Working Paper No.1996/8

**THE DECLINING PROBABILITY OF
WAR THESIS: HOW RELEVANT FOR
THE ASIA–PACIFIC?**

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# DEPARTMENT OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

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**ABSTRACT**

This paper examines the reasons why it is commonly held that the underlying conditions which shape world politics at the present time are highly favourable to the avoidence of major war, and inquires into the implications of this thesis for the Asia–Pacific region. It suggests that arguments relating to democracy and peace, and the changing attitude to war in modern industrial societies, are inconclusive in the regional context, but that arguments concerning the changing costs and benefits of major war, and the effects of interdependence and globalisation, are more persuasive. Nonetheless, the prospects for peace depend also on policy choices: the paper argues that the most familiar approaches to policy, power balancing and the construction of cooperative security institutions, are of limited value and that greater weight should be placed on diplomacy, both in responding to crises and in promoting constructive relationships.

# THE DECLINING PROBABILITY OF WAR THESIS: HOW RELEVANT FOR THE ASIA–PACIFIC?

*James L. Richardson*

Despite the turmoil and violence which dominate world headlines in the 1990s, despite the many suggestions that disorder, or even chaos, are the dominant features of the age, and despite the predilection of strategic analysts for highlighting ominous dangers in an uncertain future, a surprising number of international relations theorists maintain that, due to long-term processes of political, social and economic change, the probability of major war is declining. They do not deny the alarming incidence of internal war at the present time, nor the potential for war in certain international conflicts; no unconditional claim is being made, nor would it be plausible. What is being claimed is that the probability of war is declining in certain important categories of international relationships: relations among democracies, among advanced industrialised states or, most ambitiously, among the major powers. The most familiar arguments advanced in support of this claim relate to interdependence/globalisation, the changing costs and benefits of war, especially major war, changing attitudes to war, and the spread of democracy. It is evident that the relevance of each of these arguments varies greatly in relation to each of the three categories of relationship.

This chapter will examine these arguments, singly and cumulatively, and their relevance to the Asia–Pacific region. The region poses an interesting challenge to the thesis of the declining probability of war: in terms of the three categories of relationship, no other region is so heterogeneous. It includes democracies and authoritarian states, industrialised, 'new industrialising' and 'developing' economies, and at least four of the acknowledged major powers at the present time.[1] In view of this heterogeneity, some of the theories may now have little relevance to the Asia–Pacific—though they could become relevant in the future.

It will be argued that there are indeed good reasons for concluding that the processes of change in contemporary world politics are tending to create conditions in which the likelihood of major war is much reduced. The theories which support this conclusion, however, should not be understood deterministically, nor is there any basis for a categorical judgment on the probability of major war, globally or regionally. Even if the overall security environment is relatively benign, policies and choices remain vital, both in order to reinforce positive trends and to avoid the kind of mis-steps which can quite unexpectedly revive the predicament of confronting the 'security dilemma'. The final section of the chapter draws attention to certain key areas of policy choice in the Asia–Pacific, in particular to some areas neglected in current thinking on the regional security agenda.

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[1]    The four powers are the United States, Japan, China and Russia; a fifth power, India, may also need to be considered.

**Democracy and peace**

For many American international relations scholars, the trend to democratisation provides the strongest foundation for the prospect of international peace. Even though its significance has come to be vigorously contested, the claim that 'democracies rarely wage war on one another', officially endorsed by President Clinton, enjoys strong scholarly support.[2] *Prima facie*, it is of only limited relevance to the Asia–Pacific, insofar as one of the major powers, China, and several other significant states in the region are non-democratic. However, the claim should be considered in the regional context, for three reasons. It could become highly relevant if the states in question were to become democracies: if indeed the spread of democracy provides the most secure foundation for peace, this is of the greatest importance, however difficult it might be to devise an effective policy to promote democratisation. Second, the promotion of democracy is a stated goal of American foreign policy, largely because of the assumption that this will indeed promote peace. Third, it is desirable to take cognisance of the debate among international relations scholars, for whatever significance it may have for the region.

It is generally accepted that the numerous statistical studies on the question have shown that during the two centuries in which democracies in their modern form have existed, in gradually increasing numbers, and however broadly or narrowly 'democracy' is defined, they have very rarely fought wars against one another. Whether 'very rarely' or 'never' depends on the assessment of a handful of marginal cases. It is also accepted that democracies have been less likely than other states to threaten one another militarily, or to use force short of war against one another—or than democracies in relation to other states. The clear pattern of behaviour that emerges from these findings has not been challenged. The numerous statistical studies on democracy and war do not suggest that there is any overall probability that democracies fight fewer wars than other states—only that they do not fight one another.[3] Thus, so far as these studies are concerned, the presence even of a majority of democracies in the Asia–Pacific has no implications for the probability of avoiding war, given the presence of major authoritarian governments.

However, the 'democratic peace' hypothesis presents many problems, as does the scholarly literature which it has provoked. This is partly because of the prominence of statistical argument, and partly because many of the critics are preoccupied with the defence of neorealist theory against the resurgence of liberal theory, in which the 'democratic peace' has a central place. The statistical debate is puzzling, insofar as the critics do not appear to deny that the historical data show that there has been a distinctive pattern in the behaviour of democracies, but nonetheless

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[2]  For Clinton's formulation, see Joanne Gowa, 'Democratic States and International Disputes', *International Organization*, vol. 49, no. 3, Summer 1995, p. 511. The most substantial presentation of the claim is Bruce M. Russett, *Grasping the Democratic Peace: Principles for a Post Cold War World*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1993.

[3]  R.J. Rummel's claim to the contrary is not generally accepted. See R.J. Rummel, 'Democracies ARE *European Journal of International Relations*, vol. 1, no. 4, December 1995, pp. 457–79.

they deny that this is statistically significant.[4] On both sides there is a lack of concern for specificity and context. A refreshing exception is a recent contribution by Raymond Cohen, whose critique is based on disaggregating the data by region, and to some extent by time period.[5]

What, then, does the pattern signify, and what conclusions may be drawn from it? It has not been shown that the probability of war between democracies is very low *because* they are democracies. Correlation is not explanation. Critics have pointed to such factors as lack of capability, distance, the absence of serious conflicting interests or of disputes over regional primacy, or the presence of other factors, e.g., alliances, socioeconomic or cultural factors, as possible alternative explanations for the absence of war among democracies.[6] Bruce Russett and Zeev Maoz seek to counter this kind of critique by including in their data only those cases where the capability for war is present, and by examining separately the correlation of democracy, wealth, economic growth, alliance and contiguity, with war and militarised disputes. They claim that the data show 'a strong, independent and robust role for democracy';[7] but they also show substantial correlations for the alternative variables. More importantly, the explanatory significance of these correlations remains unclear. Cohen, for example, makes a persuasive argument that when the data are disaggregated by region, alternative—and differing—explanations are more plausible in relation to each region.

Karl Deutsch's concept of a security community provides an example of an alternative explanation of peace among a group of major democracies. His suggestion that the states in western Europe and North America formed such a 'community'[8]—within which war was avoided not because of deterrence, but because it had become unthinkable that it be entertained as a policy option—dates back to the mid-1950s, before the stability of the commitment to democratic norms in the case of the former Axis powers had been demonstrated. It is possible that peace in such a community is essentially a function of the pattern of interests in the member states, reflecting *inter alia* elite interests and prevailing societal values and ideas.[9] Deutsch also emphasises the

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[4]    Gowa, 'Democratic States and International Disputes', *International Organization*, vol. 49, no. 3, Summer 1995, pp. 511–22; David E. Spiro, 'The Insignificance of the Liberal Peace', *International Security*, vol. 19, no. 2, Fall 1994, pp. 50–86.

[5]    Raymond Cohen, 'Pacific Unions: A Reappraisal of the Theory That "Democracies do not go to War *Review of International Studies*, vol. 20, no. 3, July 1994, pp.207–23. See also comments on Cohen's article by Bruce Russett and James Lee Ray, and Cohen's response, ibid., vol. 21, no. 3, July 1995, pp.319–25.

[6]    ibid; Cohen, 'Pacific Unions'; Christopher Layne, 'Kant or Cant: The Myth of the Democratic *International Security*, vol. 19, no. 2, Fall 1994, pp.5–49; William R. Thompson, 'Democracy and Peace: Putting the Cart Before the Horse', *International Organization*, vol. 50, no. 1, Winter 1996, pp. 142–74.

[7]    Russett (with Zeev Maoz), 'The Democratic Peace Since World War II', Chapter 4, *Grasping The Democratic Peace*, p. 85.

[8]    Karl W. Deutsch et al, *Political Community and the North Atlantic Area*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1955.

[9]    Whereas the above argument distinguishes between the effects of interests and of norms, Gowa construes norms as essentially an expression of interests. 'In this interpretation, it is interests that

responsiveness of governments to one another's needs, and their mutual predictability—but not democratic norms.[10]

An inductive generalisation provides no reason to assume that the observed regularity will continue to hold, irrespective of particular circumstances. If extreme nationalists are elected to power in Russia, for example, it cannot be assumed that they would avoid war against all neighbours with democratically elected governments. More generally, there is no reason to suppose that national communities deeply divided over territorial claims will renounce war just because they become democracies. Moreover, such conflicts may change from being defined as internal to external—if a party to a civil war gains international recognition as a state, for example—but proponents of the democratic peace make no claim that democracy prevents internal war, as they cannot, given the American example. At a time when the great majority of armed conflicts are 'internal', this is a major limitation to the relevance of the theory.

The 'democratic peace' school offers two explanations for the observed pattern of behaviour. The first attributes it to the institutional constraints which distinguish democracies from other forms of government.[11] Political executives are limited by constitutional checks and balances, and most crucially, their dependence on electoral competition means that war can be undertaken only when the electorate is persuaded of the need to incur its sacrifices. The problem with this explanation is that, while it suggests that democracies will engage in war only reluctantly and with broad public support, it does not explain why this should prevent them only from fighting other democracies, leaving their overall propensity to wage war indistinguishable from other types of regime.

The second, normative explanation is also problematic. The democratic norm of resolving issues by persuasion and bargaining, not violence, it is claimed, is carried over from domestic into international affairs, strongly predisposing democracies to resolve disputes peacefully, whereas non-democracies readily have recourse to coercive norms and practices, as in their domestic affairs. Moreover, democracies' acceptance of the legitimacy of other democratic governments predisposes them to accord a degree of legitimacy to their demands which they may be less ready to accord to those of non-democratic regimes, and the relative openness of democratic societies to one another reduces the likelihood of gross misperception and 'demonising'.[12] This line of explanation, while not wholly implausible, relies on a rather idealised view of foreign policy in

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drive norms: little, if any, distinction is made between the two'. 'Democratic States and International

[10]  Deutsch, *Political Community*, pp. 66–7.

[11]  For discussion of both explanations, see Russett, *Grasping the Democratic Peace*, pp. 30–42, 86–93; John M. Owen, 'How Liberalism Produces Democratic Peace', *International Security*, vol. 19, no. 2, Fall 1994, pp. 87–125.

[12]  The evidence offered in suppport of these claims is problematic. For example, Russett and Maoz do not claim to show the effect of norms as such, but offer two measures—the stability, i.e., duration of democratic regimes, and the relative absence of political violence, as indications of the effectiveness of norms. (*Grasping the Democratic Peace*, pp. 81–93.) The claim that these are valid measures of the effects of norms is not convincing.

contemporary democracies, neglecting the extent to which it is dominated by the political executive and by a narrow elite. Moreover, democratic norms have little place in bilateral relations between the strong and the weak, as this explanation implies that they should.

Thus while it remains plausible that, other things being equal, democratic governments are likely to avoid war against one another, the democratic peace hypothesis requires far more qualification than its proponents wish to acknowledge. This has important policy implications, especially when the historical experience of the often turbulent process termed 'democratisation' is borne in mind. Edward Mansfield and Jack Snyder have shown that 'democratising' states— those in 'transition' between authoritarianism and democracy, or more generally those which are politically unstable because of conflict between democratic and non-democratic forces—have a higher than normal propensity to fight wars. Thus it is possible that in the short or medium term, far from promoting peace, the spread of democracy could increase the probability of war.[13]

This is especially significant in the Asia–Pacific. Political democracy is relatively new in some countries in the region (e.g. South Korea and Taiwan); Thailand alternates between military rule and democracy; Indonesia restricts political opposition; most importantly, China remains authoritarian, and the military enjoy a special place in relation to government. In these circumstances, the 'democratic peace' hypothesis has little to offer in the Asia–Pacific. It would become relevant only if democratic political institutions were to win general acceptance in the main countries of the region, including acceptance by key elites. Western democracies would naturally welcome the further adoption of democratic institutions, and are likely to offer moral and political support to new democratic regimes. But it would be dangerous to promote democracy through pressures or sanctions, for example, or to give uncritical support to democratically elected leaders whose agendas could exacerbate regional tensions, or make for the kind of political instability which may be more likely to promote war than peace.

**Changing attitudes to war**

The thesis of the democratic peace presupposes that democracies will avoid extreme nationalism and will remain highly averse to war. It is widely recognised that the characteristic attitude to war in contemporary Western societies represents a fundamental break with the past. Throughout recorded history war was an ever-present feature of human experience—in the relations between neighbouring communities, in the formation of states, in the rise, preservation and decline of empires, in struggles to preserve identity and independence, and so forth. It was especially prominent in the development of the modern European states system. Despite some eloquent expressions of dissent, for the most part war was regarded as normal and unavoidable.

For John Mueller, it is the contemporary attitude to war which marks the fundamental break with the past. In *Retreat from Doomsday*, Mueller argues that war among modern, Western societies has become 'subrationally unthinkable'. It is not just that it is rejected on the basis of

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[13]  Edward Mansfield and Jack Snyder, 'Democratization and War', *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 73, no. 3, May/June 1995, pp. 79–97.

analysis and calculation of costs, but that it does not enter into consideration as a conceivable option. In this it may be analogous to the rejection of longstanding social institutions such as duelling or slavery. He presents a historical interpretation of the twentieth century which highlights the significance of the massive change in public attitudes which followed the carnage of World War I. This was temporarily obscured by Hitler's role: it was only through exceptional skills in deception and manipulation that he could overcome the German public's aversion to war, just as it required exceptionally flagrant breaches of his peaceful undertakings to persuade a reluctant British public of the need to accept war. For Mueller, war aversion on the part of all the participants in World War II was sufficient to ensure that the Cold War issues would not be pressed to the point of war: nuclear weapons were 'essentially irrelevant'.[14]

While judgements such as this remain contested, the presence of a secular change in attitudes towards war, at least in the case of Western societies contemplating major war, is widely acknowledged.[15] High levels of military preparedness in the Cold War were indeed accepted, but only in the name of deterrence. Despite the weight of historical evidence that military preparedness has failed to deter war, the non sequitur that whereas appeasement had failed to prevent war, deterrence would do so, won wide acceptance—rendered plausible only by the presence of nuclear weapons.

Mueller has been criticised for failing to explain this fundamental change in attitudes towards war. One critic, Carl Kaysen, suggests that a theoretical grounding for the observed changes could be found in changes in the cost benefit calculus of war in twentieth-century industrial societies.[16] In a recent paper Mueller contests this explanation, pointing to earlier wars where the loss of life and property had been greater, relative to populations, than in the great twentieth century wars, and the setback to economic development far more difficult to overcome. Viewed in long-term historical perspective, the First World War was not exceptionally cruel or destructive. He now offers an explanation for the change in attitudes which can be linked with other developments in international relations theory.[17]

A number of scholars have begun to address the role of changing ideas in international relations—not just as the outcome of various prior developments but as shaping the course of events—an 'independent variable'.[18] Critical social theory, with its interest in the power/

14 John Mueller, *Retreat from Doomsday: The Obsolescence of Major War*, Basic Books, New York, 1989.

15 See Kalevi J. Holsti, *Peace and War: Armed Conflicts and International Order 1648–1989*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1991, for discussion of changes in attitudes to war in each phase of the modern states system.

16 Carl Kaysen, 'Is War Obsolete? A Review Essay', *International Security*, vol. 14, no. 1, Spring 1990, pp. 42–64.

17 John Mueller, 'The Historical Movement of Ideas: The Rise of War Aversion and the Retreat from Doomsday', included in Mueller, *Quiet Cataclysm: Reflections on the Recent Transformation of World Politics*, Harper Collins, New York, 1995, pp. 125–53.

18 See Judith Golstein and Robert O. Keohane, eds, *Ideas and Foreign Policy: Beliefs, Institutions and Political Change*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY, 1993; for 'epistemic communities', see Peter

knowledge nexus, approaches the question from a different angle, but this is not Mueller's point of departure. Setting aside theories of learning and of diffusion, he opts for promotion and persuasion by 'idea entrepreneurs': 'people do not learn ideas like war aversion, nor do they ingest them by a process of diffusion: they become persuaded to accept—or buy—them'.[19] This kind of explanation focuses on the promoters, but also raises the question, what circumstances favoured the acceptance of their ideas?

The promoters of the idea that war was an evil that could and should be eliminated are easily identified in the later nineteenth century, when it became the theme of major ideologies, liberalism and socialism, not just of individual thinkers, and was promoted actively by peace groups advocating alternatives to war—arbitration, international law and international organisation. Moreover, modern Europe enjoyed long periods of peace for the first time in the nineteenth century (1815–1854 and 1871–1914). Whereas in previous centuries a decade without war was a rarity, a new idea of normality—without war—became conceivable. Viewed from this angle, World War I, though by no means unprecedentedly destructive, was the catalyst which precipitated a historically novel attitude in its participants. No longer accepted as in the nature of things, the experience of the reality of war had, for most, decisively discredited traditional militarist values and the more recent social Darwinist legitimation of war, and had vindicated the ideas of the peace groups.

Among the circumstances favourable to the new idea, Mueller notes the geopolitical factor that two of the victor governments, Britain and the United States, were especially active in promoting the idea that this was the 'war to end war'—partly, in the British case, to appeal to the Americans, and in both cases because of its popular appeal. Mueller perhaps underplays the significance of liberal ideology in explaining the transformation of attitudes—war as an institution was deeply repugnant to liberal conceptions of rationality, progress and non-violence—but to accord greater significance to this would require no radical change in his explanation.

To an even greater extent than the theory of the democratic peace, Mueller's theory is limited in its scope. It is most plausible in relation to those societies which experienced the influence of the late nineteenth century anti-war movement and the shock of the First World War ('the West'), and here it is limited to 'major' war. Just as democracies do not renounce war against non-democracies, war-averse societies do not renounce war, and lesser uses of force, against non-Western, usually weaker states with technologically inferior military capabilities. Moreover, a society's aversion to major war will be a more effective determinant of policy in democracies than in non-democracies.

Mueller's Western-oriented theory cannot be extended to East Asia. The region had only a peripheral involvement in the First World War, and mixed experiences in the Second. For some countries Japanese occupation proved a step towards decolonisation; China waged a protracted

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M. Haas, ed., 'Knowledge, Power and International Policy Coordination', special issue, *International Organization*, vol. 46, no. 1, Winter 1992.

[19]    Mueller, *Quiet Cataclysm*, p. 133.

war of self-defence. The ideological dimension was quite different from that in the West; the 'idea entrepreneurs' in East Asia had quite different agendas. Only Japan experienced a major change in the prevailing attitude to war, indeed a more extreme change than in the West. At the same time, the persistence of conservative nationalist attitudes in some Japanese political circles, and concerns often expressed about Japan's 'undigested past', raise question marks concerning the longer term. It must be concluded that this issue has even less bearing on the likelihood of war in the Asia–Pacific than the democratic peace.

**Changing costs and benefits**

A third argument, rarely spelled out in detail, is that it is the increasing cost and decreasing benefit of war, especially in the case of contemporary industrialised societies, which renders major war less probable. The primary goals of governments are now bound up with welfare and economic growth. Major war is extremely costly, and any benefit which success might bring could be achieved more safely, and with far less cost and risk, through a few years of normal growth. This is plausible in relation to many states at the present time—not only the industrialised states, but the major powers, and those giving priority to development. In regions where any major actor does not share these priorities, however, the likelihood of war is much greater: for example, where priorities relate to territorial conflicts, the claims of ethnic communities to separate identity and/or the consolidation of states. Where such wars are initially internal, they may easily merge into inter-state war.

The generalised claim that 'war does not pay' has long been persuasive to some, but has regularly been disregarded by governments. The contemporary version of the argument, as presented by Carl Kaysen, for example, accepts that an economic calculus of war is meaningful only in relation to the actual goals of states, that is to say their governments and their ruling elites.[20] The argument is limited to governments which give priority to welfare and development goals. A historical account of successive phases of the modern states system, such as Kaysen outlines, brings out the magnitude of the changes in the politico–economic context of war, responding in effect to the question why was it that war served the interests of governments in the past, but no longer does so. Space permits no more than a few 'snapshots' of selected phases.

During the formative phase, central governments gradually established their authority over local notables through a process of armed struggle. At the same time the embryonic states established their claim to territory against competing states and lesser rulers, through a process of frequent war. Success in war was a prerequisite for achieving *any* political and economic goals. The timing of war was, up to a point, a matter of choice, but the option of avoiding war as such did not arise.

By the eighteenth century the system was dominated by a few 'great powers' which engaged in frequent wars over the control of territory in Europe and overseas. Success in war meant gains over rivals—in population, wealth and strategic advantages. Thus the rulers' political and

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[20]    Kaysen, 'Is War Obsolete?'.

economic incentives pointed to war whenever circumstances were favourable; those who bore the costs of war had no voice in decisions. For most of the nineteenth century, however, the rulers' calculus was radically different: in the light of the French revolutionary and Napoleonic wars, the costs of any major war—not least the threat to the social order—outweighed any prospective gains.

The initial effects of industrialisation and democratisation, proceeding unevenly and accompanied by an upsurge of nationalism and imperialism, were ambiguous. In 1914 Britain was prepared to engage in major war to defend its imperial territory against the German threat, Austria–Hungary to defend its multinational identity, and the other powers for reasons of security, prestige or expansion—the traditional motives of power politics. The disappearance of three of the regimes in question showed that however rational their choice of war may have appeared to the rulers, they grossly misunderstood the consequences of twentieth-century war.

By the 1990s the fundamentals are utterly different. The empires and the 'hyper-nationalism' of 1914 are another world, industrialisation is pervasive, the main actors are no longer the European powers, crowded together and entangled in geopolitical conflicts, but major powers for the most part separated by oceans, and the effects of nuclear weapons are evident to all. Governments for the most part depend on election by the governed, the cost-benefit calculus of major war is overwhelmingly negative, and it is difficult to construct a 'scenario' in which a great power would consciously opt for major war—for reasons even more compelling than in the nineteenth century. As in the Cold War, war through miscalculation remains conceivable, but this does not render it less plausible that, compared with any earlier period in modern history, major war among the major powers, or among the wealthier states, is now much less probable.

Another way of expressing this claim is that the present period is one in which status quo powers enjoy a clear preponderance against any potential challengers. In a world marked by extreme and increasing inequalities, their interest, as in the nineteenth century Concert, is in maintaining peace in order to preserve the existing socio-economic order. The idea is also present in contemporary Marxist writing: in effect, Kautsky's prognosis of a coalition of the strongest capitalist states has now replaced Marxism's longstanding endorsement of Lenin. The shared interests of the capitalist elites, many of them essentially transnational, are now seen as far more substantial than the interests over which their conflicts assume a national form.[21]

This argument, unlike the preceding two, is persuasive in the Asia–Pacific context. The states fall into one or other of the categories for which the cost/benefit calculus of war has become extremely negative—advanced industrial societies, major powers, and states giving priority to economic development. Moreover, the states of East Asia are among the few clear 'winners' in the present hyper-competitive global economy. Major war would not only inflict enormous absolute losses, but would undermine their relative position, and their prospects. Their awareness

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[21]   For recent comments on the 'redundancy' of major war, from this standpoint, see Martin Shaw, *Global Society and International Relations: Sociological Concepts and Political Perspectives*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1994, pp. 141–67, especially pp. 162–3.

of this provides a setting for East Asia's industrialisation which is strikingly different from that of Europe during its period of industrialisation, punctuated by major war: there was then no such realisation that war could endanger Europe's dominant position in the international system.

However, the calculations of governing elites may not always be determined by these priorities, especially in the event of economic setbacks or political instability. And in the case of divided societies, such as Korea and above all China/Taiwan, there could be circumstances in which emotional issues of national identity override the interest in development. Such situations remain potentially explosive.

## Globalisation

The final line of argument relates not to the level of the nation/state but to that of the international/global system. There is no authoritative definition of 'globalisation', the term suddenly in vogue, but it is clear that it refers to something more than 'interdependence'—which signifies major linkages between states, and in practice has referred mainly to trade relationships. Hans-Henrik Holm and Georg Sørensen define it as 'the intensification of economic, political, social and cultural relations across borders', but note that for many it signifies qualitative as well as quantitative changes.[22] For Philip Cerny it signifies a structural change, a transformation of the basic rules of the game of politics and international relations.[23] Martin Shaw, like Holm and Sørensen, highlights its multidimensional character—'a diverse social universe in which the unifying forces of modern production, markets, communications and cultural and political modernisation interact with many global, regional, national and local segmentations and differentiations'—and he suggests that this is a field of social relations in which there is considerable integration of 'knowledge-based abstract systems', whereas normative integration remains highly problematic.[24]

Globalisation in the economic domain refers to markets, production and finance. The major corporations promote and market their products world-wide. Not only are the components of manufactured goods produced in different countries, taking advantage of wage and other cost differentials, but the same is becoming true of services: data processing, for example, may be undertaken internationally, in specialised locations. The trillions of dollars in electronic money which circulate among financial centres only tenuously linked to the states which issue the currencies, or for that matter to concrete assets and investments, constrain the economic policies of governments in major ways. Some have argued that these developments should be seen as a consequence of peaceful relationships rather than as a foundation for peace in the future, but while it is evident that peace was a prerequisite for economic globalisation, so was an expectation of future peace. To the extent that governments are influenced by the corporate and financial elites

22      Hans-Henrik Holm and Georg Sørensen, eds, *Whose World Order: Uneven Globalization and the End of the Cold War*, Westview, Boulder, CO., 1995, pp. 4–5.

23      Philip G. Cerny, 'Globalization and the Changing Logic of Collective Action', *International Organization*, vol. 49, no. 4, Autumn 1995, pp. 595–6.

24      Shaw, *Global Society and International Relations*, pp. 10–11, 19.

with which they are in frequent contact, the latter will seek to perpetuate the climate in which war among the major states caught up in the global economic system is unthinkable. This constraint will not apply, of course, in the case of states which are not integrated into the system.

Social and cultural globalisation is equally characteristic of the age, most strikingly in the viewing of common TV images world-wide. Instant communication becomes cheaper, and the internet introduces new options for informal communication, but also for surveillance. 'Global' (American) everyday cultural influences are more pervasive, and more controversial, than ever. So is the awareness of common global problems—environmental threats, AIDS, or the drug culture. However parochial most peoples' concerns may remain, superimposed on them is a (partly) shared awareness of the global. Another sign of the times is the growth of international networks among NGOs, and their new prominence in special United Nations conferences. While it is true that all these developments had their earlier counterparts, especially among elites, the difference in degree is such as to amount to a difference in kind: the psychological environment of international politics has no precedent.

It should not be assumed, however, that all these are positive developments in terms of promoting peace. It is not only that rapid changes of this magnitude are deeply disturbing, socially and culturally, and thus a likely source of political turbulence. An even greater concern is the increasing polarisation, within and between societies—between those coping more or less adequately with the competitive stresses of globalisation, and those not coping, or essentially excluded. As Richard Barnet and John Cavanagh express it, a majority of the inhabitants of the planet are at most window shoppers in the global shopping mall.[25] The gross neglect of the human rights of many of these, the migration pressures and the new alienation between North and South are symptoms of the dark under-side of the globalisation process, sharply at odds with the rhetoric of liberalism and democracy which provides its political vernacular.

The political consequences of globalisation, in particular the role of the state in the new milieu, have not yet been adequately assessed. The 'end of sovereignty' is a telling image, but potentially a source of confusion. Legally, states remain sovereign, since there is no political authority superior to them. Sovereign states have always limited their freedom of action by entering into international agreements and by accepting legal obligations. These are now far more numerous than in the past, but do not in themselves entail a loss of sovereignty. Few states in the past enjoyed the kind of freedom from outside constraints which are now held up as eroding state sovereignty. A danger in the popularity of the end-of-sovereignty image is that it provides governments with an alibi for avoiding responsibility for weak policies, or that it can be manipulated to reduce awareness of—and debate over—the extent of the choices which are open to governments, economic globalisation notwithstanding. It is also evident that the effective autonomy of states, and their scope for choice, depends greatly on their location in the various global 'systems'—economic, political, military, and cultural. Some enjoy far more autonomy than

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[25]    Richard J. Barnet and John Cavanagh, *Global Dreams: Imperial Corporations and the New World Order*, Touchstone, New York, 1995, p. 16.

others. It would be incongruous, for example, to apply the 'end of sovereignty' rhetoric to the United States, or for that matter to China, or the other major powers.

Globalisation, then, is changing the context of contemporary international politics in complex ways. Global production and finance affect the material basis of politics more profoundly than the trade interdependence which failed to prevent World War I. They offer no final guarantee that peace will prevail among those deeply enmeshed in these global networks, but they render major war among the rich and powerful increasingly difficult to envisage. On the other hand, the polarisation induced by unchecked market forces, and the ferment induced by social and cultural globalisation, introduce new kinds of pressures and frictions. The version of liberalism espoused by the energetic promoters of globalisation from above offers cold comfort to the marginalised and excluded. In these circumstances, peace among the rich and powerful states may fall well short of achieving security and well-being for their inhabitants, let alone the world as a whole. Major war may be much less probable, but a 'security community', understood literally, may remain elusive, even among the privileged.

The multiple dimensions of globalisation are very evident in East Asia, but the states of the region are affected very unevenly. On the other hand, all—even in, prospect, North Korea—are caught up in major trade and investment linkages. In the case of China, it is mainly interdependence in this earlier sense, rather than the newer dimensions of globalisation, which constrain its foreign policy decisions, and it amounts to a major constraint. Such interdependence, of course, is no final guarantee of peace, but it accentuates the cost of any major war, and the incentive to limit the scope of war in any situation short of one threatening the survival of a state or a regime.

## The future is what states make of it

The four kinds of argument which have been reviewed—relating to democracy, attitudes to war, the changing cost-benefit calculus and globalisation—overlap and complement one another. Peace among the advanced industrial countries, all of them democracies and—less confidently—among the major powers may be over-determined. So momentous a judgment has massive implications for international relations theory. It would follow that the kind of continuity postulated by neo-realism, according to which the unchanging anarchical structure of the international system necessitates that war remains the final arbiter among the major actors, and that military power balancing remains the imperative for survival, is no longer compelling. Projections that 'new great (nuclear) powers will rise' assume that structural continuities will remain overriding, and that the role of the great power will remain essentially unchanged.[26] It cannot be denied that these are potentialities, but the cumulative changes, at the level of the system as well as the actors, are such that they can no longer be presented as necessities.

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[26]   See Christopher Layne, 'The Unipolar Illusion: Why New Great Powers Will Rise', *International Security*, vol. 17, no. 4, Spring 1993, pp. 5–51.

More plausible, at the present time, is an alternative hypothesis, 'anarchy is what states make [27] Even where the fiction of states as unitary actors retains some plausibility, behind the state actors stand elites and electorates which, in different ways, influence and constrain the state's goals and strategies. While it is true that the European and Japanese elites and electorates, to take a concrete example, would not accept a blatant, aggressive assertion of unipolar 'hegemony' on the part of the strongest power, the United States, and do not hesitate to assert their interests on bilateral issues, there is no indication at all that they envisage a need to engage in military power balancing in order to contain American hegemonial ambitions. Yet neo-realist logic appears to require them to do so.

Nonetheless, the kind of world envisaged by the neo-realists could return, not because of structural imperatives but because of choices made by governments. The crucial issue concerns the future relationships of those major powers—Russia, China and India—whose participation in the networks and institutions which constitute the fragile global 'order' is limited at the present time. Will they become more fully part of that order, or will they, or some of them, move into a stance of confronting the Western powers, and challenging their normative principles? While the *status quo* powers may be regarded as a loose coalition supporting and 'managing' the existing order, they cannot necessarily be relied on to form a cohesive alliance in the face of a political challenge by a power willing to use force and brinkmanship on behalf of its claims.

The inclusion of powers such as those in the emerging order is thus a central issue, which highlights the need for purposeful diplomacy on the part of the established coalition, sensitive to their aspirations and above all committed to the importance of instituting an inclusive global order.[28] The mismanagement of these relationships cannot be ruled out. A case in point may be the incremental drift of Western policy in favour of the extension of NATO. The inclusion of the former East European members of the Warsaw Pact in NATO amounts to a risky policy of unnecessarily creating a long-term relationship of military tension between Russia and the expanded NATO—an irritant liable to strengthen the position of extreme nationalism in Russian politics, and to harden the lines of hostility should such political forces achieve power in Moscow. The extension of NATO appears to reflect an uncritical application of a certain mode of realist thinking, of a kind which tends to create avoidable security dilemmas. A more resourceful diplomacy would have pursued options for underwriting the security of states in this kind of location, such as buffer zones or security guarantees, which would have offered a prospect of promoting stable political relations between Russia and its former sphere of influence. Instead, NATO appears to be opting for an arrangement which, while appearing to promote greater security, is more likely to create a potential for long-term insecurity.

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[27]     Alexander Wendt, 'Anarchy is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics', *International Organization*, vol. 46, no. 2, Spring 1992, pp. 391–425.

[28]     On the significance of the inclusion of states in the institutions which may be seen as the core of the contemporary international order, see Paul Schroeder, 'The New World Order: A Historical *Washington Quarterly*, vol. 17, no. 2, Spring 1994, pp. 25–43. 'Inclusion' raises large issues. It should be distinguished from 'co-option'—the integration of non-Western powers in essentially Western institutions. 'Inclusion' implies acceptance of a normative dialogue.

The case exemplifies the danger of the self-fulfilling prophecy which is inherent in the realist mindset—a mode of thinking which remains dominant in the bureaucracies and think-tanks concerned with national security policy. It is also the mindset of most media commentators, and plays its part in determining what is deemed newsworthy. Turmoil, violence and potential threats make better headlines than slow-moving diplomacy and policies aimed at defusing conflict. A world characterised by the turbulent changes associated with globalisation is readily perceived in realist terms, almost inevitably so when the relevant policy and media communities perceive it through pre-formed realist lenses. If the underlying processes making for the irrationality and redundancy of war are sufficiently salient, issues may be resolved in other ways, despite the mindset of the policy communities. But if, as the example of NATO and Russia suggests, there is a good deal of contingency in the present situation, realism may yet recreate the world in accordance with its presuppositions.

## Prospects for the Asia–Pacific region

Although the arguments concerning democracy and changing societal attitudes have little relevance in the region at the present time, the goals of the main states, the wholly disproportionate costs of major war and the constraints of economic interdependence are such that the underlying conditions are highly favourable to the avoidance of major war. In a heavily armed region, this in no way excludes the threat of force by major powers against smaller neighbours, the 'teaching of lessons' and also—the worst case—the risk of a wider war through a serious miscalculation on the part of one or more of the major powers. Nor does it rule out the potential for a hardening of the lines of cleavage, as in the Russian case. A situation of hostile armed camps is inherently dangerous in a way in which a low-threat environment, such as the present, is not.

Regional security elites look to two kinds of measures to ward off these potential dangers: the construction of cooperative security institutions and the maintenance of a balance of power. The establishment of the ASEAN Regional Forum has created a political framework within which leaders can discuss security concerns, and proposals which may give some substance to the concept of cooperative security—confidence-building measures, and eventually arms control, for example—can be considered. It can also play a part in diplomacy on second-order security issues such as the Spratly Islands. More vital security issues, however, such as those relating to Korea and Taiwan, are likely to be addressed mainly by the governments directly involved. Equally important for security is the indirect influence of regional economic institutions: to the extent that they can heighten the perception of shared interests in maintaining economic linkages, and habits of cooperation, they can serve as a moderating factor in any acute security conflict. The larger hope, that the present institutions may develop into a regime in which security depends primarily on the observance of institutionalised cooperative norms, looks to a kind of order which has no historical or contemporary precedent. Its realisation may be in the same kind of time frame as that of peace through universal democratisation.

It is partly for this kind of reason that more realist-minded analysts look primarily to the balance of power as the foundation for regional security.[29] This familiar idea, however, is fraught with problems, starting with its ambiguity, its Eurocentric connotations and the unresolved tension in realist thought over whether it is a means for preventing major war or a configuration which renders war more likely. In one sense, there *is* a regional balance, i.e., power is diffused among several major actors: no power has the overall resources to become an Asia–Pacific hegemon. In the unlikely event of a complete US military withdrawal from Northeast Asia and the Western Pacific there would be major strategic rethinking in East Asia, and it is likely that there would be an attempt to construct a 'balance' against the power with the strongest military capability—on present indications, China. Even so, the imagery of the balance would not serve as a reliable guide to policy: confronted with strategic uncertainties and asymmetries, states tend to seek a *favourable* balance. The reassuring image of a balance, or equilibrium, of power opens up the prospect of unlimited arms competition.

Short of this extreme—a thoroughgoing US disengagement—the balance of power and its associated imagery such as that of a future (Chinese) bid for hegemony, tends to create a certain mindset in which the containment of China by a countervailing coalition comes to appear a desirable goal of policy, with all the dangers of the self-fulfilling prophecy and the sacrifice of constructive diplomatic options that such a stance entails. It is true that China is potentially the strongest regional military power, but it lacks the overall preponderance to render plausible the notion of China as a regional hegemon.[30] A more nightmare-like scenario, of China as the leader of a civilisational challenge to the West, presupposes China's exercising some kind of coalition leadership role, not a coercive form of hegemony, and presupposes a breakdown of the economic and political relationships which now link East Asia with the West, and especially the United States. Such alarmist imagery foreshadows a premature hardening of politico–military cleavages, at the cost of foregoing the opportunity for developing constructive relationships.

*The scope for diplomacy*

Thus far it has been argued that, in the short and medium term, the potential for regional security institutions is limited and that the realist mindset and the associated imagery, with its capacity to evoke popular emotion, is potentially dangerous. How, then, can policy best address questions of security in a region where the underlying conditions are favourable to the maintenance of peace, but where there are a fair number of second-order security conflicts and a few major conflicts?

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[29]  See, for example, Paul Dibb, *Towards a New Balance of Power in Asia*, Adelphi Paper 295, Oxford University Press, Oxford, for the International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1995.

[30]  The use of this imprecise image is a source of confusion. China cannot exercise the kind of hegemony over its neighbours which is often ascribed to the US or to India (this is precluded by its neighbours' relative size and capacities). And even the most pessimistic analysts do not appear to envisage China's seeking to occupy its neighbours militarily. At worst, weak-state neighbours might become part of a Chinese sphere of influence. China lacks the overall power resources to exercise the more diffuse kind of hegemony which the US *has* exercised in the Asia–Pacific, where its 'hub and spokes' strategic dominance was complemented by 'soft' economic and cultural power.

The answer appears to lie in a field of action which is universally practised but is relatively neglected in public commentary and in the study of international relations, *viz.* diplomacy. The manner in which specific security issues are handled, the precedents which are established, the relative incidence of unilateral threats, the extent to which diplomatic outcomes tend to defuse or to exacerbate tensions—all these will have a major influence on future strategic relationships. Crises—phases of intense conflict when outcomes vital to the participants are in the balance—are especially significant in this regard, but more than short-term 'crisis-management' is involved.

Since the end of the Cold War the region's experience of crisis diplomacy has thus far been positive with respect to Korea and the Spratly Islands, but much less so with respect to Taiwan. The conflict over North Korea's apparent determination to acquire nuclear weapons in 1994 was handled with a mixture of bilateral and multilateral diplomacy. Despite a good deal of public canvassing of unpromising military options, US policy appears to have aimed primarily towards achieving the kind of bargain which was eventually agreed, whereby North Korea renounced its military nuclear program in return for very substantial assistance for its civilian nuclear industry. The dangerous and divisive option of pressing a precarious regime 'to the wall' in the hope of its collapse, was foregone. China did not support US proposals for sanctions against North Korea, but appears to have pressed it to accept the bargain. A valuable precedent was created, and an issue which could have led to war and/or major pressures for nuclear proliferation was defused, if not resolved for all time.

The conflict over territorial claims to the Spratly Islands, despite its prominence in discussions of regional security, is no more than a second-order issue, comparable to the disputes over sovereignty concerning other islands in the area. Should the adjacent seabed prove to have major exploitable oil reserves—which many consider unlikely—agreement among the states claiming sovereignty over the islands would be necessary to ensure a secure environment for exploiting the resources. Meanwhile, the handling of incidents such as that over Mischief Reef in 1995 provides a barometer for the state of relations between China and its Southeast Asian neighbours. The Mischief Reef episode, far from demonstrating a passive, 'appeasing' response on the part of the Philippines and its ASEAN partners, provoked retaliation by the Philippines navy against Chinese territorial markers and Chinese fishermen and renewed insistence by ASEAN that the Spratly issues be negotiated multilaterally, a stand which won some apparent concessions from China, and may signify another positive precedent.

The future of Taiwan, now by far the most momentous security issue in the region, has unfortunately been less well handled in the recent past. China–Taiwan relations had been on a constructive path during the early 1990s, which saw a surge of Taiwanese investment in China and Taiwanese visitors to the mainland. The two governments appeared to agree on the goal of eventual reunification, even though their programs for achieving it were incompatible. President Lee Teng-hui appeared to be able to maintain support for this approach, against the political opposition's demand for Taiwanese independence and sovereignty. China, it is widely assumed, is prepared to use force to prevent this, but short of such extreme provocation is deterred from doing so. China was able to resist Taiwan's efforts to achieve membership of the United Nations,

a step which might be consistent with its program for achieving reunification, but which could also amount to a move towards independence and sovereignty.

This delicate balance was disturbed by President Lee's visit to Cornell University in June 1995, the Clinton administration having issued his visa only under extreme pressure from Congress. The situation was further inflamed by House of Representatives Speaker Newt Gingrich's call for the US to recognise Taiwan's independence, and was not helped by *Time* Magazine's designating President Lee as the Asian Man of the Year. China responded by test-firing missiles into the sea near Taiwan and by subsequent military exercises, presumably intended to influence the Taiwanese presidential election in March 1996 or to deter any subsequent moves towards sovereignty, but prompting a US naval deployment. By early 1996, the possibility of China invading Taiwan had become a topic of everyday comment. The risk that an elaborate game of bluff and manoeuvre might escape the control of the players was enhanced by the combination of electoral politics in Taiwan and in the United States and the politics of the leadership succession in China. Although all parties proved ready to withdraw from the confrontation after President Lee's reelection, the main precedent has been the negative one—a US decision which allowed a potential crisis to be opened up. In contrast to the Korean case, US actions were guided by no overall diplomatic strategy. In the absence of such a strategy it is likely that *ad hoc* responses will strengthen the tendencies favouring 'containment' and power 'balancing', and the neglect of constructive diplomatic options.

**In conclusion**

At a time of globalisation, democratisation and the tyranny of the market, the onus of proof rests squarely on those who would maintain that the old structural constants of international politics remain overriding, and that the old theories remain valid. No new grand theory has yet become credible, but a variety of theories illuminate particular aspects of current world politics. Each region has its distinctive features, the Asia–Pacific being notable for its political heterogeneity and its rapid economic ascent. Long-term trends favour the maintenance of peace among the main states of the region, but they are open to disruption, and the orthodox prescriptions for consolidating security—liberal institutionalism and realist power balancing—offer at best partial answers, and at worst an exacerbation of the potential security dilemma. More crucial is the role of diplomacy—defensively, in defusing potential time-bombs, and constructively in establishing precedents which can create the kind of confidence needed to sustain a security community, not among the like-minded but among the culturally diverse—the unique challenge of Asia–Pacific security.

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