

DEMOCRATIC STATES DO NOT WAGE WAR AGAINST EACH OTHER. IS IT TRUE?

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Abstract

This article critically re-examines the Democratic Peace Theory (DPT), a long-standing tenet of liberal thought in international relations, which posits that democratic states are less likely to wage war against one another. While DPT has informed both scholarly discourse and policy-making, this study challenges its theoretical assumptions, empirical foundations, and normative implications through a multi-theoretical and methodologically reflective lens. The paper systematically proceeds in three analytical stages: 1.) a conceptual critique of DPT's definitional coherence and causal claims, 2.) an empirical assessment using historically documented cases of inter-democratic conflict and aggressive interventions by democracies, and 3.) a theoretical juxtaposition of liberal, realist, and constructivist interpretations of peace and conflict. Particular attention is paid to methodological limitations such as selection bias, endogeneity, and Eurocentric framing. By dissecting both mainstream support and prominent critiques, the article highlights how alternative variables may offer more robust explanations for observed patterns of peace. In its conclusion, the study argues that the deterministic logic of DPT is inadequate for explaining the complex dynamics of contemporary international relations and may even reinforce problematic normative hierarchies that justify interventionism.

Keywords: Democracy, War, Liberalism, Realism, International Relations

INTRODUCTION

The theory of democratic peace (DPT) is a cornerstone of liberal thought in International Relations (IR), asserting that democracies are less likely to engage in wars with one another. This theory, rooted in Immanuel Kant's ideas in *Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch* (1795). In Kant's view, three primary conditions of perpetual peace of a republican government in every country are based on a civil constitution, establishment

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of a federation of free states, and cosmopolitan right of individuals as world citizens. The foundations of republican system, i.e. freedom for all members of the society as human beings, belonging of each individual to a public code of law as subject, and equality before law as a citizen, are important in Kant's political philosophy (Mahmoudi, 2008). The same position as Kant was also held by the liberal-minded American president Woodrow Wilson after the horrors of the First World War. He said in his speech in 1917: "A steadfast concert for peace can never be maintained except by a partnership of democratic nations. No autocratic government could be trusted to keep faith within it or observe its covenants. It must be a league of honour, a partnership of opinion" (Wilson cited in National Archives, n.d.).

This concept was later developed by scholars such as Michael W. Doyle and Bruce Russett, has significantly influenced both academic discourse and policy-making. It claims that democratic states, bound by norms, institutional constraints, and economic interdependence, create a more peaceful international system. Proponents argue that this theory provides a compelling explanation for the absence of wars between democracies, particularly in the post-World War II period. However, this optimistic perspective is not without its criticisms. So[SM1.1], the main research question of this article is: To what extent can Democratic Peace Theory adequately explain the absence of war between democratic states, and what alternative factors provide a more convincing explanation of this phenomenon?

Although DPT has gained broad acceptance in liberal circles (i.e., in the policies of countries belonging to the "Euro-Atlantic civilization," as Samuel Huntington would put it), it also faces significant criticism due to its theoretical assumptions, methodological shortcomings, and resulting empirical inconsistencies. Critics argue that the theory is overly idealistic and relies on West-centric definitions of democracy and peace (Waltz, 1962). Moreover, it often fails to account for historical anomalies, such as wars involving democracies or their aggressive behaviour toward non-democratic states (despite the fact that the next section of this article presents several examples where a democracy waged war against another democracy). These criticisms raise important questions about the universality and applicability of DPT in explaining peace within the international system.

The theoretical foundation of DPT is rooted in liberalism, which emphasizes shared values and institutional mechanisms that purportedly prevent democracies from engaging in conflicts with one another. This perspective assumes that democracies operate based on mutual trust

and peaceful dispute resolution. However, realist scholars counter this by arguing that the anarchic nature of the international system means that power politics and self-interest often prevail over normative considerations. Constructivist perspectives further challenge the assumption that democratic norms are universally applicable, asserting that cultural and historical contexts significantly influence state behaviour (Wendt, 1999).

Empirical evidence supporting DPT is also contentious. Proponents highlight examples such as the peaceful relations among Western democracies during the Cold War (although the very nature of a bipolar world already suggests the non-universality of DPT's claims), while critics point to cases like the conflict between Finland and the United Kingdom during World War II, which undermine the core premise of the theory (Elman, 2001). Many further argue that the true drivers of peace are economic interdependence and rigidly organized international institutions (those with enforceable sanction mechanisms – such as the European Union (EU) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), rather than BRICS³ or the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) rather than the democratic idea itself. Methodological issues, including selection bias and the problem of endogenous idealist assumptions, further complicate the credibility and validity of DPT's claims. The theory's focus on a narrow set of democratic states and its tendency to overlook non-traditional forms of democracies (which, from a political science perspective, are still democracies) raise doubts about its contemporary relevance.

Beyond theoretical and empirical critiques, DPT is also challenged on normative grounds. Its West-centric framework is often used to justify foreign interventions “in the name of democracy” (Iraq, Afghanistan). Postcolonial scholars argue that this approach imposes a Euro-Atlantic-centric governance model on often more diverse communities while overlooking alternative paths to peace (Pourmokhtari, 2013). Furthermore, the assumption that democracies inherently promote peace while simultaneously fostering aggressive tendencies toward “non-democracies” only perpetuates global inequalities among states.

This article works with a relevant critical stance (considerably unpopular in the Central European environment) and analytically supports arguments demonstrating why peace among democracies also has alternative explanations. The paper exposes the theory's reliance on Western-centric definitions of democracy and peace, its selective historical interpretations,

³ BRICS as an intergovernmental organization consisting of ten countries — Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa, Egypt, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Iran and the United Arab Emirates.

and its failure to account for instances of democratic states waging war against each other. The study (critical analysis, historical sociology and discourse of the academic debate) argues that alternative factors, such as geopolitical balance of power, economic interdependence, and the strategic influence of hegemonic actors, offer more compelling explanations for observed patterns of peace. Additionally, it scrutinizes the normative implications of DPT, contending that its ideological underpinnings have frequently been instrumentalized to justify foreign interventions under the guise of democracy promotion.

The article aims to contribute to the academic debate by advocating for a pluralist, context-sensitive approach to theorizing peace, which resists reductionist binaries and reflects the multipolar realities of 21st-century global politics. It also makes three main contributions to the academic debate on Democratic Peace Theory. First, it provides a systematic multi-level critique of DPT by combining conceptual, empirical, and methodological perspectives, highlighting its internal inconsistencies and limitations. Second, it advances a pluralist explanatory framework, arguing that peace cannot be attributed to regime type alone, but rather emerges from the interaction of multiple factors such as power distribution, economic interdependence, and institutional constraints. Third, the article contributes to the metatheoretical debate by questioning universalist claims in international relations theory and proposing a context-sensitive approach that recognizes the conditional and limited validity of DPT.

1 THE DISCOURSE OF ACADEMIC DEBAT

In 1964, Dean Voris Babst published one of the first articles that had a significant influence on the later development of DPT. In this paper called *Elective Governments: A force for peace* this scholar argues that between 1789 to 1941, “no wars had been fought between independent nations with elective governments” (Babst, 1964, p. 10). Babst’s work aimed to demonstrate that democratic states do not wage war against each other and that this stability results from internal political structures that create transparent and accountable governance. His argument was that democracies tend to pursue peaceful foreign policies because they are governed by public opinion, which in most cases opposes war. In other words, Babst also showed that democracies regularly fought against autocracies, and engaged in colonial wars. Babst concluded that diplomatic efforts to increase the number of democracies could increase the chances of

maintaining peace (Babst, 1964, p. 14). This perspective laid the foundation for further research in the field of democratic peace and inspired theorists such as Bruce Russett to continue writing on this phenomenon.

Russett, in his book *Causes of Peace: Democracy, Interdependence, and International Organizations, 1885–1992* (2003), along with John R. Oneal and Michael L. Berbaum, argues that not only democracy but also mutual cooperation through international organizations and trade relations ensures stability and peace among these states. Russett, John R. Oneal and Michael L. Berbaum demonstrate that democracies are more interdependent and tend to avoid conflicts because they share common values and interests, leading to peaceful agreements and behavioral patterns (Oneal, Russet, Berbaum, 2003).

Kantian principles, which supported the idea of perpetual peace among democratic states, were further developed in their modern form by Michael W. Doyle (arguably the most iconic figure associated with DPT) in his article *Kant, Liberal Legacies, and Foreign Affairs* (1983). This article establishes continuity between the Kantian project and modern liberal thought in IR; in particular, Doyle finds his democratic peace thesis – the fact that liberal democracies do not wage war against one another – to be consistent with Kant's three Definitive Articles for perpetual peace. Following Kant, Doyle expands on the thesis that liberal democratic states inherently tend to create peaceful international relations. Doyle argues that democracies are not aggressive in international relations because their internal structure is based on respect for the law, making them inclined to resolve conflicts through diplomatic means rather than military action. Furthermore, he elaborates on the idea that democratic states share certain norms and values, which explains why they rarely go to war with each other (Doyle, 1983). Democratic peace, in short, refers to a theoretical constellation of political space that is filled with states with a democratic polity and conflict-free potential.

In later years, critical voices emerged, questioning DPT. Joanna Gowa, associated with the neorealist school, in her book *Ballots and Bullets: The Elusive Democratic Peace* (1999), argues that there is not as much peace among democratic states as DPT claims. Gowa points out that most empirical studies supporting DPT ignore historical examples where democratic states have waged war against each other or have engaged in wars with non-democratic states. She focuses on empirical evidence showing that the patterns of peace among democratic states lack clear consistency and that other factors, such as geopolitical and economic interests, may be crucial in explaining international conflicts (Gowa, 1999).

It should be noted, that supporters of realism are some of the greatest critics of DPT. They generally argue that it is not democracy or the absence of, but considerations and evaluations of power, that cause peace or war. Layne (1994), Spiro (1994), Oren (1995), Farber and Gowa (1996) and the already mentioned Gowa (1999) jointly conclude that the relationship between democracy and peace is coincidental and, therefore, they argue against the democratic peace proposition (Antić, Vlahovec, 2013).

This criticism is also supported by other theorists, such as Christopher Layne. In his crucial contribution *Kant or Cant: The Myth of the Democratic Peace* (1994) Layne selects four crises² in

which democracies came close to war. His review of the historical record concludes that in those cases democracies avoided war, but there is no evidence that they did so because they shared democratic norms. The indicators that should have been present were absent. Instead, the democracies behaved in a manner predicted by realism: they acted on the basis of calculations of national interest and used threats when vital interests were at stake. Layne also argues that looking at cases where war was possible is a better way to test DPT (Antić, Vlahovec, 2013).

According to Layne, DPT is therefore based on false assumptions. He demonstrates that even democratic states may wage wars to spread democracy or protect their strategic interests, which challenges the core premise of DPT. According to Layne, DPT is too one-sided and fails to account for the complex reality of international relations, where decisions about war depend on many different factors, not just the political regime (Layne 1994).

Another critic of DPT is social constructivist Oren Barak, who, in his work *The Failure of the Israeli–Palestinian Peace Process, 1993-2000* (2005), points out that the theory ignores external factors and geopolitical circumstances that may play a key role in decisions about war. Barak argues that even democratic states can be motivated to go to war based on external threats or a desire for dominance (in this case, Israel), making DPT insufficient for explaining the complexity of international relations (Barak, 2005).

David A. Lake, who focused on *Powerful Pacifists: Democratic States and War* (1992), is a liberal scholar who nonetheless questions the idea that democratic states are inherently peaceful. Lake argues that DPT fails to properly explain why some democratic states engage in wars and that the theory does not sufficiently account for factors such as economic interdependence or regional security structures. According to Lake, democratic states can behave just as aggressively as authoritarian regimes if it aligns with their national interests.

These theorists highlight that DPT overestimates the role of democratic governance in preventing wars and that broader factors beyond the political system must be considered to explain international conflicts. Similarly, perhaps the most mainstream realist scholar in international relations – John Mearsheimer – also joins these criticisms (unsurprisingly). He argues that DPT does not address the complex issues related to geopolitics and military interests. In his work *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (2001), Mearsheimer points out that states, regardless of their political system, may act according to realist principles of power and security, which is why DPT fails to capture the full dynamics of international relations (Mearsheimer, 2001).

The criticism of DPT has thus been a long-standing phenomenon. While some theorists continue to support it, the evidence and arguments put forward by its critics suggest that its validity in the complex world we live in is not as clear-cut as its proponents often hope.

1.1 Empirical Evidence for and Against DPT

Empirical evidence for and against DPT forms the core of the conceptual debate in IR. Proponents of the theory argue that the absence of wars between established democracies is an indicator of its validity, pointing to numerous historical examples. However, critics challenge this claim, highlighting alternative explanations for the observed patterns of peace. This part of the paper primarily examines the weaknesses and historical cases that undermine its fundamental assertions.

1.2 Arguments Supporting DPT (?)

Proponents of DPT often cite the absence of significant wars between democracies as its strongest empirical foundation. For example, during the Cold War, relations between Western democracies such as America, Britain, and France remained peaceful. Similarly, the EU is frequently mentioned as a model of democratic cooperation, where shared governance and liberal norms have supported decades of peace among member states (Schimmelfennig, 2010).

A commonly cited example for liberals is also the alliance between the USA and Britain, characterized by deep trust and mutual respect. This relationship has endured critical moments in history, including World War II and the Cold War, and remains strong today (Placek, 2012). Proponents

of DPT argue that such alliances are evidence of the unique ability of democracies to resolve disputes through dialogue and diplomacy rather than conflict.

The integration of Europe after World War II is also frequently cited as a case study for DPT. The creation of democratic institutions, such as the European Coal & Steel Community and its later evolution into the EU, facilitated economic interdependence and political cooperation, preventing further conflicts between historical rivals like France and Germany (Attia, 2016). Idealists attribute the low probability of war to this democratic governance, which strengthens stability.

1.3 Criticism of Supporting Evidence

Despite these examples, critics of DPT argue that its empirical support is limited. Proponents tend to focus on cases that support the thesis and ignore exceptions and complexities of the observed phenomena. In other words, they are satisfied with the universal explanation of DPT without considering the more complex aspects that play a role in why, in a particular case, conflict does not occur (Rosato, 2003). Moreover, while Western democracies have enjoyed relative peace, their behaviour toward non-democracies and during transitional periods tells a very different story.

A number of historical case studies contradict the logic of DPT. The previously mentioned conflict between Finland and Britain during World War II involved two democratic countries, yet they found themselves on opposing sides of the conflict, as at that time (i.e. in 1941, when the UK declared war on Finland) both countries had entirely different interests, which they perceived as vital to their survival. During the Kargil War in 1999, whether we like the designation or not, two democracies clashed, India and Pakistan, two democracies with complementary values based on different religious traditions and, additionally, nuclear arsenals. The last international conflict on the South American continent was a clash between two democracies: the war over the Cordillera del Condor, a completely uninteresting, mountainous, uninhabited area between Peru and Ecuador, where a few dozen soldiers died and the mountains ended up in Peruvian hands. The war in Nagorno-Karabakh was also de facto fought between two states with democratic forms of government (this was in 1991, prior to the authoritarian regime of the Aliyev family in Azerbaijan). One can even go far back into history, into ancient times, to the Punic Wars (2nd–3rd century BC) and the Peloponnesian War (5th century BC). These conflicts cannot be viewed through the lens of the modern liberal European concept of

democracy; despite their unequal suffrage and oligarchic features, Rome, Carthage, Athens, and Melos (and other Greek democratic poleis into which the Delian League decided to militarily intervene for strategic reasons) were democracies at the time of these conflicts (Russett, 1993).

Critics also cite Cold War-era the United States (U.S.) military interventions in Latin America aimed at preventing the rise of leftist ideologies in republican leadership (Schenoni and Mainwaring, 2019). Such a scenario occurred in the 1950s in Guatemala (among other reasons, also to defend the interests of the United Fruit Company (UFC) company, which operated in Guatemala and needed to maintain exploitative practices for its survival) and in the 1970s in the notoriously best-known case of Chile, when left-leaning Allende was overthrown with the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) help and replaced by right-wing dictator Augusto Pinochet. The U.S. even went as far as preventing the emergence of democracy if that democracy was expected to be leftist. A sufficient example is Anastasio Somoza Debayle, president of Nicaragua from 1967 to 1972 and again from 1974 to 1979. Although he was as a ruthless dictator, the U.S. continued to support his regime as a non-communist stronghold in Nicaragua.

2 METHODOLOGICAL & CONCEPTUAL SHORTCOMINGS

Despite its widespread acceptance, DPT is burdened by methodological and conceptual shortcomings that challenge its credibility and applicability. These issues stem from questions of causality, inconsistent definitions, historical and cultural biases, and the inability to adapt to the changing nature of international relations. This part of the study critically examines the shortcomings and claims of the theory's weakening theoretical coherence and validity as such.

2.1 Causality vs. Correlation

One of the most significant methodological criticisms of DPT is its inability to demonstrate a causal relationship between democracy and peace. While proponents of the theory claim that democratic states do not go to war with one another, critics argue that the observed correlation does not necessarily imply causation (Spiro, 1994). For example, the absence of war between democracies may be attributed to other factors (confounding variables), such as economic interdependence, shared cultural norms, or hegemonic stability, rather than the nature of their political systems.

The problem of endogeneity further complicates this issue. DPT assumes that democracy causes peace, but it is equally possible that peace creates favourable conditions for the emergence of democratic governance. What if the causality is reversed? States that are already peaceful and economically stable are more likely to adopt democratic institutions, making it difficult to distinguish cause from effect (Rosato, 2003). This circular logic weakens the explanatory power of the theory and raises questions about its empirical foundation.

2.2 Definitional Ambiguities

Another major shortcoming of DPT lies in the vague and inconsistent definitions of its key concepts, namely “democracy” and “peace.” Proponents of the theory often adopt broad definitions of democracy that include states with varying degrees of democratic institutions and practices (Kinsella, 2005). However, this approach undermines the theory itself, as the probability that a flawed democracy might attack another is not zero; history has already shown otherwise. Moreover, DPT lacks definitional frameworks that would filter out such states. Countries like the U.S., Britain, and France are frequently cited as model examples of peaceful democracies and evidence of how DPT functions. Yet, there are specific reasons why these states are members of the same alliance and no longer engage in war with each other. Furthermore, their involvement in wars and interventions, especially against non-democratic states, complicates the “peaceful” narrative. What about Iraq, for instance? Following the protests of 2019–2021, this ethnically heterogeneous country was catalyzed into a democratization process. Although it is a flawed democracy with high levels of corruption, socio-economic problems, especially those stemming from the last civil war (2014–2017), and unstable political institutions, it is still a democracy (Salim, 2021). In fact, it may currently be one of the most democratic countries in the Middle East (though the competition is limited).

Now, imagine a scenario in which Iraq, under a democratically elected government, decides to attack Israel, also a flawed democracy (given its ethnocentric structure and apartheid-like elements), but nonetheless a democracy. If such a military conflict were to happen, it would likely not come as a surprise, as people would not assign much significance to Iraq’s status as a democratic state⁴. Furthermore, if the attack were carried out

⁴ This scenario has, after all, already occurred during the Six-Day War, when Lebanon, at the time a democratic country, was among the Arab states that went to war with Israel.

in accordance with the will of the people, it would further challenge the foundations of DPT, which links democratic governance with peace, partly based on the assumption that elected leaders avoid war to secure re-election and retain voter support. DPT does not claim that “liberal democratic states of the modern Euro-Atlantic type” with additional specific characteristics do not go to war with each other. It simply states that democracies do not go to war with one another.

The definition of peace is no less problematic. DPT predominantly focuses on the absence of interstate wars while overlooking other forms of conflict (after all, from the perspective of security studies, there is a broader range of international conflicts than just war itself, /Glasl, 2011/), such as civil wars, proxy wars, and non-traditional security threats like terrorism or cyberattacks. The most famous civil war is arguably the American Civil War. If democracies cannot prevent military conflict within their own democratic communities, how could they prevent conflict with one another? By narrowing its focus to interstate wars, DPT ignores the complex and dynamically evolving nature of modern conflicts, thereby diminishing its relevance in international relations.

2.3 Selection Bias & Historical Context

DPT also suffers from selection bias, as it focuses on specific periods and regions where democracies coexist peacefully (Slantchev, Alexandrova, Gartzke, 2005). For example, it relies heavily on the post-World War II era, particularly among Western democracies. This focus overlooks cases in which democracies have engaged in conflict with each other (such as the aforementioned Britain and Finland, or India and Pakistan, etc.).

Furthermore, the theory’s emphasis on Western democracies reflects a historical and cultural bias that limits its validity on a general level. DPT assumes that once a country adopts a democratic system, it automatically shares similar norms and values, ignoring the diversity of cultural contexts within these countries. Logically, the democratic practices of the EU member states will differ from those of emerging democracies in Africa, Asia, or Latin America. This lack of universality weakens the claim that the theory provides an explanation for global peace (Henderson, 2009).

2.4 Excessive Emphasis on Western Liberalism

DPT is often criticized for its West-centric perspective, which assumes the superiority of liberal democratic norms and institutions. This “non-

globalized” bias not only limits the theory’s applicability in non-Western contexts but also sustains a hierarchical view of global governance and international relations theory as a whole (Pourmokhtari, 2013). By promoting democracy as a universal solution to conflict, DPT ignores alternative political systems and models of governance that can also contribute to peace.

For instance, non-democratic states such as China have maintained peaceful relations with many of their neighbours through mechanisms like economic cooperation and regional diplomacy (Bakker, 2020). Similarly, traditional and hybrid models of governance in regions such as sub-Saharan Africa or the Middle East and North Africa region have played significant roles in conflict resolution. DPT’s inability to account for these alternative paths to peace highlights its narrow theoretical framework and dependence on Western liberalism as a normative foundation.

2.5 Time-limited Theoretical Shortcomings

Another significant conceptual shortcoming of DPT is its reliance on specific historical and geopolitical contexts. Many of the theory’s arguments stem from the period after 1945, when American security policy was established in the West within the bipolar system of the time, and international institutions such as the UN and NATO were created. These factors, rather than democracy itself, may have played a more significant role in maintaining peace among Western democratic states (Rosato, 2003).

After World War II, the U.S. and the Soviet Union were significantly marked geopolitically, while smaller Western and Central European countries were in a poor security position. Fearing a potential Third World War with the Eastern Bloc, it was only natural for Western countries to band together in a security alliance with the U.S. (Bhuiya, Jahan, 2022). The post-Cold War period further complicates the applicability of the theory. As new democracies emerge and the power dynamic shifts (from a bipolar to a unipolar and later multipolar system), the assumptions of DPT become increasingly difficult to sustain. The rise of democracies that have electoral processes but lack liberal democratic norms challenges the theory’s emphasis on shared values and mutual trust (Solik, Graf 2023). Similarly, the growing influence of authoritarian regimes such as those in China, Kazakhstan, Turkey, and elsewhere raises questions about the future of democratic governance and its role in global peace (Lu, Shi, 2015).

3 ALTERNATIVE EXPLANATION OF PEACE

Alright then, apparently the DPT does not function as properly as it might seem, so... What does? Rather than proposing a single competing theory, this article advances a pluralist explanatory approach. It argues that peace is best understood as a multifactorial outcome shaped by the interaction of structural (balance of power), economic (interdependence), and institutional (international organizations) variables. This approach does not reject DPT entirely but reframes it as a partial and context-dependent explanation rather than a universal law[SM3.1].

While the DPT claims that democracy is the main driver of peace between states, alternative explanations challenge this assertion. These alternative explanations emphasize factors (besides the mentioned balance of power, economic interdependence and IGOs) such as the shared cultural norms in promoting peace[SM4.1]. This part of the study analyses potential alternative explanations, critically compares them with DPT, and explains why a multifactor approach is inherently more meaningful for understanding peace. The authors suggest the name “Pluralist Multifactor Framework of Peace” theory, combining analytic eclecticism (Sil & Katzenstein), hegemonic stability (Kindleberger & Gilpin); security communities (Deutsch), complex interdependence (Keohane & Nye), global international relations’ theories (by non-western authors to criticise the westcentrism of modern IR theories and lack of Global South emancipation in the field) and others... There is simply no universal theory, combining multiple theories is the key to grasp the very essence of true understanding of the world.

3.1 Realist Perspectives: Balance of Power & Security Studies

Theories based on the realism of international relations offer fairly compelling arguments against DPT by focusing on the balance of power and strategic interests as the primary determinants of peace. Realists such as Waltz and Mearsheimer argue that peace is not the result of democratic norms but rather a consequence of the balance of power or the dominance of a hegemon. According to this view, states act in their own interest and prioritize security and survival over ideological considerations (Mearsheimer, 2001).

As mentioned above, the relative peace among Western democracies during the Cold War period can be attributed to the presence of a common threat: the Soviets. The alliance led by the U.S. created a security structure

that united the West out of the need to balance Soviet power (Cederman, Rao 2001).

The concept of hegemonic stability further assumes that a dominant power, such as the U.S. after World War II, can enforce global order and reduce the likelihood of conflict. Pax Americana, characterized by the U.S. dominance in the military, economic, and political spheres, played a role in shaping the current international system (Layne, 2018). This realist perspective challenges DPT by attributing peace to the distribution of power rather than the nature of political systems.

3.2 Economic Interdependence & Globalization

Another significant explanation of peace is the role of economic interdependence and globalization. The theory of liberal peace suggests that states with high levels of trade and economic integration are less likely to engage in conflict, as war would disrupt mutually beneficial economic relationships (Chingono, 2009). This perspective aligns with Immanuel Kant's idea of "perpetual peace," which emphasized the importance of trade in fostering peaceful relations between countries.

Both historical and contemporary experiences support this argument. For instance, the deep economic ties between the U.S. and China, despite their ideological and political differences, function as a stabilizing factor in their relationship. Both countries understand that conflict would have catastrophic consequences for their economies, which deters direct military confrontation (Attia, 2016).

Similarly, the EU provides a compelling case study of how economic dependence promotes peace. The integration of European economies through initiatives such as the European Coal and Steel Community and the eurozone has made war between member states virtually impossible. These facts suggest that economic factors, rather than democratic governance alone, play a key role in reducing the likelihood of conflict (Robbani, 2007).

4 PROPOSED SOLUTIONS TO THE THEORETICAL DISPUTE IN THE ACADEMIC COMMUNITY

Contemporary international politics is moving away from rigid theoretical frameworks that were long considered authoritative for understanding global processes. DPT, which assumes that democratic states do not go to war with each other, has in recent decades proven to be an insufficiently explanatory concept. Historical examples such as the war between the

U.S. and Great Britain in 1812, the Turkish invasion of Cyprus (and others mentioned in previous parts of the paper), or diplomatic crises between European countries show that democracies are not immune to conflicts (whether physical or verbal in nature). In the current context, this issue is reflected, for instance, in the geopolitical tensions between the U.S. and the EU, where differences in economic and security priorities are gradually deepening. During Donald Trump's second term, this dynamic could become even more pronounced, raising questions about the stability of transatlantic relations and the functionality of liberal institutions (Pribecevic, 2020).

Liberalism, as one of the dominant theoretical approaches in international relations, emphasizes the importance of institutions and cooperation among states. However, this approach is increasingly unable to adequately reflect new global challenges, such as geopolitical competition in the Indo-Pacific. The U.S., China, and other regional actors are increasingly turning to bilateral and minilateral security agreements, showing that faith in multilateral mechanisms does not correspond to the reality of power politics. Regional groupings such as The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the African Union, and others are proving insufficiently effective in addressing security dilemmas, while formats like the Quad⁵ or the AUKUS⁶ are gaining importance (Satake, 2023), reflecting the strategic priorities of individual states rather than a liberal vision of collective security (in this article, ramification is perceived as possibly the most important contribution of liberalism to 21st-century diplomacy).

In Europe, liberal dogmas are gradually being reassessed within domestic political processes as well. The growing electoral support for parties with more defined geopolitical orientations, whether right- or left-leaning (in the traditional left-right spectrum), points to a transformation of political thinking and a shift from universalist visions toward more pragmatic and realist approaches (Mudde, 2021). In this respect, these tendencies should not be seen as revisionist or heretical but as a natural response to a changing international environment in which existing paradigms are eroding. The EU, for example, faces major challenges in energy policy, where the original ambitious Green Deal plan is meeting growing resistance not only from political elites but also from civil society and industrial sectors. The gradual pragmatization of this agenda, for example through renewed support for

⁵ The Quad is a diplomatic partnership between Australia, India, Japan, and the U.S. committed to supporting an open, stable and prosperous Indo-Pacific that is inclusive and resilient.

⁶ AUKUS is a trilateral security partnership between Australia, the United Kingdom, and the U.S. intended to promote a free and open Indo-Pacific region.

nuclear energy or the transitional use of fossil fuels, shows that political decisions are increasingly driven less by ideological norms and more by economic and security imperatives.

In this context, it is necessary to also reassess the role of international relations theory itself in diplomacy and policy-making. As Piotr Pietrzak notes in the Sixth Great Debate, the academic community must move away from self-serving intellectual debates that lack practical relevance (Pietrzak, 2024, pp. 160–161). Nigel Thrift (2000) emphasizes that instead of hyperbolic rhetoric that appeals only to a narrow circle of readers, the focus should be on real geopolitical practices and power discourses. This approach is crucial not only for academia but also for diplomacy itself, which in recent years has been facing increasing uncertainty and the need to adapt to new power configurations.

The current shift in global politics clearly shows that existing theoretical frameworks are becoming inadequate. It is necessary to develop new models capable of reflecting the dynamics of a multipolar world, where traditional institutions no longer fulfill their original stabilizing role (Kurfürst, Solik, Baar, Baarová, Graf, 2024). Energy security, geopolitics in the Pacific, the rise of Europe's strategic autonomy, and the transformation of domestic political landscapes are examples of processes that cannot be adequately explained through rigid theoretical concepts of the past century (Griffiths et al., 2007). However, this does not mean that theory should be completely rejected; on the contrary, its practical application must be more flexible and capable of reflecting current geopolitical challenges.

CONCLUSION

DPT has significantly influenced academic and political discussions in the field of international relations by asserting that democracies are inherently less likely to go to war with one another. This optimistic view was widely adopted as a foundation for promoting democracy worldwide, particularly in the post-Cold War era. However, as this article has shown, DPT is far from being an unassailable paradigm. Its theoretical assumptions, empirical arguments, and normative implications reveal significant limitations that require a more nuanced approach to understanding the causes of peace.

Theoretically, DPT is grounded in liberal assumptions about shared norms, institutional constraints, and economic interdependence. Although these principles seem to explain certain patterns of peace among democracies, they are subject to critical shortcomings. The theory overgeneralizes the

behaviour of democracies and assumes that all democratic states share common values and practices. Moreover, it underestimates the role of power politics and strategic interests in shaping state behaviour, as emphasized by realist critiques. The assumption that democratic norms universally promote peace fails to account for the diversity of political cultures and historical contexts, especially outside the Western world.

Empirically, the evidence supporting DPT is selective and often suffers from methodological biases. Proponents cite examples such as the peaceful relations among Euro-Atlantic democracies in the 20th century, but counterarguments, such as the record of conflicts between democracies, challenge its validity. The assumption that democracies naturally avoid conflicts is the result of a selective reading of history, where inconvenient cases (e.g., U.S. interventions in Latin America) are either ignored or interpreted in ways that do not threaten the theory's premises. The theory's narrow focus on interstate wars also excludes other forms of conflict, such as civil wars and cyberattacks, in which democracies may be involved. Methodological issues, including selection bias and the problem of endogeneity (e.g., the lack of participation by international relations scholars from East Asia, the Middle East, or sub-Saharan Africa, as would be expected by the Global IR approach), further weaken the causal link between democracy and peace. These limitations suggest that other factors, such as economic dependence, international institutions, and power dynamics, may better explain observed patterns of peace.

Alternative explanations of peace offer a more complex and multifaceted view than DPT alone. Realist theories emphasize the importance of power dynamics and security considerations, while liberal perspectives highlight the role of economic interdependence and globalization. Constructivist approaches stress the importance of shared identities and norms, and institutionalist theories focus on the role of international organizations in maintaining stability. Together, these frameworks challenge the deterministic assumptions of DPT and provide a broader range of variables that contribute to peace.

While the democratic peace thesis offers valuable insights into the relationship between democracy and peace, its limitations call for a more critical and inclusive approach. Peace is not the product of a single factor but the result of complex interactions among political, economic, cultural, and institutional elements. As the nature of conflicts evolves in the 21st century, the international community must move beyond simplistic theories such as the DPT and adopt multilayered strategies to address the root causes

of all types of conflicts in pursuit of sustainable peace. By doing so, both academics and policymakers can better respond to the complexities of the global system and foster stability in an increasingly interconnected world.

DPT is undoubtedly one of the most influential concepts in the field of international relations, and although this article has critically examined its conclusions, this does not necessarily imply a rejection of all its principles. Rather, it highlights that reducing complex international relations to a dichotomy of “democracy versus non-democracy” leads to dangerous simplifications that can foster antagonism and justify conflicts under the guise of defending “our” values against “theirs.”

History shows that the belief in one’s own moral and ideological superiority has often led to military interventions or geopolitical strategies aimed at spreading democracy but instead resulted in the destabilization of regions and the exacerbation of global conflicts. After all, as the cases from Vietnam to Iraq have shown, the adoption of democratic principles cannot be imposed from the outside.

There is no ambition in this study to highlight or favour any theoretical approach in IR.

The author of this article does not sympathize with any particular theoretical school in international relations, as no theory, whether liberalism, realism, Marxism, or constructivism, is universally applicable. Each international phenomenon has its own historical, social, and political context that requires analytical flexibility and the ability to approach problems from multiple perspectives. The attempt to create a universal theory of international relations is as elusive as trying to apply Newtonian mechanics to the world of quantum physics. There will always be cases where we turn to liberalism to explain value-based conflicts, to realism for balance-of-power dynamics, to Marxism for economic exploitation between countries, or to constructivism, historical sociology, and other poststructuralist approaches for cases shaped by their specific historical context. Complex interactions between states (and non-state actors) cannot be confined to a single interpretive framework without losing essential nuances.

It is therefore unsurprising that today’s world does not match the expectations of those who believed in the definitive triumph of the liberal order. As the events of recent decades have shown, democracies are not immune to authoritarian tendencies, economic dependencies, and geopolitical pressures that can lead to aggressive policies toward other states. Therefore, academic debate must move away from black-and-white

labeling and embrace the complexity of the world as an unavoidable reality.

For this reason, we must reject absolute truths in international relations and instead adopt an analytical approach that incorporates multiple perspectives and theories. DPT can be a useful explanation of certain phenomena, but its rigid application leads to erroneous conclusions and potentially to political decisions that do not align with the realities of the international system. History is not a linear narrative progressing toward a single truth; it is constructed, reinterpreted, and continuously evolving.

This study therefore suggests that Democratic Peace Theory should not be treated as a universal explanation of international peace, but rather as a limited and context-bound framework. Future research should focus on integrating insights from realism, liberalism, and constructivism into more flexible analytical models capable of capturing the complexity of contemporary international relations. The multifaceted and multidisciplinary approach is absolutely necessary in order to understand the world of today, and that world of today is shifting from the very paradigm of the bipolar and unipolar world of the past quite rapidly.

The DPT might not take into account wars waged by autocratic or hybrid regimes, but it is a very eloquent and excusable way of showing under which specific conditions liberal states can be perceived as more peaceful. The perception of liberal states being inherently less violent is now gone, as U.S. forces under Trump's administration attacked Iran. This "unexpectedly longer" invasion will spark many unintended consequences, one of which will definitely be a more rapid decline of liberal democracies, as non-democracies began to outnumber democracies for the first time in 2022 after twenty years (V-Dem Institute's Democracy Report (2023)), and a shift of the international order towards the model proposed by the BRICS countries.

The authors of this article do not suggest that the liberal world should entirely give up on the struggle to emphasize liberal values in a normative way, but it should do so with caution regarding its own violent history/presence, not intervene in wars that were not waged against it, and accept the very existence of non-democratic states as part of the international community, as they will not wane anytime soon[S.

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