

Contextualizing international relations' phenomena within democratic peace

Gajić, Aleksandar. 2021. *Democracies do not wage war? And other views*. Belgrade: Institute of European Studies, pp. 215. ISBN 978-86-82057-80-2

Democratic Peace Theory (DPT) has seen a resurgence in academic thematization in recent years. Even though the first decade of this century brought scepticism on idea that political regime type greatly influences the adoption of foreign policy preferences, lately more and more attention has been paid to this theory. V-Dem¹, one of the largest databases that measures political regime type changes around the world, reports that between 2011 and 2021, the world saw a massive surge of autocratization. Authoritarian activities, as well as the sudden decline of particular aspects of democracy, such as the quality of election procedures and the deliberative model of democracy, have caused a drop of liberal democracy during the last decade (V-Dem 2022). When producing a multiplicity of papers that add to IR analyses, the academic community deploys democracy as a significant variable and tool in an attempt to understand the complexity of contemporary international relations (Dujčić 2015). Such methods, which allowed the degree of democracy to be reintroduced into academic work, reignited debates about the notion of democratic peace's use and its applications in empirical research.

The book „Democracies do not wage war“ published by the Institute of European Studies in Belgrade and written in Serbian language (original title: *Демократије не ратују? и други огледи*), is one such effort to bring the postulates of democratic peace closer to the domestic academic public and its application to the analysis of current problems in the system of international

¹ This project is being implemented by the V-Dem Institute based within the University of Gothenburg, Sweden.

relations. It is 215 pages long and is divided into six thematic chapters, the first of which introduces the DPT, while the other five correspond to individual case studies.

The book commences with brief introduction of the DPT, its fundamental postulates, and the evolution of the theory. The author discusses the definitions of “war” and “democracy” as key DPT variables, as well as the history of wars between countries with democratic political regimes and DPT criticisms. He deploys five phenomena immanent to international relations that correspond to the book’s case studies.

As the book’s first case study, Gajić (2021) examines the disparity between the EU’s and Russian Federation’s divergent ideologies and geopolitical aims. He suggests that the EU is prone to normative power usage, while on the other hand, he describes the *realpolitik* concept deployed by the Russian Federation aiming to accomplish its foreign and security policy. His argument is that Russia sees EU efforts in the post-Soviet zone largely as a geopolitical struggle to expand its sphere of influence over its cultural and historical space, to its detriment, in an environment where no power vacuum can exist. Furthermore, he claims that Russian influence in this area should be developed in a preventative, progressive, and peaceful manner. The EU, on the other hand, perceives Russia’s actions as aggressive, resurgent Russian imperialism motivated by nostalgic historical feelings and illogical impulses.

The right to self-determination is discussed in the second case study from an international legal perspective. The author utilizes the academic concept of sovereignty as an entity that results in a violation of the right to self-determination. Besides, he addresses the “external” and “internal” components of the right to self-determination, as enumerates five key distinctions (mis)applications of this right in Kosovo and Metohija and Crimea. The first difference arises from the state-historical context, the second – legal-procedural, refers to the (un)use of the internal type of right to self-determination, the third is related to the legitimacy of the central government in relation to which the right to self-determination is required, the fourth – to different contexts in terms of the existence of external military aggression, while the fifth difference is related to the international legal status of the area whose population has “resorted” to the right to self-determination (Gajić 2021).

The book’s third case study examines small-country foreign and security policy strategies from Serbia’s standpoint. The author provides an outline of many alternatives on disposal to small nations in present circumstances after placing “small states” in the theoretical context of democratic peace. He then discusses how small countries could perform well in international system. Following the

existing theoretical explanations of the foreign policies of small countries, the author introduces the balancing strategy, bandwagoning strategy, proclamation of a neutrality, and the hedging strategy deployment. The majority of this chapter is devoted to an examination of Serbia's choice of strategy that it conducts in its foreign policy. According to Gajić, Serbia used the bandwagoning option to join the European Union throughout the first decade of this century. He furthermore states that Serbia's modern foreign and security policy is built on a strategy that is akin to hedging, namely the policy of "four pillars of foreign policy". He concludes that, in a typical situation, it is uncertain if Serbia uses strong bilateral ties with PR China as a hedging strategy in its EU relations, or whether these moves from official Belgrade signal a possible new era in Serbia's foreign and security policy paradigm.

Gajić (2021) includes human rights and military interventions in the fourth case study of this book. He begins by describing Costas Douzinas' approach to the ethics of so-called humanitarian operations. Westphalian sovereignty and human rights, according to this UK philosopher, are mutually independent variables in international politics (Douzinas 2009). The author discusses how Douzinas sees the interaction between legally legislative norms and informal ethics in international politics. In addition, the author portrays the objectification of human rights as a significant aspect of international relations. The author closes the chapter by addressing some early outstanding concerns that developed in this field of democratic peace considerations.

The final case study in the book examines the evolution of the OSCE. The author examines the actions of this global corporation in light of its evolutionary issues. Gajić cites the OSCE's massive bureaucratic apparatus and lack of in-depth attention to international security matters as two major criticisms of this international organization. He then referred to the Russian Federation's proposal for OSCE institutional reform as a security guarantor in the wider Eurasian region. Such proposal incorporated "Treaty on Security in Europe" made by the Russian Federation as an initiative for effective cooperation mechanisms that should provide solutions to security challenges and threats. The key regulation was contained in Article 2 of the Draft, which proposed that a state would not undertake, participate in or support actions or activities that significantly affect the security of another signatory state. The chapter concludes with discussion of future political and institutional issues facing the OSCE, as well as the OSCE's reaction to emerging security threats across Eurasia.

Even though the book "Democracies do not wage war" contributes to knowledge of liberal conceptions of international relations to some extent, it is not immune to both general and specific critiques. On a broad level, the book lacks a significant focus on what the theory of democratic peace is primarily concerned

with – peace studies and, more especially, armed conflicts. The author does not link a fundamental variable of democratic peace – armed conflicts – to any of the case studies' matrix, which does not correspond to standard practice in existing scholarly works. It remains unclear how the the postulates of democratic peace are applied to problems that burden contemporary international relations such as secession, the choice of security strategies, the functioning of international organizations, and the issue of human rights. The monograph ends without a concluding chapter in which the findings would be systematized, and the author does not observe qualitative insights that might have emerged from case studies.

Despite these criticisms, this monograph has qualities in terms of incorporating some IR phenomena into the DPT matrix. The choice of five case studies is more than relevant in nowadays academic practice. Such security issues are treated in their contemporary outlook in the system of international relations through the prism of ethical, legal-institutional, and normative problems, which is another confirmation of adequate scientific work on this topic. In such an endeavor, the author favors a state-centric approach, which is why this book could be rather considered an *ode* to the monadic variation of the democratic peace theory. The fact that this is one of the first publications in the topic of DPT to be published in Serbian language adds to the overall quality of the book, as similar attempts that have been made in the domestic academic community so far are rather limited. Finally, academics and the general public who want to understand more about how international relations are intertwined with a range of bilateral and multilateral concerns can benefit from this book.

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