

Beyond the Separate Democratic Peace*

JOHN MACMILLAN

*School of Politics, International Relations and the Environment,
Keele University*

This article argues that the balance of evidence and argument supports a shift from the conventional 'separate democratic peace' position that liberal states are peace prone *only* in relations with other liberal states to the view that they are also *more* peace prone in relations with non-liberal states than usually thought. The article reviews a range of recent empirical studies that either support or are consistent with this turn and also critiques a number of existing democratic peace theories. Those theories that maintain the view that democracies are peace prone in general are criticized for failing to differentiate the circumstances in which liberal states do and do not go to war. Those theories supporting the predominant 'separate' democratic peace position are criticized for failing to explain why liberal states should be peace prone only in relations with other liberal states. The force of this argument challenges scholars to re-specify the extent (and limitations) of liberal state peace proneness and to develop a theoretical explanation of this broader but more complex relationship between liberal states and peace.

Introduction

At the core of the democratic peace debate are the twin claims that liberal states (1) tend not to go to war against other liberal states but (2) are just as – or even more – war prone in relations with non-liberal states as are non-liberal states among themselves. However, the empirical basis of this conventional 'separate peace'¹ position is challenged by a growing body of recent research, and attempts to explain it are shown here to be theoretically flawed. Accordingly, it is time to develop the emergent view that while liberal

states are *especially* peace prone in relations with other liberal states, they are not *only* peace prone with other liberal states, but also more broadly. As such, the inter-liberal (dyadic) peace is not an isolated pacifism, but part of a broader liberal state peace proneness. While the shift within democratic peace research is marked, there is no generally accepted understanding of this broader or *more* general peace proneness among scholars, and its bases, extent and limitations remain only partially understood.

I begin by considering the initial debates of the 1980s: how one accounts for the war proneness of liberal states and how the limits of the democratic peace are to be established. The article reviews the recent empirical turn identifying the broader peace proneness of liberal states and then shows that theories of separate peace have in fact failed to explain the position's central claim that the liberal peace extends 'as far as, and no further than,

* Part of this article was written while the author was a research fellow at the Norwegian Nobel Institute. The author would like to thank participants in a research seminar at the Institute for their comments on an earlier version of the article and to thank also Hidemi Suganami, Nils Petter Gleditsch and the anonymous reviewers for their helpful suggestions (e-mail: j.r.macmillan@keele.ac.uk).

¹ The term 'separate peace' is borrowed from Doyle (1983: 232) and Russett & Oneal (2001: 275).

the relations among liberal states' (Doyle, 1983: 223).

The Contested Range of the Democratic Peace

The Initial Predominance of the 'Separate Peace' Position

In 1983, the year Doyle first published his separate peace claims, Rummel further advanced his own argument that, while liberal states *were* particularly peace prone among themselves, they were also more peace prone *in general* than states with other types of domestic political system. Rummel (1983: 27–28) drew on classical liberal and pluralist arguments regarding the checks and balances upon power in states having a developed civil society and the unwillingness of the citizenry to bear the costs of war ('unless they are aroused by an emotionally unifying issue') to argue that 'free states are *least prone* to international violence and war'.

There were two main reasons why Doyle prevailed with his claim that constitutionally secure liberal states are just 'as aggressive and war prone as any other form of government or society in their relations with non-liberal states' (1983: 213, 225). First, numerous statistical studies found that liberal states went to war against non-liberal states as *frequently* as non-liberal states did against each other (Chan, 1997: 61). For many, this finding presented confirmation enough that liberal states *were* just as aggressive and war prone as other types of state. The second reason was that separate peace *theory* was internally the more sophisticated of the two positions. Theorists, through the factor of 'regime type', developed an explanatory mechanism to differentiate those circumstances when liberal states did and did not use force. As such, they were developing a theory of liberal state peace *and* war. While regime type is actually a highly problematic axis of differentiation, a theory of democratic

peace does require *some* form of mechanism to explain variation between war and peace. Given this, Rummel's position of either neglecting the issue of liberal state violence (1983) or of portraying it as a defensive response to violence initiation by others (1979: 292–293; 1997: 64) was duly criticized, particularly in the light of the considerable record of liberal state imperialism and military intervention (Russett, 1993: 30–31; Bueno de Mesquita et al., 1999: 792, 801). The combined strength of these two factors underpinned a (near) consensus among democratic peace scholars that the democracy–peace connection was manifest *only* in relations between democracies. It was not long, however, before a series of counter-findings and anomalies emerged.

The Monadic Revival

The first tenet of separate peace theory – that democracies tend not to fight each other – remains robust. It has withstood a critical debate with realists and statistical challenges (see Chan, 1997; but also Lemke & Reed, 1996; Gartzke, 1998; Russett & Oneal, 2001: 228–237; Henderson, 2002) and has recently been deepened to include the claim that 'pairs of democracies are much less likely than other pairs of states to fight or to threaten each other in militarized disputes less violent than war' (Russett & Oneal, 2001: 46).² But the second tenet – that liberal states are peace prone *only* in relations with other liberal states – is increasingly

² Russett & Oneal (2001) move beyond the focus upon relationships between democratic states through developing the notion of a systemic (Kantian) peace. The inter-relationships between democratic states, economic interactions and membership of international organizations can generate 'virtuous circles' that lead to greater levels of peace in international relations. While they are clear that they do not see continuation of such a trend as inevitable, they do identify a number of feedback loops to show that the system does have its own dynamic of self-reproduction and expansion. They also find that international trade and, to a lesser extent, membership in international organizations correlate positively with the probability of a state being at peace.

challenged. The *significance* attached to the 'frequency' of war involvement has diminished as studies have turned to other aspects and indicators of war proneness. The balance of empirical research increasingly supports the view that liberal states are more generally peace prone. Indeed, two literature reviews of the mid-1990s (Ray, 1995: 11–21, 33; Elman, 1997: 15–18; see also Russett & Starr, 2000) find that 'much of the aggregate data on the democratic peace phenomenon suggest that democracies are less war prone in general, and that it is not only in their relations with each other that the pacifying effects of democracy emerge' (Elman, 1997: 16).

The basis for this shift lies in the trend to look beyond the scope of the 'frequency' measure to consider the willingness and circumstances of liberal state war involvement (Maoz & Abdolali, 1989: 18–20; Bueno de Mesquita & Lalman, 1992: 157; Bremer, 1992: 329; Benoit, 1996: 654; Gleditsch & Hegre, 1997: 295, 302; Russett & Oneal, 2001: 276; see also Chan, 1997). While these authors all point to a broader or more general peace proneness, there are considerable differences in their precise claims.

However, one point on which a consensus does appear to be consolidating is that liberal states have a lower propensity to *initiate* violence. Rousseau et al. (1996: 512–513) suggest 'that democracies are less likely than non-democracies to initiate crises against *all* states', but that once a democracy is involved in an international crisis, the regime type of its opponent will influence its bargaining behaviour. Gleditsch & Hegre (1997: 295) note problems of interpretation but find that in the modern era 'democracies would appear to initiate violence very rarely, except in protracted conflicts'. Rioux (1998: 282) also finds that democracies initiate fewer crises than non-democracies, as does Schultz (2001: 137). Russett, a leading proponent of the separate peace position, is increasingly

inclined towards this revisionist position (Russett & Oneal, 2001: 50).³

Reinforcing these statistically based studies are a number of recent historically grounded works. One such group extrapolates the policy positions of liberals or parliamentary socialists within the state and finds that these groups tend to be more peace prone in foreign policy relative to other mainstream domestic political positions (although there may be circumstances, such as humanitarian intervention, when liberals may be more willing to use force than those on their Right). Avineri's (1986) dated but suggestive study of Israel's foreign policy, MacMillan's (1998) studies of the Anglo-Boer Wars and of British and German liberalism prior to World War I, and Keohane's (2000) study of British security policy since 1945 all find a positive correlation between liberalism/socialism in domestic politics and greater constraints on the use of force in foreign policy. They ground this greater constraint in the character of liberal/socialist values and ideologies. Central to these studies is the analysis of the way in which liberalism and socialism influence perceptions of the legitimacy of the use of force.⁴ These studies place greater emphasis upon monadic (that is, nation-state) level factors than does separate peace scholarship and are concerned to trace not only foreign policy *preferences* but also international *outcomes*.

The preferences/outcomes distinction is considered in detail by Gaubatz's (1999) study of the relationship between the domestic electoral cycle and war involvement. His

³ See Russett & Starr (2000) and Russett & Oneal (2001) for a discussion of other main trends in recent democratic peace scholarship.

⁴ Peceny (1997) presents a suggestive constructivist approach to historical case studies. While the direction of his argument differs from the others referred to in this paragraph, the underlying approach of teasing out the interplay between power and interest, principles and norms is common to all. See also Risse-Kappen (1995) for a constructivist approach to the democratic peace.

discussion stresses the need to distinguish between foreign policy preferences and international outcomes and also to develop explanatory frameworks able to synthesize the operation of monadic (nation-state level) factors and dyadic (international) level strategic interactions. Gaubatz argues that (the monadic factor of) elections and the public debate that these encourage incline democracies 'consistently toward the avoidance of war even when the public mood is quite belligerent' (1999: 78, 15). He also finds that democracies enter more wars in the early stages of their electoral cycles and fewer wars in the later stages (1999: 142).

Other recent studies also feature monadic factors.⁵ Schultz (2001) draws on recent work by Fearon (1994a,b, 1995, 1997) regarding the inefficiency of war as a method for rational state actors to resolve their disputes and the notion of 'audience costs' as a credible regime-dependent indicator of how willing a state is to use force in a particular dispute. Given the irrationality of war, Schultz assumes that wars break out because of imperfect information regarding the other party's actual commitment to fight, this lack of accurate information being in part a requirement of the 'routine' practices of bluff, counter-bluff and escalation integral to coercive diplomacy. Where a democratic political system makes a difference to this process is in the existence of a 'loyal opposition' that, indirectly, provides information to challenger or target states about how committed the state is to fight. In brief, support or dissent from the opposition raises or lessens respectively the likelihood that the democracy will actually

use force, as distinct from threatening force as a bluff. Schultz then applies this insight to several case studies to argue that a democratic political system in one of the parties is sufficient to explain why democracies initiate fewer crises but tend to win those wars in which they do participate. Schultz argues that this informational perspective 'predicts a general restraining effect that is *not conditional* on the regime type of the target' (2001: 125, 232, emphasis added).

Goemans (2000) focuses upon how regime type influences decisions regarding the appropriate point at which to *end* a war. He finds that non-repressive (that is, democratic) regimes *and* repressive regimes (dictatorships) modify their minimum terms of settlement in line with new information about the outcome and costs of the war. Thus, if new information appears unfavourable, the minimum terms of settlement will decrease, and vice versa. However, semi-repressive, semi-exclusionary regimes (anocratic, mixed) will not act in this way, and may even increase the minimum terms of settlement upon receiving unfavourable new information. The rationality of this apparently perverse behaviour becomes clear once the factor of anticipated punishment is taken into account. In a democracy, political leaders are likely to lose power even if they lose the war moderately, but they are unlikely to face additional punishment (death, imprisonment, exile). Dictators who lose office are likely to face additional punishment, but they are less likely to lose office if they only lose the war moderately. This is because they continue to possess the necessary repressive apparatus to suppress attempts to remove them. However, in a semi-repressive state, the leadership can expect to lose power *and* face additional punishment if it loses a war, hence the incentive to avoid that day of reckoning through continuing the war – gambling for resurrection – even in the face of deteriorating prospects of victory.

⁵ Snyder's (2000) recent work on the connection between *democratization* and increased risk of war is also firmly grounded in monadic factors but is beyond the purview of this article. Reiter & Stam (2002) identify public consent as the key determinant of when democracies do and do not use force, but seek also to relate this to factors of strategic political interaction. Reiter & Stam make a theoretically significant contribution to the debate, but this article had already been completed by the time of its publication.

The early focus, then, upon the frequency of war involvement blinkered researchers from recognizing indicators of a greater peace proneness that became apparent when one considers the willingness and circumstances of liberal state war involvement. This shift in opinion is reinforced by a significant body of recent work, employing different methodologies. However, the strength of the separate democratic peace rests not solely on empirical findings, but also on the power of its theoretical underpinnings. A critique of the separate peace position will be much strengthened if it can demonstrate the failure of its theoretical foundations.

Separate Democratic Peace Theory: Chasing a Phantom

Rummel's 'general' and Doyle's 'separate peace' variants of the democratic peace each generated a distinct theoretical or explanatory task. Rummel's general pacifism simply required the identification of certain factors at the monadic level that increase the peace proneness of liberal states, and he adopted fairly conventional tenets of liberal internationalism and pluralism for this purpose. Separate peace theorists had to explain, simultaneously, why liberal states rarely if ever go to war against one another and why they are as (or more) war prone in relations with non-liberal states as are any other type of state. To reconcile these two aspects, separate peace theorists had to demonstrate how any specific explanatory factor manifests itself so as to (1) promote peace when a liberal state engages with another liberal state and (2) be either inoperational or promote conflict when a liberal state engages with a non-liberal state. This requirement led separate peace theorists to neglect or discount monadic factors, as in principle these would operate in relations with non-liberal as well as other liberal states, thereby undermining the theory's core claims, and to focus instead

on dyadic (or interactive) factors manifest in terms of the liberal-to-liberal state *relationship* itself. As one leading scholar put it, 'the rarity of lethal violence between democracies [is due to] something in the nature of the democratic-to-democratic state relationship itself' rather than the characteristics of democracies or liberal states themselves (Russett, 1993: 22). However, while theorists have produced numerous insights of value, they have not been able to explain why liberal peace proneness does not extend beyond the liberal 'zone of peace'.

Maoz & Russett (1993) made a useful distinction between normative (or cultural) and institutional (or structural) strands. This remains a major division, with some scholars using 'norms' as expressions of the liberal political-philosophical tradition (Owen, 1994, 1997; MacMillan, 1996, 1998) and others referring to the way in which the domestic institutional context, itself a function of regime type, determines the rationality of choices for political elites (Bueno de Mesquita et al., 1999; Reiter & Stam, 2002).

Russett's (1993) norms argument rests on the premise that regimes apply the norms of conflict resolution they use domestically to international relations, and presume that others will do likewise. Hence, decision-makers in democracies, ruling with the consent of the people, expect to be able to resolve their domestic disputes through peaceful means and with respect for the existence and rights of opponents. In non-democracies, leaders do not rule with the consent of the people and may settle their domestic disputes through the use or threat of force, with the expectation that their opponents would do likewise. These practices will be externalized, so decisionmakers will seek to follow the same norms of conflict resolution in their relations with other states as they do in their domestic relations. This, however, will be dependent upon the regime type of the other party. Hence, democracies

will expect other democracies to pursue peaceful methods of conflict resolution, and will thus respond in kind, whereas they will expect non-democracies to pursue non-peaceful methods of conflict resolution, which will neutralize or override their own peaceful inclinations. Indeed, democracies may adopt non-democratic norms (that is, resort to violence) in order to avoid being exploited by non-democracies who seek to take advantage of the apparent peacefulness of democracies.

The claim that non-democracies may 'exploit' peace-prone democracies does remain relevant as it potentially accounts for some instances of the diplomatic-political interactions between non-democracies and democracies – Hitler's foreign policy being an archetypical example. Saddam Hussein had apparently also learnt the 'lesson' of Vietnam – that democracies don't have the stomach for a fight – just as the United States gained the military sophistication and political will to put this 'lesson' behind it. Also, if Milosevic had not reckoned on the 'exploitability' of democracies (in terms of lacking the will to fight) at the start of the 1990s, then one could well forgive him for developing such a view subsequently given the vacillation and confusion of Western policy up until the 1999 NATO bombing. However, and despite the anecdotal illustrations offered here, as Russett himself is aware, being right on occasion does not mean that an argument is correct as a general thesis. Quite simply, the extensive case-study work necessary to establish the accuracy and reach of this claim has not been undertaken. Hence, while this is an interesting contention, it remains underdeveloped and requires much greater historical grounding before its measure is known. Linked to this is the second criticism that the notion that democracies are somehow 'victims' of the aggressive actions or intent of others will always remain dubious in the absence of an integrated account of the extensive record of

war, intervention and imperialism initiated by democracies themselves against weaker parties. Third, the method of identifying (or sourcing) norms in this argument has been criticized by Bueno de Mesquita et al. as 'ad hoc'; that is to say, norms seem to feature in the explanation solely by reference to the outcomes of conflict between democratic states. 'In order to qualify as an explanation of the observation, however, that assertion must be derived independently of the observation, either from prior axioms or from unrelated empirical evidence' (Bueno de Mesquita et al., 1999: 792).

Weart's (1998) study is an ambitious survey of cases ranging from ancient Greece through to the present day. A novel finding is the extension of the democratic peace claim to 'oligarchic' republics, distinguished from democratic republics through the suppression of a crucial domestic 'enemy' group by the ruling elite (1998: 30, 121). Both democratic and oligarchic republics tend to maintain peace among other democratic and oligarchic republics respectively, so long as the ruling elites recognize the other as of their own kind. Peace among republics requires (1) the drawing of a boundary around one's in-group to include everyone who shares one's political culture and (2) republican political culture itself, 'with its predilection for nonviolent negotiation and accommodation within the in-group' (Ray, 1995: 117). However, Weart's reliance upon the protagonists' own perceptions of the other's regime type (and in-group/out-group categorizations) is vulnerable to Oren's (1995) charge that such perceptions will be determined more by interest-based considerations than by neutral, independent indicators. Further, there is a long tradition of dissent within liberal states against wars with non-liberal regimes, indicating that republican political culture is itself contested, not settled, and that there are strong determinants of a war's legitimacy independent of

the other party's regime type (see also Robinson, 2001a,b; Weart, 2001).

Owen's (1994, 1997) focus upon 'liberalism' as the peace-generating independent variable valuably connects democratic peace scholarship to political philosophy. Theoretically, this is important for understanding the moral context and orientation of actor preferences and is important also in facilitating analysis of different domestic ideological strands and political traditions within the state. However, in Owen's account, the price for satisfying the explanatory requirements of the separate peace position is a highly selective, if not distorted, reading of the liberal tradition itself. Owen (1997: 5) remains on fairly solid ground when he argues that liberal states 'contain elites who believe that peace is intrinsically good [and] that liberal states are more pacific and trustworthy . . . Conversely, they believe that illiberal states are belligerent and that close ties with them may corrupt their own state.' It is a mistake, however, to confound liberal *analyses* of the causes of war in the international system with liberal *ethics*, or thinking upon the *legitimacy* of the use of force. For sure, liberals have long regarded non-liberal regimes as more war prone than other liberal regimes, but liberals have not inferred from this a general, wide-ranging right to go to war against them, which is how Owen appears to represent the tradition.

His political-philosophical grounding of the separate peace in the work of Kant, Paine and Condorcet does not bear scrutiny. Owen's method of identifying certain instances or passages in which liberals lend support to the use of force would be valuable if it were a comprehensive review of the circumstances when specific liberals did and did not support the use of force, but a snippet here and there does not do this. Running throughout Kant's work, for example, is the strong disapproval of the use

of force as a way of pursuing one's rights, let alone for conquest or direct political gain (see, for example, Reiss, 1991: 105, 174; MacMillan, 2002). In the case of Thomas Paine, Owen's representation of the pamphleteer as an apologist for France's anti-British policies fails to acknowledge the strong war aversion in his thought. One would not know it from Owen's account, but Paine 'usually opposed [France's] expansionist warfare', and while he was a supporter of civil wars of national liberation against despotic governments (unlike Kant, who forbade rebellion), 'he felt that it would be immoral for liberal republics to intervene in such conflicts' (Fitzsimons, 1995: 578). Similarly, the political biography of Condorcet that Owen himself uses is notable for emphasizing the reluctance with which he supported the use of force and the need to devise institutional mechanisms that circumscribe the state's ability to use military power (Schapiro, 1963: 92, 146).

Certainly, there are tensions in liberal thinking and inconsistencies in practice, but the bulk of liberal thinking is far more peace prone than Owen would have one believe. While the existence of non-liberal regimes presents liberals with a whole series of moral and practical dilemmas, their existence does not of itself sanction the use of force. Owen is, however, largely accurate in stating that, generally, liberals 'believe that peace is intrinsically good' as liberals (including the *philosophes*) realize that war and preparation for war jeopardizes the pursuit of liberty and the development of a just political community. This danger, however, is not dependent upon the regime type of the other state, and as such is one fundamental reason why many liberals have been disinclined from war in general, not only war against other liberal states.

Bueno de Mesquita et al. (1999) develop a rational choice model in an attempt to explain a number of empirical findings

pertaining to the democratic peace.⁶ The discussion here is concerned only with the mechanism through which their analysis limits democratic peace proneness to the inter-democratic state realm. They argue that political leaders generally are motivated by the desire to stay in office but that the strategies required in order to do this are determined by the institutional context. In an autocracy, the small size of the winning coalition, as a proportion of the (s)electorate, provides incentives for the leader to channel resources as *private* goods to her/his support base as the optimal strategy by which to stay in power. Success in public policy, including in war, is actually secondary (as a means of staying in power). In contrast, the high proportion of the (s)electorate required for a winning coalition in a democracy means that the leaders in democracies are likely to remain in power through the successful provision of *public* goods, measured in terms of policy success. The opportunity to make a significant difference to the prospects of remaining in office through channelling resources as private goods is minimized as, given the large winning coalition, resources would need to be divided between too many people and thereby spread too thinly to ensure continued loyalty.

The authors infer from this that, during wartime, leaders in a democratic institutional context will commit a higher proportion of national resources to the war, as winning is vital to their continued position. By contrast, in an autocratic institutional context, the key to remaining in power is to maintain the satisfaction of their winning coalition, and hence there will be a lower commitment to the war effort, as this requires what would be regarded as the diversion of resources from their

primary function. From this, the authors declare that democracies will be unlikely to fight each other, as both parties recognize that their adversary will commit a high proportion of their national resources and energies to war. The exception, however, will be when there is a great disparity of power between democracies, in which case the stronger may seek to exploit the weaker. By contrast, when a democracy is in dispute with an autocracy, the assumption is that the autocrat will not fight as hard as the democracy. Hence, while a democracy may use force, an autocracy will not attack a democracy. Through this chain of logic, which turns many regular democratic peace assumptions on their head, the authors maintain the existence of the separate peace.

The lack of supporting historical evidence makes it difficult to know how the authors would confirm their explanation, but a preliminary examination of one of their key assumptions does not encourage confidence. At the heart of their defence of the separate peace is the claim that autocrats will not try hard in war, as an autocrat's 'survival is not strongly influenced by the war outcome' (Bueno de Mesquita et al., 1999: 800). This, however, will be news indeed to the great majority of autocrats who have been defeated in a war against a democracy, for they have lost power either at the implicit or explicit insistence of the democratic victor or at the hands of their own people. The cases of President Kruger, General Huerta, Emperor Wilhelm, Mussolini, the Nazi leadership, Emperor Hirohito, General Galtieri, General Noriega and Slobodan Milosevic provide ample evidence from which to reject the authors' assumption. Saddam Hussein, in having remained in power after a war with a democracy, appears more the exception than the rule but, in fact, he himself faced a widespread revolt after the 1990–91 Gulf War. Indeed, given that a defeated autocrat often loses a lot more than the presidential

⁶ Gelpi & Griesdorf (2001) review and test several institutional theories of the democratic peace and advocate a synthesis of the work of Bueno de Mesquita and Fearon. The study does not, however, consider Bueno de Mesquita's most recent (1999) work discussed here.

limousine, there is in fact a very strong incentive for such leaders to win, if they choose to fight (note also the contrast with Goemans, 2000, discussed above). Whatever other merits the authors' argument has, it fails, along with other theories of the separate peace, to explain why liberal or democratic peace proneness should extend only to relations with other liberal or democratic states. Individually, these theories are flawed through internal problems, lack of systematic verification, distortions of the liberal political-philosophical tradition or high incidence of counter-examples. Ultimately, however, the underlying reason for their failure is that – as indicated by the empirical turn outlined above – the 'separate' democratic peace is a phantom, and it is time to give up the chase.

Conclusion

It is now time to move beyond the separate peace position towards the view that, while liberal states are especially peace prone among themselves, their peace proneness is not limited to inter-liberal state relations but is manifest more widely. Certainly, this is an interim, under-specified position but one that is indicative of the current state of democratic peace research and at the same time a pointer towards its future direction. For now at least, the claim of inter-liberal state peace is widely accepted by scholars as empirically valid (which is not the same as saying that it is permanent or perpetual), even if there remains some debate surrounding the nature of the causal relationships at work. By contrast, the liberal/non-liberal realm remains much less explored and much less understood. The war and peace proneness of relationships within this realm are likely to prove more complex than represented either by the 'Hobbesian state of war' of the separate peace theorists or the undifferentiated peace proneness of Rummel. While liberal states do display peace

proneness beyond the inter-liberal realm, they are also often involved in war or other forms of international violence. Making sense of this realm is an important area for future research on the democratic peace.

Existing approaches have much to offer such research, and will benefit from the integration of monadic and dyadic factors that becomes possible when one does not have to theorize the restriction of the liberal peace to the inter-liberal realm. At the same time, however, theorists will have to devise an alternative to separate peace theory's reliance upon regime type to differentiate between those circumstances in which liberal states do and do not fight. Besides a norm against inter-liberal state violence, further work on the existence and power of a norm against aggression will be of interest, as will work on weaker, secondary norms such as those against the unilateral use of force, preventive war or inflicting civilian casualties. Part of this exercise would also involve consideration of circumstances in which liberalism may commission rather than constrain the use of force, such as in halting mass violations of human rights. Democratic peace research looks set to continue to develop – and indeed needs to if it is to make sense of this complex but compelling topic.

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JOHN MACMILLAN, b. 1963, DPhil in International Relations (University of Oxford, 1991); Lecturer in International Relations, Keele University (1991–). Most recent book: *On Liberal Peace: Democracy, War and the International Order* (Tauris, 1998).