

## Farber and Gowa – “Politics and Peace” (1995)

Nutshell: The Clinton administration’s desire to replace containment with democratic “enlargement” in the post-Cold War world is misguided. This is because the assumption that there is an intrinsic pacificity intrinsic to democracies, even if only in relations with one another, does not appear to be valid. Analysis suggests the only evidence for the democratic peace exists in the era dated from the beginning of the Cold War. However, the alliance patterns of states during the Cold War make it difficult to conclude that common politics, rather than common interests, explain the apparent democratic peace of this period.

Central Question: Despite popular acceptance of the notion of the democratic peace, does historical evidence prove its existence? Specifically, can we statistically find a causal relationship between the presence of democratic governments and peaceful relations between them? In periods where there is a strong correlation between democracy and peace are there alternative explanations that better fit the data?

### Explanations for Existence of Democratic Peace:

- 1) Norms: Democracies have developed norms of peaceful resolution of internal conflict and disdain the use of force. Such states externalize these norms of behavior to international relations so that two states with such norms will resolve their conflicts peacefully. Farber & Gowa critique this view because such norms are of enormous instrumental value to citizens and leaders and therefore one cannot separate the norm from collective interest. Since the instrumental value of peaceful conflict resolution is not necessarily present at the interstate level, we cannot determine whether a state will act on its norm or its interest in its foreign relations.
- 2) Checks and Balances: Constraints on would-be renegade leaders more effective in democracies than in autocracies. But this ignores the fact that democracies war with nondemocratic states as often as nondemocratic states do. Also, checks and balances do not seem to protect the general welfare from policies that serve the leader’s interests (as in the case of tariffs which benefit the leader at the expense of the polity as a whole). Farber and Gowa do admit that the *ex post* ability of constituents to sanction their leaders may give some minor force to this argument.

Measures and Analysis: Breaks history into five periods: 1) pre-WWI, 2) WWI, 3) interwar years, 4) WWII, 5) Cold War until 1980. Uses Correlates of War data to measure “militarized interstate disputes” (MIDs), defined as overt, nonaccidental, and government-sanctioned displays, threats, or uses of military force. Measure individual disputes between nations in dyad-years including only the first year of each dispute as well as the highest level of conflict reached. Treat the general wars (WWI and II) differently from other wars for two reasons: 1) causes differ (relation between underlying distribution of power and status quo more significant in general wars), 2) general wars tend to render dyadic relations, precisely what Farber and Gowa are testing, meaningless. Thus believe that the two world wars do not generate observations

appropriate for this test. Go on to measure probabilities of both war and lower-level MIDs in the five time periods. Find empty-margin problem with respect to measuring war since war is such a low-probability event. Lack of wars between democratic dyads since WWII an example. This is not a problem for measuring MIDs, which are more common.

Findings: In the analysis of wars, the only statistically significant findings supporting the democratic peace are in the post-WWII era. Further, there is no relationship whatsoever between regime type and probability of war in the pre-WWI period. In the case of MIDs, prior to WWI the probability of low-level disputes is actually *higher* for a democratic-democratic dyad. It becomes lower in all following periods, but is only significant in WWII and, again, during the Cold War.

Conclusions: Evidence for the democratic peace only exists in the period following WWII. But this does not mean we should conclude that something intrinsic to democracies has prevented war between them in the Cold War era. This is highlighted by the fact that democratic-democratic dyads were not significantly more peaceful toward one another in the past, and were even more given to low-level disputes prior to 1914. Farber and Gowa propose the alternative hypothesis that Cold War alliance patterns better explain the correlations they find in their analysis. The context of the Cold War created strong common interests among a large number of democratic states, and the resulting alliances maintained peace among them. The democratic peace literature fails to distinguish between correlation and causation. The Clinton administration would do well to encourage the formation of common interests rather than common polities.