

Peace in Multi-State Systems

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Abstract. The multi-state system is a political configuration that recurs in history. Among the better known examples are classical China, classical Greece, pre-Mauryan India, and Renaissance Italy.¹ Modern Europe is an important test case for the theory of such systems. Like classical Greece, but unlike classical China or Renaissance Italy, Europe has not coalesced into one state, but has persisted for centuries *as a system*.² These different historical outcomes raise theoretical questions of some interest.

We here test against ancient and modern examples one theory of the behavior of states.³ This is the Democratic Peace (DP) theory,⁴ which holds that democratic states never attack each other, or do so far less often than do nondemocratic states.⁵ If so, democratic political structure in single states will be a significant predictor of system stability. The DP theory seems to be successful in predicting known outcomes in early China (no democratic states, continual war, unification) and also in early Greece (some democratic states; some war; no unification). We note, however, that the theory fails with modern South America, and conclude that factors other than political structure must be invoked to explain multi-state outcomes, whether ancient or modern.

Data. DP theories abound; some proponents emphasize the “liberal” aspect of “democracy.”⁶ We chose for testing the Polity IV list, which assigns to states a democracy index ranging from -10 to +10, on criteria established by CIDCM.⁷

¹Participants at the 16th WSWG Conference on multi-state systems (22-23 May 2002), considered these four cases plus the classic Maya and Samguk Korea.

²The European Union can be read as an effort to stabilize a multi-state system *as such*.

³We are indebted at several points to a 16-28 Nov 2002 discussion of DP on the WSW and CGC E-mail networks. The conclusions here drawn are solely our own.

⁴The concept is usually traced to Kant **Peace** (1795), who also specified economic integration and international organization. The more reductive DP theory emerged in the 1990's. An early statement is Owen **Liberalism** (1994); for a sampling of later opinions, see Farber **Politics** (1995), Weart **Never** (1998), and Russett **Triangulating** (2000). Russett argues for restoring the other two factors recognized by Kant.

⁵It should be noted that attacks on states of *other type* are not precluded by the theory.

⁶Owen **Liberal** (1997). Tin-bor Victoria Hui clarifies thus: “Liberalism says that the people who fight and fund war have the right to be consulted, through representatives they elect, before entering it” (WSW, 18 Nov 2002).

⁷On recommendation of Alastair Iain Johnston. CIDCM is the Center for International Development and Conflict Management at the University of Maryland at College Park.

By CIDCM criteria, the 32 states with a score of +10 were the following:

United States	Luxembourg	Italy	Iceland
Canada	Switzerland	Slovenia	Mauritius
Trinidad	Spain	Greece	Israel
Costa Rica	Portugal	Lithuania	Mongolia
United Kingdom	Germany	Finland	Japan
Ireland	Poland	Sweden	Australia
Netherlands	Austria	Norway	Papua New Guinea
Belgium	Hungary	Denmark	New Zealand

A Counter-Example. Very little recourse to theory is needed to explain why Mauritius (area: 2,000 km²) never conquered the other Commonwealth nations. Of greater analytical interest is the fact that no South American country makes the CIDCM +10 list. If indeed those states are not “democratic,” it follows from DP theory that they will be much more mutually bellicose than a counterpart European “democratic” group (say, Netherlands, Belgium, Spain, Italy, Germany, Austria, Hungary, Poland, Greece, Norway, Sweden).⁸ But in the period since South American independence (c1830), in addition to local conflicts, Europe has twice been kept from unifying through war only by substantial outside-power intervention. By contrast, and apart from any turbulence in individual states, the South American states *as a group* have experienced few conflicts of importance during that period,⁹ and despite those conflicts, they have retained their individual identity and their collective equilibrium as a stable system.

South America thus reverses DP expectations, and we must account in other ways for its relatively pacific system character. To begin with, we note that these states have an entire history in common. Their invention as Western-oriented nations derives from a remarkably uniform and artificial construct imposed by Spain over centuries. This construct becomes somewhat less coherent and loses its central regulatory apparatus in the independence transition (1810-1830), but the ensuing conflicts are more akin to the readjustment of local boundaries than to the conflicts of conquest and control, or an effort to create or recreate empires.

⁸Perhaps the chief anomaly of the list, for any period earlier than the late 20c, is the presence of Germany and the absence of France. Oren **Subjectivity** traces the Germanic bias of DP theory (with Kant **Peace** as its foundation document) to Woodrow Wilson (1856-1924), who despised “French democracy” and admired “German constitutionalism,” and to John Burgess (1844-1931) before him, who saw Imperial German structure as ideal for preserving peace (Burgess **Emperor**), and thought South America undeserving of “scientific treatment” (Burgess **Political** 1/3-5). On this last point, we beg to differ.

⁹Over the period in question, the major South American conflicts are: (1) between Paraguay and the Triple Alliance (Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay; 1865-1870), which arose from Brazilian reprisals against Uruguay for mistreatment of its citizens in Uruguay’s civil war, and ended in defeat but not extinction or absorption for Paraguay; (2) the nitrate wars between Chile and the allied states of Bolivia and Peru (1879-1884), which ended with territorial gains by Chile and the ongoing tensions of the Tacna-Aria dispute, which were finally resolved by mediation in 1929; and (3) the Chaco Wars (1928-1930, 1933-1935), in which Paraguay gained territory from Bolivia. It will be obvious that landlocked Paraguay and Bolivia are a geopolitical focus in these wars; see Child **Geopolitics** and Kelly **Checkerboards**.

One variant of DP runs: “Contemporary liberal democracies tend to recognize in other liberal democracies a preference for resolving disputes through mediation . . . They tend to believe that together liberal democracies constitute a shared ‘ingroup,’ or in Karl Deutsch’s words, a ‘security community’ in which it is almost impossible to envision the use of major force to resolve disputes among the members.”¹⁰

A New Theory. The South American case suggests eliminating the D from DP, thus: Other things being equal, states of similar structure and tradition, *whatever the content of that structure and tradition*, will regard each other as nonthreatening, and will view states of different structure and tradition with suspicion. But replacing DP with a one-factor “identity peace” (IP) theory creates a problem with the classical Greek and Chinese systems, since a common tradition in classical China seems to have supported,¹¹ but in classical Greece seems to have inhibited,¹² the unification process. We conclude that additional factors need to be considered. Our suggestions follow.

Factors Supporting System Stability

One factor is cultural.¹³ Warlike states are more warlike than other states. And belligerent social style is independent of political type; thus, a vendetta culture may coexist with autocratic (Hàn China) or democratic (19c US) political structures.¹⁴

Even warlike states may not feel impelled to make the effort of unification. Cultural unity may justify an *attempt* at political unity, or it may also *substitute* for it. The presence or absence of a cultural unity agenda may be decisive.

Military effectiveness also counts. The Spring and Autumn Chinese states fought, but were not strong enough to destroy each other.¹⁵ In Warring States times, political and military reforms made definitive war possible. This efficiency transition did not occur in Greece. If we distinguish phases, and note military capacity as the new factor in the second phase, the classical Chinese case becomes analytically tractable.

Again, war may be inhibited by diplomacy, which may create alliances or other structures which operate to contain a conquest push. The “Balance of Powers” concept recognizes one self-regulating device in multi-state systems: the conscious wish of other states not to have the multi-state equilibrium become too far unbalanced by the success of any one state.¹⁶

¹⁰The formulation of Alastair Iain Johnston (WSW, 18 Nov 2002).

¹¹In China, an increase in cultural unity in an originally multicultural system accompanied an 04c escalation of severity in the wars of unification.

¹²For Greek *cultural* unity as not containing a *political* unity agenda, see Finley **Nation**.

¹³That is, the peace question, though *statable* in political science terms, may not be wholly *solvable* in political science terms.

¹⁴As a sample of cultural explanation, Owen **Liberalism** 98 finds the classic Greeks *not* liberal: “They valued heroism and conquest over self-preservation and well-being. Athenian democracy as a result is a restive, adventurous, conquering regime, to be trusted by no one.”

¹⁵See Brooks **Capacity**. Warlike behavior does not invariably jeopardize the *system*.

¹⁶See Toynbee **Study** 3/93. Diplomacy is war carried on by other means, and sometimes to other conclusions. For diplomacy against outside conquest in early China, see Brooks **League**.

And in addition to the internal factors of heritage coherence, warlikeness, political unity agenda, and military and diplomatic expertise, we note the external factor of resource differential as a root cause of conflict among states, whether those states are intrinsically bellicose or pacific in character. This is notably true in the South American case, where the issues in two of the three major wars involved such things as the exploitation of mineral resources and direct access to the sea. We may add that shifts in resource use, such as technological change brings about, are likely to redraw the previous resource map, and define new zones and fault lines of potential conflict between states. In many cases, such zones and fault lines form the grid on which other disposing factors are graphed out.

Our Formulation

We would summarize the above findings in this way: States with a common heritage, whatever the content of that heritage, will tend to regard each other as nonthreatening, and the system of those states will tend to be peaceful and stable. Intrinsic belligerence, resource differentials, or a political unity agenda, will dispose toward wars of conquest, but such attempts at expansion or unification will fail unless supported by adequate military means, or if prevented or countered by adequate diplomatic and military measures.

This formula, though it is more complex than the one we began by considering, may for that very reason more adequately explain multi-state situations of the kind that are actually encountered in history.

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