The Democratic Peace Theory

(A) Concept

- Based on the idea that whether states are likely to go to war or choose peace depends on the type of political system they have
- Puts a lot of faith in democracies; Democracy brings a more peaceful, less belligerent foreign policy
- Three versions: (1) Monadic: Democracies, in general, are more peaceful and are less likely to go to war
  with any type of state; Problem: Those who argue for the monadic version only examine conflict in the 1960's and '70's
- (2) Dyadic: The most commonly accepted version among Democratic Peace Theorists; Democracies are peaceful with one another, but are just as likely to fight with non-democracies
- Democratic states have rarely, if ever, fought other democracies; However, there are plenty of examples of democracies fighting autocratic states; Democracies will often join other democracies in conflicts against non-democracies
- (3) Systemic: As the # of democratic states grow, then the international system as a whole becomes more peaceful (one rationale behind Clinton and Bush Adm.'s policies in Haiti, Kosovo, Iraq, etc.)
- Problem: The number of wars actually increased as new democracies were established during the pre-Cold War period

(B) Testing and Measuring the Democratic Peace

- (1) Defining Democracy: Despite the number of countries that were formally democracies; most of these so-called "democracies" would not be considered democratic by most political science standards (The Polity III data set, Freedom House)
- Most liberal, full-fledged democracies did not become fully democratic until after 1945 (Cold War Period)

- (2) Measuring War and Conflict: The Correlates of War Data Project (COW) (Small-Singer) project contain data for every war between 1815-1986
  - In these data sets, war is defined as any armed conflict that results in over 1,000 battlefield deaths
  - Also, other studies measure non-wars that still are violent armed conflict: military interventions, militarized interstate disputes (MID's), civil wars and ethnic warfare
  - Indirect Testing: Rather than looking at armed conflict, one measurement looks at foreign aid and economic aid; democracies that are more peaceful will spend bigger % of natl. budget on
foreign/economic/humanitarian assistance and less % on military/defense budget
- Specifically, certain types of democracies (Consensus-type democracies) will spend bigger amounts of budget on foreign aid than Majoritarian-type Democracies
- Problem: Free Rider Problem: Western European states riding on U.S. for military defense obligations during Cold War and even post-Cold War periods

(3) The Logic and Argument for the Democratic Peace

(A) Normative Logic

- Democratic states are bound by cultural and social norms that call for non-violent conflict resolution and negotiation
- Because democratic leaders are bound by these norms, they try to adopt them in the intl. arena
- This means that democracies both trust and respect one another; the sentiments of respect come from the idea that all democracies abide by these shared social and cultural norms
- This means that a democracy will respect its fellow democracy abiding by these norms and, thus, treat the fellow democracy with great esteem and diplomatic affection
- This explains why democracies often go to war with non-democracies; Non-democracies are simply not trusted or respected by democracies

- Autocratic political systems are considered unjust and immoral - thus, are not respected by democracies because autocracies do not respect the rights of their own citizens
- Autocratic states are also not trusted by democracies; autocracies do not have the same domestic norms of problem solving and conflict resolution; thus, autocracies are seen as deceptive and innately violent
- From the perspective of democracies, war may be necessary and permissible to free the people from dictatorship; Democracies may also want to introduce the idea of human rights and democratic govt. to the population
- Also, because democratic states are inclined toward peaceful resolution, autocratic states may be motivated to exploit these democratic cultural norms and, therefore, get some concessions from a democracy
- In other words, autocratic states will think democracies are politically weak with little/no will
- This means that an autocratic state will either attack a democracy or
threaten the use of force
- Democracies then will be motivated to defend themselves or launch a pre-emptive strike against the autocratic state

(B) Institutional Logic

- Democratic leaders are elected leaders that are pressured by opposition party leaders
- Democratic leaders, thus, are accountable to voters and political interests that helped elected them to office
- Many of these voters, political interest groups may oppose war at various times; due to economic interdependence, global markets, international trade and investment are disrupted with war - many of these economic/political groups will not want war for these reasons
- The General public, in general, has aversions to war
- Opposition leaders will be ready to take advantage of any unpopular war policies toward the incumbent govt.
- Sensitive to these concerns and wanting to be re-elected or remain in office, leader will often seek a peaceful solution, rather than war
- There is also transparency; Govt. decision-making processes are relatively open and transparent to the voting public
- This makes it easier for the public to evaluate a govt.'s performance and policy choices; this will make democratic leaders more inclined to pursue peaceful policies
- Due to the need to seek consensus and support from voters, interest groups, legislature, etc., democratic leaders will be slow to mobilize military forces for conflict
- When military forces are mobilized, they cannot be mobilized secretly due to the transparency of the democratic political system; mobilization takes place in the plain sight of the public domain
- This means that surprise attacks cannot take place; in a conflict between two democracies, both sides will have time to come to a mutually acceptable agreement and have good faith negotiations
- Finally, if unpopular wars can lead to high economic and political costs for the democratically elected leaders, then democratic leaders will only engage in wars that have strong public support
- This means that elected leaders will only choose to fight wars that the democratic state can win - wars against states that have lesser military capabilities
- Democratic states tend to be the strongest economic and military powers, while autocratic states tend to be weaker because many are (A) developing, poorer economic countries and
- (B) are led by autocratic leaders who are in power by force and want to avoid being ousted; they have to make sure the military is weak, less-professional, ill-equipped and poorly trained
- Therefore, democracies can easily beat autocracies, but cannot
easily defeat fellow democracies

(4) Arguments Against the Democratic Peace

- (A) Democracies, in fact, have failed to apply their norms of peaceful resolution in the int'l. arena;
- The COW data project indicates that the majority of wars fought by democracies have been for reasons other than self-defense or promotion of democratic values;
- Most wars have been initiated by democracies for imperial, territorial purposes - to create buffer states against rivals, economic colonial motivations, etc. (ex; Britain tried to conquer Afghanistan in 1838 so as to create a buffer zone against Russia, France invaded Tunisia in 1881 to prevent Italian occupation)
- These were all preventive, imperial wars started by Democracies
- Also, the regimes followed invasion by a Democratic state were mostly not democratic and liberal, but rather just as authoritarian as the pre-invasion regime
- (B) The U.S., during the Cold War, engaged in some type of military intervention against democratic states so as to promote containment and counter-balance efforts against the Soviet Union;
- These democratic govt.s. that were the targets of U.S. direct/indirect military intervention were replaced by autocratic regimes - plus most of these actions were covert and secret
- Counterargument: These states targeted by the U.S. were not liberal or sufficiently democratic
- (C) Autocratic regimes that lose wars are actually almost just as likely to be removed from power than democratic govt.s’
- Autocratic leaders that lose wars are likely to be much more severely punished that democratic leaders; dictators have been illegally ousted from power in coups, imprisoned, exiled, or killed
- (D) Democratic leaders are not that negatively politically effected due to the fact that wars involving democracies do not have that much of a personal effect on the public; in 60% of wars fought by democratic states, losses represented less than 0.01% of the population - one in 10,000 people (This excludes the two WW's)
- (E) Therefore, democratic wars (usually fought against winnable opponents) will meet with strong public support; the winning war will cause an increase in nationalism
- In the U.S., many wartime Presidents have enjoyed strong public approval ratings and have often been re-elected due to wartime support and popularity
- (F) Domestic political interests within and outside of govt., will not pressure democratic leaders to be restraint; but rather to use force (ex. Bureaucratic Politics)
- (G) If indeed democracies faced domestic/public constraints against
going to war, then would not democracies be peaceful against all states - not just democratic ones?
- Also, if full-fledged liberal democracy could not be identified until 1945, then should not the Democratic Peace argument be looked at only after this period?
- This leads to the Cold War, Realist argument; Democracies did not fight each other during the Cold War not because of common political systems - but rather because of common strategic interests
- The Western, liberal democracies were in alliance against a common strategic enemy - the Soviet union; containing the USSR was in the national, self interests of the Western democracies
- However, any democracies that were aligned with the Soviets were targeted by the U.S. with some type of military action
- Counterargument: Why was the USSR a common threat to the democracies? Due to its repressive, autocratic totalitarian regime!
- (H) Finally, Democracies, for the sake of the national interest, have engaged in quick mobilization without being slowed down by legislative approval, public polling, domestic consensus-building, etc.
- EX: The U.S. has been involved in over 200 military conflicts - only 5 of these actions were official, constitutional declarations of war by Congress