Waltz, 1979; Grieco, 1988a). A liberal response to the realist claims that concentrates on establishing the inherent peacefulness of liberal democracies is, therefore, insufficient. Given the condition of uncertainty in an anarchic self-help system, states can be as peaceful as they want to be, they still have to be defensive positionalists if they want to survive in such a system.<sup>5</sup> Rather, a liberal response to realism must, first, explain why and how democracies 'know' that other participatory systems have equally peaceful intentions, i.e., why the uncertainty that drives the security dilemma is far less relevant when democracies deal with each other. Second, it follows that such a response cannot exclusively focus on the unit-level of domestic politics and politics, but needs to include the level of international interactions among states. I argue in the following that the prevailing liberal interpretations of the 'democratic peace' fail on both accounts.

## Participatory Constraints and Rational Cost-Benefit Calculations

Immanuel Kant already argued that democracies do not fight each other because of the participation of the citizens in the decision-making processes:

If ... the consent of the citizens is required to decide whether or not war is to be declared, it is very natural that they will have great hesitation in embarking on so dangerous an enterprise. For this would mean calling down on themselves all the miseries of war, such as doing the fighting themselves, supplying the costs of the war from their own resources, painfully making good the ensuing devastation... (Kant, 1795[1991: 100]).

The peaceful foreign policy of democratic states is explained by the rational cost-benefit calculations of the citizens in a participatory polity. Aggressive foreign policy and the costs of war run counter to the welfare interests of the citizens — except for the immediate defence of one's territory and way of life. It is argued that the citizens in democratic states are primarily motivated to increase their economic well being, as long as their external security is guaranteed. As a result, they are unlikely to support military adventures and wars of aggression,

except, maybe, under circumstances of low risk (Müller and Risse-Kappen, 1993: 390-91). While this account focuses on the cost-benefit calculations of the citizens, a 'political incentive explanation' of the democratic peace has been suggested that concentrates on such calculations by national leaders (Geva et al., 1993).<sup>6</sup>

Cost-benefit calculations and the price of war fighting might explain a certain reluctance of participatory polities to engage in military adventures. But such calculations should apply irrespectively of whether democratic systems deal with each other or with dictatorships. Rational choice arguments might explain why democracies pursue aggressive foreign policies under specific circumstances, but not why societal support for such interventions can only be mobilised against authoritarian systems. Referring to utilitarian cost-benefit calculations of citizens in a democratic polity cannot explain why foreign aggression is absent even in extremely asymmetrical relations in which the costs of attack are low for the more powerful state – as long as democracies are involved on both sides. Moreover, the argument does not address the uncertainty issue that lies at the heart of the security dilemma. It merely accounts for some reluctance to engage in warfare. As I will argue later in this article, costs and benefits of aggressive foreign policies are not quasi-objective entities, but depend on perceptions, norms, and collective identities. The latter define the framework within which utility calculations take place.

### Institutional Constraints and the Complexity of Democratic Decision-Making

A second explanation emphasises institutional constraints. Democratic political systems are characterised by an elaborate set of checks and balances – between the executive and the legislature, between the political system, interest groups, and public opinion etc. Decision-making processes, particularly those involving war and peace issues, need time, since leaders need to mobilise sufficient domestic support to go to war. The size of winning coalitions is expected to be far larger in democracies than in authoritarian systems in which support by small elite groups might suffice. One could then argue that the complexity of the decision-making process makes it unlikely that leaders readily use military force unless they are confident of gathering enough domestic support and of the costs being low. They will perceive leaders of other democracies as equally constrained and, therefore, refrain from violence (Bueno de Mesquita and Lalman, 1992: ch. 4; Morgan and Campbell, 1991; see also Russett, 1993: 38-40).

In a sense, the finding that democracies rarely fight each other would be a statistical artefact according to the 'institutional constraints' argument, since

the democratic character of decision-making processes would not explain the absence of war among liberal systems, but the higher complexity of their policy-making institutions. The more centralised the political systems, the more likely it is that their leaders go to war. If so, the decisive distinction would not be between democracies and non-democracies, but between highly centralised and fragmented political structures, between 'weak' and 'strong' states as far as the state-society relationships are concerned (Katzenstein, 1978; Krasner, 1978). The degree of autonomy which decision-makers enjoy vis-à-vis societal demands should then correlate with their preparedness to use force in international politics. One would expect, for example, that the French state with its highly centralised political institutions of the Fifth Republic would be more likely to go to war than the comparatively fragmented and 'society-dominated' U.S. political system. There are not many empirical studies available investigating systematically the war involvement of 'strong' as compared to 'weak' states (see, however, Russett and Maoz, 1993; Morgan and Campbell, 1991; Morgan and Schwebach, 1992).

More important, the 'institutional constraints' model is unconvincing theoretically, since it tries to separate norms and institutions. Institutions consist of norms of appropriate behaviour, rules defining role expectations, and stabilised anticipations of the future. The complexity of democratic decision-making procedures is itself partly a function of democratic norms incorporated in the political institutions of liberal systems. The rule of law, for example, which is an intrinsic characteristic of liberal democracies and is emphasised in Kant's 'Perpetual Peace', is both normative and serves as an institutional constraint on decision-makers. It is, therefore, almost impossible to distinguish between arguments focussing on the complexity of decision-making processes and those emphasising norms.

Moreover, the model cannot explain why democratic leaders sometimes quickly decide to go to war against authoritarian systems, are able to mobilise a lot of societal resources within a short period of time — and get away with it by counting on the 'rally 'round the flag' effect (Mueller, 1973; Russett, 1990: ch. 2). The U.S. initial escalation of the Vietnam war represents such a case as well as the interventions in Grenada and Panama. When liberal systems are faced with authoritarian adversaries, the complexity of democratic institutions appears to matter less. Finally, the 'institutional constraints' model might explain why complex decision-making systems exert checks on national leaders concerning war fighting and, thus, emphasises — again — some inherent peacefulness of such systems. The argument does not address the uncertainty question discussed above, however. It is not clear why institutionally constrained leaders who perceive their fellow democrats as equally constrained, should, therefore, refrain from violence. The model — in the absence of normative underpinnings — has no theoretically convincing argument why rational

leaders of democratic systems should not be tempted to exploit equally constrained leaders for a quick and less costly military victory, thereby overcoming their own domestic restrictions. Rational leaders in institutionally constrained decision-making structures could even fear that their equally constrained counterparts make similar calculations as a result of which uncertainty re-enters the calculus. And back we are in the security dilemma!

## The Externalisation of Democratic Norms

Liberal democracies are not only characterised by the rule of law, the constraints of checks and balances, and participatory rule of the citizens. Their domestic structures also consist of norms, rules, and procedures embedded in the political culture and institutionalised in the political system. Democratic systems are supposed to guarantee freedom and human rights, to protect minorities, and to establish the principal equality of citizens with regard to their participatory rights. Democratic decision-making rules emphasise the peaceful resolution of conflict through compromise and consensus, penalise the threat or the use of force in domestic disputes as illegitimate, and provide for the possibility that today's minority might become tomorrow's majority. Democratic governance emphasises social diversity, shifting coalitions, the consent of the governed, and the publicity of the political process. Authoritarian regimes are mostly characterised by the absence of these norms. If, however, the norms regulating the decision-making processes in democratic systems are oriented toward non-violence and the peaceful resolution of political conflicts, one could expect that democracies externalise these norms when dealing with each other.

This argument emphasises the norms constituting the collective identity of actors in a democratic polity instead of utilitarian cost-benefit calculations or the complexity of decision-making processes. These norms are then expected to shape the motivations, perceptions and practices of actors in liberal systems. The argument offers a more convincing explanation for the 'democratic peace' than the other accounts, since it focuses on normative structures shaping interaction processes rather than individual behaviour. Norms which have been internalised by actors to the extent that they affect their collective identities, are expected to guide interactions, whether in the domestic or in the international realm. Democratic systems are expected to externalise their internal decision-making norms and rules in their foreign policy behaviour. Two functions of norms can be distinguished (Kratochwil, 1989). First, norms serve as communication devices that enable interactions in the first place by providing a framework of shared and collective understandings. Second, norms create, regulate, and stabilise social order. It is the first function that might provide an explana-

tion for the externalisation of democratic norms when liberal polities deal with each other. We need additional arguments, however, in order to explain why democracies are also likely to externalise the regulatory functions of their domestic norms when dealing with each other. It is not obvious that democracies are likely to create co-operative international institutions on the basis of compromise-oriented decision-making norms — social order — among themselves. I come back to that point later.

The argument offers a convincing explanation why democratic state actors are in general defensively motivated when it comes to international relations. Norms as communication devices also provide a starting point to explain why liberal democracies perceive each other as peacefully motivated. It is this perception that needs to be assumed in order to deal convincingly with the uncertainty factor inherent in the security dilemma. But the normative explanation for the democratic peace is still under-theorised. Bruce Russett, the leading advocate of the normative explanation, argues, for example, that,

if people in a democracy perceive themselves as autonomous, self-governing people who share norms of live-and-let-live, they will respect the rights of others to self-determination if those others are also perceived as self-governing and hence not easily led into aggressive foreign policies by a self-serving elite (Russett, 1993: 31; see also Czempiel, 1981: 219; Doyle, 1986).

This argument rests on an assumption, which is not self-evident. In a dog-eat-dog world of anarchy, the self-image as democratic and peaceful might or might not guide interactions with other democracies. Again, the perception of others as equally restrained might lead rational actors into adventurous foreign policies themselves or create the uncertainty that other rational leaders might come to the same conclusion. One frequently used line of reasoning to overcome this problem is to assume that aggressive behaviour is forced upon democracies by the mere existence of authoritarian regimes. Autocratic leaders are not bound by liberal norms of non-violent and compromise-oriented resolution of conflict, since they do not form part of their identity:

In non-democracies, decision-makers use, and may expect their opponents to use, violence and the threat of violence to resolve conflict as part of their domestic political processes. ... Therefore non-democracies may use violence and the threat of violence in conflicts with other states, and other states may expect them to use violence and the threat of violence in such conflicts (Russett, 1993: 35; see also Czempiel, 1992: 263).

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In other words, authoritarian systems determine the rules of the game in their interactions with democratic states. The latter have to keep up their guard in order to contain potentially aggressive behaviour of the former. Aggressive behaviour of peacefully minded democratic states would ultimately result from the mere existence of autocratic regimes in the international system. As argued above, such an explanation cannot be easily reconciled with the empirical data. For example, one would expect to find clearer indications that militarised disputes between democracies and authoritarian systems are more often caused and initiated by the latter rather than the former. In striking contrast to the robustness of the 'democratic peace' finding, there is not much in the empirical data to suggest that.

In sum, the normative explanation of the 'democratic peace' provides a good starting point for theorising about war and democracy. The arguments presented so far might explain the defensive motivations of democratic systems stemming from their collective identity as well as the potentially aggressive intentions of authoritarian systems. But if the argument is right that the security dilemma results from uncertainty rather than from intentions, these explanations are insufficient. There must be something in the *interactions* between democracies and dictatorships, on the one hand, and among democracies, on the other, that explains the difference in behaviour. Where do democracies 'know', on the one hand, that their fellow democracies are equally peaceful and can, therefore, be trusted? On the other hand, why do they feel potentially threatened by autocratic rulers thus enacting the 'security dilemma' when dealing with them?

## A Social Constructivist Interpretation of the Normative Argument

Social constructivism as such does not provide a substantive theory of international relations. It is not a 'fair weather' theory of international politics, as some have misunderstood it.<sup>7</sup> Rather, social constructivism provides a set of assumptions of what it is that we theorise about in international relations:

- International relations form part of the social construction of reality. Social rather than material structures constitute actors as social individuals. Structures and agents are mutually constitutive (Wendt, 1987, 1992; Jepperson et al., 1995).

It follows that anarchy and the resulting security dilemma are social constructs themselves (see also Mercer 1995). The structure of the international system has not somehow fallen from heaven, but has been created by the states and their

interactions. Consequently, anarchy and self-help as fundamental characteristics of international relations are not unavoidable.

- Actors' interests and preferences cannot be treated as exogenous or fixed in a theory of international relations. Rather, they originate and change during the processes of social interaction. As a result, we must move beyond the logic of instrumental rationality implied by rational choice theory and incorporate the logic of persuasion and communicative action. Words matter as much as deeds (Müller, 1994).
- Ideas and norms have to be taken more seriously in international relations than traditional theories based on material interests can account for.

In particular, the notion of ideas as 'switchmen' between material interests and behaviour has to be challenged (Hall, 1993). A more fundamental notion holds that ideas and norms have constitutive effects on the identity of actors and, as a result, on the way actors perceive their interests (Wendt, 1994; Jepperson et al., 1995). To put it differently, material interests do not exist in an idea-free vacuum.

What does a social constructivist interpretation of the democratic peace and the war involvement of democracies add to the liberal argument, particularly its normative version? *Perceptions* are the starting point. The proposition that authoritarian regimes are potential aggressors given their domestic structure of oppression and violence can be easier reconciled with the empirical data, if it is not taken as a quasi-objective finding, but as a *perception* by democratic systems. As Michael Doyle put it,

[D]omestically just republics, which rest on consent, then presume foreign republics also to be consensual, just, and therefore deserving of accommodation. ... At the same time, liberal states assume that non-liberal states, which do not rest on free consent, are not just. Because non-liberal governments are in a state of aggression with their own people, their foreign relations become for liberal governments deeply suspect. In short, fellow liberals benefit from a presumption of amity; non-liberals suffer from a presumption of enmity (Doyle, 1986: 1161).<sup>8</sup>

In other words, enmity as well as friendship in the international system does neither result from some inherent features of the international distribution of power, as realists would assume, nor from the domestic structures of states as such, as the above-quoted liberals argue. Rather, it is socially constructed. The democratic peace as well as the frequently aggressive behaviour by liberal states toward non-democracies then results from a rule learned through the processes of interaction, namely to infer aggressiveness or peacefulness from

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the degree of violence inherent in the domestic political structure of one's opponent. This explanation has to be distinguished from the liberal interpretations discussed above in that it does neither assume some inherent aggressiveness of authoritarian systems nor some intrinsic peacefulness of liberal democracies. Rather, intersubjective perceptions count and the rule to infer external behaviour from one's internal political structures and its degree of violence and oppression. Peacefulness as well as enmity is learned through international interactions.

But why is it that the perception of others as either potentially hostile or probably friendly depends on an evaluation of their domestic political structures? We get closer to an answer if we conceptualise norms as communication devices. Decision-makers in democratic polities who have been socialised in the norms governing liberal states, are likely to communicate their intentions in the international realm by referring to these very norms. When they encounter fellow democrats, a collective understanding of these norms can be easily established providing a common basis for further communication of peaceful intentions. Leaders of democratic states communicating their peaceful intentions to each other can always validate their claims by pointing to the peaceful resolution of conflicts inherent in their domestic structures. In other words, the validity claims of peacefulness are substantiated by one's own domestic structure. As a result, the spiral model of the security dilemma is reversed and uncertainty reduced. The possibility to validate one's claim of peacefulness through reference to one's domestic norms also explains why the democratic peace is particularly characteristic of stable democracies. States in various stages of transition to democracy may still be met with suspicion given their domestic turmoil.

The argument that democratic norms serve as communication devices by which leaders of liberal states are likely to establish peaceful relations with fellow democracies can also account for the fact that there are indeed militarised disputes among democracies, but that these almost never escalate into war. First, nothing in the argument presented so far assumes that there are never real conflicts of interests among liberal states. The issue is about how these conflicts are dealt with, not their existence. Second, the argument about communication processes by which democratic leaders establish the mutual recognition of norms of peaceful conflict resolution implies that time is involved. The democratic peace results from a process of social interaction. Initially hostile confrontations particularly in cases of severe conflicts of interests are well within the realm of possible behaviour. The longer the crisis endures, the more likely it is that norms of peaceful resolution of conflict can finally be established or that third-party mediation succeeds. Third, norms do not guide behaviour in such a way that they are never violated. We do run red lights from time to time. Valid norms guide behaviour in a probabilistic sense. As a result, the argument pre-

sented here does not require zero wars among democracies. It does require, though, that leaders of democratic states use third-party mediation or engage in specific communicative behaviour such as apologies, justifications, offer of compensatory action when violating norms.

Insights derived from psychological attribution theory shed further light on both the virtual absence of the security dilemma among democratic states and its presence in interactions between the latter and dictatorships. Attribution theory posits that individuals tend to judge the behaviour of others on the basis of dispositional rather than situational factors, while one's own behaviour is regarded as driven mostly by situational components (Crocker et al., 1983; Jones et al., 1971; Kahnemann, 1986; Lebow and Stein, 1993; Stein, 1994). Actors of democratic systems would then attribute potentially co-operative and non-aggressive behaviour to fellow democrats in the international system, since their domestic structures pre-disposes them toward such conduct. If the other state is considered as democratic and just, one does not assume to be potentially threatened. As a result, one starts trusting each other. Trust, however, is a functional equivalent of complete information and, thus, reduces uncertainty, the driving force of the security dilemma (Luhmann, 1989). If actors of democratic states view each other as pre-disposed toward peacefulness, the significance of the security dilemma in their interactions is substantially reduced and, therefore, a major obstacle toward stable security co-operation removed. Actors who trust each other, start behaving accordingly. They thereby create a peaceful and co-operative order through their interaction processes which reinforces the perception of one's peaceful intentions. In other words, the presumption that the other is pre-disposed toward peacefulness leads to a self-fulfilling prophecy, if both sides act on this assumption. The 'democratic peace' is socially constructed.

The democratic character of one's domestic structures then leads to a collective identification process among actors of democratic states defining the 'in-group' (Wendt, 1994). Such a collective identity not only substantially reduces the significance of the security dilemma, it also decreases the importance of the two major obstacles to international co-operation identified by regime theory - fear of cheating and the 'relative gains' problem (Oye, 1986; Baldwin, 1993; Grieco, 1988a). Mutual trust reduces fears of cheating. As to the 'relative gains' problem, actors of democratic states 'know' through the process of social identification that they are unlikely to fight each other in the future. The realist assumption is no longer valid that today's friend can always be tomorrow's enemy and that, therefore, each state has to worry that its partner might gain more from co-operation than oneself. Mutual gains through co-operative arrangements become possible.<sup>9</sup>

If we assume a collective identity because of shared liberal values among democratic state actors, co-operative norms regulating the interactions among

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democracies are likely to emerge when liberal systems are faced with co-operation problems. If these norms are institutionalised in regimes or international organisations such as NATO or the European Union, democracies are expected to form the Kantian ‘*pacific federations*’ (*foedus pacificum*) or what Karl W. Deutsch called a ‘*pluralistic security community*’. Such communities are defined as

a group of people which has become ‘integrated.’ By INTEGRATION we mean the attainment, within a territory, of a ‘sense of community’ and of institutions and practices strong enough and widespread enough to assure, for a ‘long’ time, dependable expectations of ‘peaceful change’ among its population (Deutsch et al., 1957: 5-6).

While Deutsch’s notion of pluralistic security communities was not confined to democracies, it is unlikely that a similar collective identity and sense of mutual responsiveness could emerge among autocratic leaders. There is nothing in their values that would prescribe mutual sympathy, trust, and consideration. Rather, co-operation among non-democracies is likely to emerge out of self-interests narrowly defined.

Why is it that *domestic orders*, norms, and political cultures shape the identities of actors in the international realm? Why not *economic* orders such as capitalism? Why not *geographic* concepts such as ‘the West’, the ‘North Atlantic area’, and the like? Why not *gender* and *race* such as ‘white males’? It is, of course, trivial that actors hold multiple identities. Which of these or which combination dominate their interests, perceptions, and behaviour in a given area of social interaction, needs to be examined through empirical analysis and cannot be decided beforehand. I submit, however, that values and norms pertaining to questions of governance are likely to shape identities in the realm of the political - be it domestic or international. Moreover, notions such as ‘the West’ do not contradict the argument here, but seem to represent a specific enculturation of a broader liberal worldview. The same holds true for identities as ‘capitalists’, particularly if juxtaposed against ‘Communist order’. The notion of the ‘free world’ which Western policy-makers used frequently during the Cold War to refer to their collective identity and to demarcate the boundaries against ‘Communism’ encompassed liberal values pertaining to both the political and the economic orders (Latham, 1995).

Most liberal systems not only share democratic values, but also a common appreciation of capitalist market economies.<sup>10</sup> Why is it that their community of values is based upon the norms governing their domestic *political* rather than *economic* orders? If the latter were the case, relative gains would matter more, since the norms governing capitalist orders emphasise competition and — albeit regulated — conflict. Fierce economic competition among capitalist states does

not contradict the notion of security community among democracies, though. International competition among capitalists is as much predicated upon a stable and peaceful international order as a domestic capitalist economy requires the state to guarantee property rights and the rule of law. Such a stable international order cannot be built upon capitalist values of competition, but requires the mutual recognition of democratic norms of peaceful conflict resolution.

If the pre-disposition of actors in democratic states leads them to trust other democracies, to externalise their internal decision-making norms in their interactions among each other, and, thus, to construct the 'democratic peace', how is the war involvement of liberal states with non-democracies to be explained? Starting from the above-quoted argument by Michael Doyle, I argue that the same rule — identity formation in international relations on the basis of one's domestic order — leads to the opposite predisposition and perception when actors of democracies deal with authoritarian regimes. It is irrelevant in this context whether dictatorships are inherently aggressive or not. It is enough to set a security dilemma in motion, if one side perceives the other as potentially violent. If democracies infer potential aggressiveness out of the internal political structure of oppressive regimes, they will feel threatened and act accordingly by forming alliances, engaging in arms races and even aggressive foreign policy. While ambiguous behaviour by other democracies is likely to be perceived as confirming the assumption of friendliness, ambivalent behaviour of autocratic regimes will probably confirm the perception of their pre-disposition toward violence and, hence, the feeling of being threatened. As the security dilemma tells us, mutually aggressive behaviour might well occur despite mutually defensive intentions. Belligerence then results from uncertainty about each other's motives. Unlike realism which posits that the security dilemma is caused by the eternal anarchic nature of the international system, a social constructivist interpretation of the liberal argument points out that, first, the security dilemma is confined to relations between democracies and autocracies or among the latter and, second, results from dispositional attributions in conjunction with behavioural consequences creating the anarchical structure in the first place. Enmity is socially constructed through mutual perceptions and interactions.

While democracies are likely to form a collective identity because of shared values whereby other liberal states become part of 'us', dictatorships are perceived as the 'other', the out-group. This does not exclude tactical alliances such as the US-UK alliance with the Soviet Union in 1941 or the American-Chinese relationship after 1972, but the co-operation problems identified by realist regime theory should apply. Since there is no mutual trust, fear of cheating might prevent co-operation. Since there is no sense of community, the 'relative gains' problem should play a more significant role. The Western aggressiveness during the Cold War and its sometimes grotesquely exaggerated threat perceptions can be easily accounted for in this context. The social con-

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struction of the Communist threat also explains why détente and arms control were so difficult to establish in the East-West relationship. If both sides perceive their conflict as irreconcilable, as caused by dispositional rather than situational factors, and as involving values and fundamental goals rather than means, conflict regulation becomes very difficult.<sup>11</sup>

An approach combining domestic structure characteristics, perceptions, and interaction patterns in the international realm appears to offer a better explanation than conventional liberal accounts for the dual finding of the 'democratic peace' despite frequent war involvement by democracies. However, if the presumption of friendship among democracies is as socially constructed as the presumption of hostility in relations between the latter and autocratic systems, one should assume that both did not automatically emerge with the existence of democratic states in international relations. Rather, one would assume an evolutionary process and *learning* (Levy, 1994; Russett, 1993: 5-11). Two factors might have encouraged that leaders in democratic states learned to perceive other democracies as peaceful and, by the same token, to distance themselves from autocracies.

First, publicity is an important ingredient of democratic decision-making processes. When foreign policy becomes the subject of public controversies (Holsti, 1992; Russett, 1990: ch. 4), and when aggressive foreign policies provoke counter-reactions in a democratic polity, actors can be easier persuaded of the peaceful nature of democratic systems. The more decision-making processes become transparent, the more other political systems and societies can convince themselves that democracies are defensively motivated. The absence of publicity in autocratic systems, however, increases the feeling of uncertainty by liberal states and might lead to increased suspicions. Western speculations about Iraq during the Gulf crisis and war as well as about North Korean ambitions with regard to nuclear weapons illustrate the point. Iraqi and North Korean behaviour was frequently evaluated on the basis of dispositional factors whereby the lack of transparency confirmed perceptions of the aggressive nature of these autocracies.

At the same time, the publicity of the democratic process is unlikely to be perceived as reassuring by non-democracies, since transparency threatens the rule of autocratic leaders. The CSCE process, for example, created international publicity on the violation of human rights in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union thereby empowering dissident groups and undermining the rule structure of the Communist systems (Deudney and Ikenberry, 1991/92; Thomas, forthcoming). In other words, the difference in publicity contributes to the democratic peace among liberal systems, on the one hand, but also increases threat perceptions between democracies and authoritarian systems.

Second, liberal states generate transnational relations among societal actors, since democracies are characterised by the separation between state and socie-

ty. The more autonomous societies are vis-à-vis the state, the less governments are capable of controlling or prohibiting transnational activities of their citizens (Keohane and Nye, 1971, 1977; Risse-Kappen, 1995b). This is not to argue that transnational relations are restricted to democracies. I only posit that liberal societies facilitate the emergence of transnational actors, while transnational access to autocratic states tends to depend on the explicit consent of the rulers.

But transnational relations as such do not promote peace among states. They might have different effects depending on whether they link democratic systems with each other or democracies and dictatorships. Transnational relations within the democratic community of states might increase the sensitivity of the societies for each other thereby providing one more mechanism by which liberal systems communicate peaceful intentions. Transnational contacts between democratic societies and autocratic states, however, are unlikely to communicate defensive motivations, but, first of all, might undermine oppressive regimes by decreasing the closed character of their societies. There are quite some indications, for example, that transnational exchanges between Western human rights and peace movements, on the one hand, and dissident groups in Eastern Europe, the Philippines, and South Africa, on the other, empowered the latter and, thus, undermined the autocratic rule structures (Klotz, 1995; Sikkink, 1993; Thomas, forthcoming). As a result, transnational linkages between democratic societies and authoritarian states might not contribute to peaceful relations, but might even increase the tensions between the former and the latter, since they challenge repressive rule from inside.

## Conclusions: Suggestions for a Research Agenda on Democracy and Peace

I have argued in this article that a social constructivist interpretation of the normative explanation for the dual finding of 'democratic peace' and 'democratic war involvement' provides a better account than reference to cost-benefit calculations, institutional constraints, or an alleged inherent peacefulness of liberal systems. Democracies do not fight each other, because they perceive each other as pre-disposed toward peacefulness and then act on this assumption. They perceive each other as peaceful, because of the democratic norms governing their domestic decision-making processes. These norms constitute their collective identity in international relations. They externalise them when dealing with each other, thus reinforcing the presumption of peacefulness. For the same reason, they are likely to form pluralistic security communities based on a collective identity. Because they perceive each other as peaceful and express a sense of community, there are likely to overcome obstacles against internation-

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al co-operation and to form international institutions. The norms regulating interactions in such institutions are expected to reflect the shared democratic values and to resemble the domestic decision-making norms.

At the same time, relations among democracies and authoritarian regimes suffer from the presumption of potentially aggressive intentions. Democratic state actors assume that autocratic leaders are pre-disposed toward belligerence, since their domestic rule is based on oppression and violence. This perception then creates a security dilemma leading to behavioural patterns that confirm the presumption of enmity. Both the absence of the security dilemma among democracies and its presence when democratic systems deal with dictatorships are then socially created through perceptual and interaction processes. Thus, the explanation is situated on both the domestic and the international levels.

The argument put forward in this article is highly speculative at the moment. While it is consistent with the empirical data, the processes it describes require detailed investigation. However, there are some empirical studies suggesting that collective identities and the perceptions of enmity and friendship matter indeed. John Owen (1993, 1994), for example, has shown in detail how perceptions of the other as democratic or non-democratic mattered in war-threatening crises involving the U.S. from late 18th century to World War I. His work comes close to an empirical test of the argument developed above. Another study pertains to the question of whether the Peloponnesian war involved wars among democracies, particularly between Athens and Syracuse. Challenging the argument by Bruce Russett and William Antholis (1993), Tobias Bachteler (1995) argues that Athens and Syracuse did not perceive each other as stable democracies and, thus, could not develop a collective identity preventing them from fighting each other. Internal turmoil and frequent domestic violence prohibited a mutual perception as peaceful and liberal. My own work (Risse-Kappen, 1995a) on the European influence on U.S. foreign policy elaborates on the proposition that democracies are more likely than other types of political systems to align with one another. I argue that interaction patterns in the transatlantic alliance can be explained by assuming a security community in Karl W. Deutsch's sense creating a collective identity of shared democratic values which then leads to norms of consultation and consensus-based decision-making. I submit that this account provides a better explanation of the empirical evidence in the US-European Cold War relationship than traditional alliance theories based on realist bargaining theory.

However, these studies only represent a first attempt at systematically evaluating the normative-constructivist explanation of the 'democratic peace' and the 'democratic war involvement'. We need detailed case studies on

- the domestic discourses leading to the war involvement of democracies as compared to 'near misses' when disputes among democracies did not escalate;

- the origins of such militarised disputes among democracies as well as the reasons for the lack of escalation to war (see Dixon, 1993, 1994);
- the role of publicity and of transnational relations in creating both the 'democratic peace' and perceptions of potential hostility between democracies and autocratic systems;
- the differential impact of mass public opinion and elite opinion in the processes described above.<sup>12</sup>

I particularly emphasise that such studies involve detailed analyses of communication processes. One fundamental problem of most quantitative studies on democracy and war is that they rely, first, on data on a highly aggregate level, and, second, on behavioural evidence. An explanation focussing on norms, identity and perceptions, however, must involve discourse analysis, since words matter in such an account as much as deeds. The main reason why current studies evaluating the normative explanation of the democratic peace against the 'institutional constraints' model have been found inconclusive is that measuring norms via behaviour alone is questionable.<sup>13</sup> Norms and identities affect behaviour via processes of communicative action. If we ignore these processes in our research designs, we cannot convincingly prove or disprove the normative argument.

## Notes

- \* We wish to thank *Sage Publications* for granting us the permission to reprint this article, which originally appeared in *European Journal of International Relations*, Vol. 1, (1995), No. 4, pp. 491-518.
- <sup>1</sup> It is now clear that the crossing of the 38th parallel by the Western democracies constituted *the* major escalatory move during the Korean war leading to the Chinese intervention (Christensen, 1992).
  - <sup>2</sup> Table 2, for example, which he considers superior to Table 1 which relies solely on Correlate of War data, shows no difference between democracies and non-democracies for violence dead as percentage of population (Rummel, 1995).
  - <sup>3</sup> Two points have to be made here. First, if general and universal suffrage is considered the most significant criterion for the democratic character of a political system, it should be noted that there have been no democracies since approximately 1900. Until that time, women were mostly not allowed to vote. How can one speak of democracies, if half the population is excluded from participatory rights? It might well be that gender is relevant for the 'democratic peace' finding in the sense that the women vote strengthens it (see Brandes, 1994; Russett, 1995: 167/fn.8). Second, most scholars argue that democracies 'rarely' fight each other, since there are some borderline cases depending on how strict criteria for what constitutes a democracy one uses. According to James Lee Ray (1993), however, none of the alleged 'wars among democracies' qualifies, if peaceful change of government following free elections that involve at least 50% of the population is used as the definitional criterion for 'democracy.'
  - <sup>4</sup> Layne's treatment of pre-World War I Imperial Germany as a democracy as a result of which World War I was a war among democracies is too grotesque to require a comment by a European scholar. For example, the controversy surrounding Fritz Fischer's work that Layne calls

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'ideologically tinged' was not about the alleged democratic character of Wilhelmine Germany, but about the domestic causes of World War I and their relative significance as compared to other causes of war (Layne, 1994: 41-44).

5. At this point, I agree with Christopher Layne's criticism of the prevailing liberal explanations for the 'democratic peace' (Layne, 1994: 7-13; see also Owen, 1994: 90-103).
6. I thank an anonymous reviewer for alerting me to this article.
7. See, for example, John Mearsheimer's recent analysis of 'critical theory.' He lumps together very different approaches having allegedly in common the assertion that ideas move the world. See Mearsheimer (1994/95).
8. For a similar point see Russett (1993: 33). As the above-quoted excerpt from Russett's book shows, however, he appears to argue closer from a position which assumes an intrinsic malevolence of at least some authoritarian systems rather than a socially constructed enmity between democracies and dictatorships.
9. This is not to argue that only liberal democracies form stable international regimes. Rather, I submit that democratic states can overcome obstacles to international co-operation more easily than other types of systems.
10. I thank Mark Laffey for alerting me to this point.
11. On this point, see the 'problem-structural' approach to regime analysis as developed by the Tübingen group (Efinger and Zürn, 1993).
12. In this article, I have deliberately avoided the issue whether the social construction of the democratic peace and the war involvement of democracies only concern the elite level or must include the level of mass public opinion. I suspect the latter, but am unable to provide a convincing argument. I thank an anonymous reviewer for alerting me to this point.
13. Bruce Russett and Zeev Maoz, for example, operationalise the normative approach via the persistence of a political regime and the level of violent internal conflict. Neither indicator can be regarded as directly and causally linked to norms. In fact, the persistence of political regimes over time can as well be explained within the 'institutional constraints' model (Russett and Maoz, 1993).