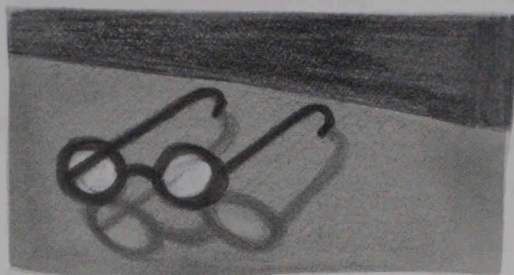


FROM THE DIRECTOR

The Curious Link Between Democracy and Peace



ONE STRIKING RESULT OF THE WITHERING OF the Cold War has been the flowering of some unabashed utopianism about what can follow. The hardened cynicism of forty-five years of East-West confrontation and mistrust has given way, even in some of the most hawkish quarters, to explicit optimism about the prospects for a wider and more durable "peace." This new world has heard brave visions of "new thinking," a "Common European Home," a world of "cooperative security," a born-again United Nations, and various forms of "New World Order."

The habits of cynicism die hard and the brief experience of the post-Cold War world has already included some major disappointments. But as people who think about international relations dare again to dream about a better world, as they did at the end of each of the two World Wars, it is depressingly clear how much the Cold War retarded the development of serious thinking about how to get there. One indication of this shortcoming was the widespread confusion and misinformation about the rules of collective security and the role of the UN which followed Iraq's war against Kuwait.

An even more revealing echo of past debates about peace has centred on the attempt to understand societal sources of war and their possible remedies. One focus for these inquiries is the link between democratic government inside states and peaceful international behaviour between them. The overturning of undemocratic structures in the communist countries and the parallel emergence among them of more pacific international stances has renewed interest in the democracy-peace linkage. Aggression by the Iraqi dictator, his obvious unconcern for his own peoples' danger and suffering, and the threat of continuing chronic instability among undemocratic countries of the region – including Kuwait – have all led to new questions about whether durable peace can be assured with dictatorial governments.

Such thinking harkens back to some of the more aggressive, proselytic Western rhetoric of the Cold War era, as well as to some of the genuine democratizing and integrating achievements of the Helsinki CSCE process in Europe. At the same time, the winds of democratization

and liberalization in various forms are swirling throughout the world, from Africa to China, and many observers are speculating about the ways in which internal and international improvements might reinforce each other.

Such reflections are seen by some as being very brave and new, but in fact they are only brave. Immanuel Kant, in his *Project for Perpetual Peace* in 1796, laid out sweeping propositions about how "republicanism" and peace would come together:

The republican constitution ... offers the hope for the desired result i.e. perpetual peace ... because when the consent of the citizens is required in order to decide whether there should be war or not, nothing is more natural than that those who would have to decree for themselves all the deprivations of war, will think long before they will begin such an evil game.

Over the decades, this Kantian vision – and some other, more sectarian designs – have been the subject of repeated debate and study. Woodrow Wilson's prescriptions during the "war to end all wars" contained a strong dose of democratic medicine. And John Maynard Keynes' warnings about how the punitive terms imposed on Germany at Versailles in 1919 would cripple that country's ability to develop a stable economic and social order, in turn bringing chaos to all of Europe, proved prophetic.

THE CURRENT SITUATION ARGUES FOR A thoughtful consideration of this tradition, and not just for a triumphalist offensive by missionaries of Western democracy. Kant's proposition that democracies would be inherently more peace-loving states is such an attractive one ideologically that analysts have repeatedly tried to support it by reference to historical experience. They have generally been frustrated. In a recent assessment, two scholars from Rice University concluded that "the results of most [empirical] studies indicate that democracies are no less war-prone than other forms of government." More optimistically, however, they also found that virtually all studies have "noted that, at the dyadic level, democracies simply do not fight one another."*

The cynic might suggest that the reason for the lack of wars between democracies is that the sample of democratic nations is still too small, but there is probably more to it than that. In pursuing the subject, scholars have opened up some more specific and less rhetorical lines

*Clifton T. Morgan, Sally Howard Campbell. "Domestic Structure, Decisional Constraints, and War – So Why Kant Democracies Fight?," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol.35, No.2, June 1991.

of thinking, and recognized that no nation's decision on going to war is arrived at through referendum. The democratic influence on these decisions is thus always indirect and always shaped by "decisional constraints" on leaders, some of which may also operate in non-democratic societies. These constraints include: the method of selecting and removing leaders – leaders who are regularly and frequently accountable are likely to be more constrained in launching wars; the nature of political competition – the freedom to organize opposition through formal, institutionalized channels should reduce the society's propensity to war; the degree to which the leader must share decision-making power – the greater the number of individuals, and, especially, institutions that must approve a decision for war, the less likely it may be.

In fact, when they test even these appealing hypotheses against experience, the researchers do not find clear general support for them, and the results even suggest that these democratic constraints may be more influential in curbing major powers than minor ones. And it is worth noting that mass public opinion, particularly whipped on by a jingoistic press, has sometimes pushed less willing leaders down the path to war, as it did in the 1898 Spanish-American War. At least one of the contributors to a recent issue of the journal *Alternatives* – writing on the theme of "The Global Context of Democratization" – purports to have seen somewhat similar processes at work in US decisions in the Persian Gulf.

THE "STRUCTURAL" ANALYSES OF DEMOCRACY and peace thus remain inconclusive, and researchers concerned refer to the work of Michael Doyle on "Liberalism and World Politics" and others, to suggest that it may be more in the political culture of democratic conflict resolution that hope is to be found. For a whole range of excellent human reasons, international as well as domestic, the evidence that democracies seem to be able to avoid fighting each other still lends support to the desirability of fostering more democratic forms of governance.

In the US, some argue that a consensus is emerging to "make the promotion of democracy the central focus of [US] foreign policy." Many countries are glad that the middle powers are available with their own kind of help with democratic change, and many of them have already found their way to the International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development in Montreal. □

– BERNARD WOOD