

Democracies do not fight each other. Discuss!

„The End of History“, as envisioned by Francis Fukuyama in 1993, has descended down on humanity with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the spread of Western, democratic liberalism. Perpetual peace, as sketched by Immanuel Kant in 1795, appears to become reality. As more and more nations are democratized, chances of interstate warfare are rapidly decreasing. May peace be upon us.

Is Fukuyama right and has the spread of democracies and interwoven, global markets, governed by internationalism as envisioned by Immanuel Kant's "perpetual peace" proposition made the world a safer place? Recently, the answer appears to be "yes", and since the early 1980s the view that democracies do not wage war with one another has been regarded as close as anything there is to an empirical law within the field of international relations.

Even though the monadic proposition – the proposition that the more democratic a state, the less violent it becomes in behaviour towards all other states – has not become reality, the dyadic proposition has. Democracies tend not to fight each other, but show little tendency to stop waging war on non-democracies. Recently, this was portrayed by the US invasion of Iraq, whose newest justification is based on spreading the word of democracy and justifying the efforts of those already fallen, which is rather close to the idea that if something has proven costly, it needs finishing, no matter how dumb it was in the first place. Previous justifications proved impossible to sell in the light of missing evidence regarding weapons of mass destruction or friendly relations between Mr. Saddam Hussein and Mr. Osama bin Laden. It could also be argued that it has become easier for democratic states to justify wars against non-democratic states merely based on the fact that these are not democratic enough, or harbour dangerous "nouns", but this lies beyond the scope of this paper's focus, namely the question whether democracies fight each other or not.

Several academics are trying to deconstruct the democratic peace theory by pointing out that definitions of democracy and war have undergone continuous changes and that there is no significant statistical correlation between democracies and war before 1914, but nevertheless after 1945. Such deconstructions might appear valid, just as it can be claimed that history tends to repeat itself, but the past is not necessarily a guideline for the future. More people were killed in car accidents per driven kilometre before the invention of the airbag (if seatbelts are applied), and chances are that history will not repeat itself in regard to road safety. Every nice saying has its limitations.

The fact that no significant correlation is observable prior to 1914 is not necessarily of any importance, as the pre-1914-world differs significantly from the post-1945-world, when the United States used its victorious WWII-status to remodel and reconstruct the world, which apparently sees its history "come to an end". Even though this has been perceived as the "rollback" of the South by authors such as Walden Bello, the rolled back South, or Third World, has nevertheless become interwoven in an international economy that often, albeit not always, renders conquering wars useless, especially where modern, economic development has resulted in the highest degrees of what is commonly perceived as "wealth". Matter of factly, the spread of neo-liberalism and democracies have constructed a world in which for two and a half decades democracies have not waged war on each other, but frequently on non-democracies and nouns. Whether the current emphasis on the importance of democracy in regard to bloody conflicts is justified or overdetermined, as correlation does not necessarily equal causation, is up for history to decide. Additionally, it could be argued that a mere 25 years are such an insignificant time-span in the era of the nation-state that conclusions along the lines of an "end of history" appear a bit hastened.

As long as democratic nations, even though authors as Noam Chomsky state that contemporary democracies fall far short of their ideals, as exchangeable elitist representatives manufacture public consent, experience economic growth and chances of what is called "prosperity", chances are that peace has a chance. As Kant points out, the spirit of commerce is incompatible with war, and there appears little reason to refute this, as long as leaders are under a somewhat sufficient system of checks and balances. People themselves would hardly disagree, as eating hamburgers is preferable to taking up arms, if Thomas Friedman's Golden Arches Theory of Peace is correct. Marxists would point fingers and moan "whose wealth?" in regard of global, economic growth and stress capitalism's unavoidable contradictions, but development-saints as Jeffrey Sachs appear to map strategies to steer capitalism away from its self-constructed dead ends. What visionaries pointing towards an age of perpetual peace, Sachs and Marxists alike, even though their vision of perpetual peace differs slightly from Sachs', are missing is that contemporary world affairs might not prove sustainable after all. It will be interesting to observe how an international, democratic community deals with projected streams of climate migrants or countries running out of sufficient water supplies. The spirit of commerce does not get you very far if the water pipes are dry. Such scenarios are not guaranteed to occur, but nevertheless increasingly likely, as western consumerism is encroaching upon the world's democracies (and non-democracies) and an infinite hunger for finite products might force thirsty, sweaty or drowning democratic countries to cross thresholds incompatible with perpetual peace. Theoretically, one could even interpret the wasteful lifestyles of the world's privileged minorities as waging a war on the livelihood of the majority, as those least capable of dealing with climatic changes appear to be on track to be hit first. It is the definition of "war" that matters, and there appears justification to include a sheer unimaginable complacency and continuous neglect by the world's richest in regard of their responsibilities towards humanity to be included. It has to be added that representatives of the rich, as Jeffrey Sachs, are frantically trying to globalize the myth of the American dream, but this globalization of the unreal might become quite a nightmare if the world's resources are unable to keep the promise of global, economic growth and prosperity.

In conclusion, there appears little reason to refute the fact that in our world as it contemporarily is, democracies do not fight democracies, at least not in a traditional manner. Tanks might not be rolling, but wastes and their consequences are, both likely to become a menace for other livelihoods at some point of time. Even if the past does not indicate positive correlations between democracy and peace, the past was also less economically globalized than the present is, if not in the sheer volume of a percentage of trade, then nevertheless in regard of the people's minds. As long as democratic states do not fail because its nation's soil fails its people, peace and the myth of potential prosperity might be here to stay. If Gaia eventually strikes back, the last chapter of the "end of history" might yet not have been written, no matter how democratic everyone becomes.