When Democracies Choose War

Politics, Public Opinion, and the Marketplace of Ideas

Andrew Z. Katz

When Democracies Choose War

Politics, Public Opinion, and the
Marketplace of Ideas

Andrew Z. Katz

Acknowledgments

I am a bit further along in my life and career than most first-time book authors. Owing to the number of years it took for these ideas to come to fruition, my parents and in-laws are unable to enjoy the pride of this accomplishment. My two sons, however, are now grown and perhaps can better appreciate what this book means to me and, I hope, can see in this achievement the merits of doing things "not because they are easy but because they are hard."

I have been extraordinarily fortunate to teach at an institution of higher learning that both encourages its faculty to engage their students and provides resources to help them fulfill their scholarly ambitions. Accordingly, several Denison University students have been important contributors to this project and have enriched my life in the process. I extend my appreciation to Adam Crowther, Kelsey Bryant, Meghan Hofert, Josh Williams, Lauren Mallet, Lauren Brown, Lauren Waters, Katherine Standbridge, Kristina Dungan, and Leah Hansler.

I am grateful to Sue Davis, Katy Crossley-Frolick, Vaughn Shannon, Laura Roselle, and Douglas Foyle, who read the entire manuscript and offered useful insights. I am especially thankful for the crucial assistance provided by Mike Brady.

I acknowledge the contributions of three political scientists from my past who deserve special mention for their contributions to my development as a scholar. Phil Powlick taught me a great deal about the craft of research, and Emmett Buell helped foster my development as a professional writer. I owe the biggest debt to Richard Melanson. From the time I was a graduate student through my arrival at Denison, Dick was a mentor, advocate, inspiration, and friend. Though we have been out of touch for a while, I have never lost sight of the debt I owe him.

Over the years I have been the recipient of assistance from numerous archivists. I would like to mention Anne-Sophie Cras of the Centre des archives diplomatiques de Nantes for her especially helpful guidance.

The late Marilyn Grobschmidt helped initiate this project; Lynne Rienner and Shena Redmond helped bring it to publication.

Several individuals have played supporting roles in bringing me to this point. Thanks to Shirley Lange, Joe Baumgarten, Steve Vogel, Dave Bussan, and Cathy Dollard. Both Ezra Sagan Katz and Toby Sagan Katz made direct and indirect contributions to the completion of the book. All errors and shortcomings contained herein are the fault of no one but myself.

Ever since I took a nap in her dorm room at the age of eighteen while she diligently wrote a final paper, Susannah Sagan has been my inspiration, role model, and lodestar through life. It is to her that I have devoted all of my adult life, and to her that I dedicate this book.

Contents

Tables and Figures

Tables

Figures

1

Democratic Wars of Choice and the Marketplace of Ideas

As the summer of 2002 wound to a close, speculation was rife across the country that Iraq would be the next target of the George W. Bush administration's war on terror. Prominent foreign policy experts from the president's own party, including former secretary of state James Baker and national security advisor Brent Scowcroft, questioned the wisdom of going to war against Iraq in high-visibility venues.[1] Yet the White House remained mum on its plans, waiting until after Labor Day to launch a coordinated public relations campaign to build domestic support for a bellicose policy toward Saddam Hussein. Curiously, White House Chief of Staff Andrew Card explained the delay in terms of marketing strategy, informing *New York Times* reporter Elisabeth Bumiller, "You don't introduce new products in August."[2] To even the most seasoned and sophisticated observers of US foreign policy, this must have seemed a rather crass remark, reflecting an attitude appropriate to marketing laundry detergent but not for national security affairs. In fact, Card's statement reveals a lot about how modern democracies justify and sustain so-called wars of choice and anticipates the central themes explored in this book. In short, the comment represents the culmination of efforts by leaders of democracies to persuade their citizens to embrace the decision to take up arms regardless of their reluctance, in the words of Immanuel Kant, to risk "all the calamities of war."

Card's reference intrigues because it strikes at the heart of theoretical and practical concerns regarding democracy and war. Inspired by Kant's argument that states in which citizens enjoy liberal rights would share a zone of peace, the proposition that democratic states do not wage war on fellow democracies has gathered significant empirical support and has become a regular feature of the rhetoric of political leaders.[3] However, the degree to which democracy inhibits or promotes the use of force in the

more limited instance of democratic-democratic war, let alone in general, remains in dispute. Scholars searching for a satisfactory explanation for why democracies behave one way toward similarly constituted regimes while evincing no such restraint against other regime types have few untapped routes for empirical investigation. Wars between democracies, and even near misses, have been so rare that limited insight can be gained from further intensive consideration of such cases.[4] To better understand the interaction of democracy and war, I propose examination of cases where the state does not face anything approaching an existential threat, making it incumbent on leaders to generate societal support for military action that for all intents and purposes is a choice.

In their study of the misapplication of the right-to-protect norm, Badescu and Weiss demonstrate how "backlash and contestation" can help "clarify the actual meaning and limits" of a norm, even in cases when the norm is not heeded.[5] I use democratic wars of choice in a similar fashion to enlighten our understanding of the evolution of liberal constraints on the use of force. I ask whether these instances of democratic war provoke a domestic reaction that propels forward the adoption of norms restricting future democratic belligerent action.

Richard Haass has popularized the distinction between wars of necessity and wars of choice. A war of choice is one in which the survival of the state is not at risk, where decisionmakers opt for war as one of the possible means to achieve desirable but not core state goals.[6] A war, according to Haass, "undertaken for reasons that do not involve obvious self-defense."[7] Democracies certainly engage in wars of choice; the question is whether and how democracy affects state behavior in these wars. Through close observation of democratic wars of choice, we may appreciate whether, as a consequence of the experience, democratic identity and liberal norms evolve to forestall such wars from the panoply of actions states identifying themselves as "liberal" do not commit.

Haass presents the decision to go to war as dichotomous—it's either a choice or a necessity. Of course, there is some element of choice in almost all wars. Moreover, modern democracies seldom face existential threats. There may be instances when a democratic leader does not think the state faces a threat to its existence but nevertheless believes that he or she must go to war owing to political necessity, fearing that a failure to respond to the domestic political imperative of attacking the hated foe will put their political viability at risk. For example, although Spain posed no existential threat to the United States, domestic pressure arguably compelled President William McKinley to war in 1898. Were the leader to resist the siren calls to war in such circumstances, placing his or her own assessment of the national interest above political concerns, we would characterize their refusal as a profile in courage, reflecting a difficult choice, but a choice

nevertheless. Thus, even when war might seem a political necessity, there is an element of choice. Moreover, given the low levels of knowledge and awareness of foreign affairs among the public, it is extremely unlikely that pressure for war from ordinary citizens would emerge without elite encouragement and debate—precisely the mechanisms that regulate democratic involvement in war of interest in this study.

A concept used to describe the pressures faced by dictators in the developing world also may be applicable to leaders of democratic states. Steven David uses the term *omnibalancing* to refer to the need for dictators in what was then called the third world to placate potential domestic rivals even as they respond to the structural imperatives of the international system.[8] No leader is immune from tending to their domestic flanks; the key point is that when the choice is war—no matter how narrow that choice may be— democratic systems afford many pathways for contrary voices to air their views. How actors in a democracy navigate these pathways when the subject is war forms the core focus of this research.

We therefore ought to think of wars as falling along a *choice continuum*, with a very narrow set of conflicts on one end of the spectrum being clearly of necessity, and at the other end would be those uses of force advocated by few other than those at the pinnacle of state power. Given the realities of democratic governance, the instruments of state power cannot be applied to any substantial degree or for very long without the acquiescence of society. Thus, in most cases, governing elites must expend effort bringing other institutions and the body politic to concur with their assessment that this perceived danger must be met with force. In those rare instances when political necessity may argue in favor of a use of force, hesitant leaders may endeavor to argue that in actuality war would be more of a choice than their constituents contend. In most cases, however, it is incumbent on a democratic leader to present the prospect of war as falling as close to the necessity side of this continuum as possible to secure the broad backing that makes battlefield success possible. To do so, the leader must *frame* the choice of war in terms that will resonate positively across society, reflecting the purposes for which the democratic audience believes wars should be fought. Or, in Card's language, sell the war to reluctant consumers hesitant to find war in the national interest or consonant with expected norms of liberal state behavior.

Theoretical Foundations

What is the connection between democratic war, democratic politics, and democratic norms? How do democratic officials reconcile their assessment of national security requirements with imperatives imposed by the political system? In short, what happens domestically when democracies choose

war? To address these questions, I integrate three areas of inquiry that for sake of scholarly convenience are normally kept separate.

First, I take my research question from democratic peace theory, which finds mixed evidence that liberal states are more peaceful than other regime types (the monadic proposition) and persuasive indications that they do not wage war against fellow democracies (the dyadic). Much democratic peace research over the past two decades or so seeks explanation for why democracies tend not to fight fellow democracies but engage in war against non-democratic opponents. By highlighting democratic wars against illiberal targets that do not pose an immediate threat, I aim to clarify why democracies fight some types of wars but not others. Can we explain why war between democracies has been rare, if not nonexistent, by examining the conditions that give rise to opposition to democratic wars of choice? In addressing this question, I seek a more nuanced understanding of the role of democracy and war than is currently provided by democratic peace research. I explain the variance in democratic behavior by highlighting normative debate about wars of choice in the democratic marketplace of ideas and exploring the role played by public opinion in rendering some forms of wars inappropriate for democracies to wage.

Second, I incorporate research on public opinion and foreign policy to provide guidance on the conditions under which public opinion becomes activated in foreign policy formulation. Basically, activation of public opinion occurs when debate among societal elites signals a challenge to the normative justification for a war of choice offered by leaders. I use newspaper coverage and other contemporaneous accounts as a representation of the marketplace of ideas and evaluate the degree of elite consensus through content analysis of the debate carried out in the national media.

Third, to evaluate how arguments over ideas affect the course of a war of choice and how this debate ultimately influences the evolution of democratic norms, I turn to constructivism, a mode of analysis that emphasizes the role of nonmaterial factors such as identity and norms on state behavior. In contrast to materialist approaches, such as realism and liberalism, that focus on power and wealth as the key motivating factors for state action, constructivism highlights how the determination of "appropriate" behavior constrains the policy choices available to officials. I evaluate how arguments presented by leaders in support of policy are challenged by elite and public debate, and I use constructivist analysis to interpret how this interaction constitutes the evolving position of society on the appropriateness of the use of force in a given context. In essence, when there is debate over a democratic war of choice in the marketplace of ideas, the conditions are ripe for the evolution of norms that define democratic identity and shape democratic behavior.

I bring these three strands of inquiry together to explore the debate in the democratic marketplace of ideas for five cases of democratic wars of

choice: the French effort to retain Indochina after World War II, Richard Nixon's effort to sustain US intervention in Vietnam from 1960 to 1973, Great Britain's war to retake the Falklands in 1982, Israel's invasion of Lebanon in 1982, and the decision to topple Saddam Hussein and its aftermath in Iraq in the early 2000s. To lay the foundation for my case studies, I use Card's metaphor as a segue to explore sequentially how the key themes relevant to this project from the literatures on democratic peace, public opinion and war, and the potency of norms come to a confluence when debate over war is engaged. I present my model of the relationship between wars of choice, democratic politics, and norms of liberal behavior. I complete this introductory chapter with a description of my research methodology and case format.

The Interaction of International Relations and Domestic Politics

By connecting the choice to go to war with the ensuing domestic debate over its wisdom, I follow in the footsteps of Robert Putnam, whose two-level diplomacy makes a start toward reconciling the security requirements of the external realm with the political constraints of the domestic. I advance Putnam's efforts at synthesis by focusing on how democracy shapes the interpretation and presentation of the security environment and consequently the resources available to leaders to pursue their security agendas. Putnam characterizes international diplomacy as a contest between chiefs of government (COGs) negotiating on the international plane, while these principals remain attentive to what their domestic counterparts are willing to ratify. The *winset*, or range of acceptable negotiating outcomes, is forged by the interaction of the COG and his or her domestic audience, regardless of regime type.[9] Scholarship on interstate rivalry offers another avenue of research that explores the link between domestic politics and international relations. Eric Cox examines how domestic politics may shape state action to ameliorate interstate rivalries. He finds that domestic or foreign policy failure may lead the public to turn to new leadership to seek an end to an ongoing conflict.[10] Using a dynamic longitudinal approach, Diehl and Goertz confirm that joint democracies are very rarely rivals, and indicate that when former rivals become democracies, their hostility is likely to end.[11]

Of course, for every democratic war of choice, the COG's job is to make the case that war is necessary. The opposition's task is to make the counterargument that the choice of war is unnecessary, imprudent, premature, or immoral. In a democracy, the clash among various individuals and institutions in the marketplace of ideas determines the size and characteristics of the win-set. Curiously, aside from Putnam and some others, this rela-

tionship, though not highlighted by scholars, is attended to assiduously by contemporary policymakers, as Card's remark made clear.[12]

By applying a marketing metaphor to a foreign policy issue, Card confessed to the realist-based conventional wisdom among academics and policymakers that the duty of leaders is to identify security threats, formulate a justification for resulting policy, and then expect domestic support to follow. Even so, his declaration resonates as an admission that the public must be coached to support the choice of war. Leaders of democracies are normally loath to admit considering public opinion when conducting foreign policy, since consulting polls on questions of national security violates the almost universally held realist value that officials act on the basis of the national interest, not domestic politics. This attitude was best expressed by a high-level State Department official who proclaimed in Bernard Cohen's 1973 classic, *Public Opinion and Foreign Policy*: "To hell with public opinion. . . . We should lead, not follow."[13] On this basis, Card's admission that the choice to go to war needed to be sold as does laundry detergent does not seem surprising. After all, being dismissive of the reasoning capacity of the public fits right in with the sentiment expressed by Cohen's respondent, as well as empirical evidence collected over the decades that reveals public opinion to be fairly uninformed about issues of international import.

While waiting until after Labor Day to ensure you have the attention of the domestic audience suggests a low regard for the public's ability to concentrate on issues of state, it is not an attitude that lacks basis in scholarly literature and standard practice. Nevertheless, Card's remark is striking because democratic officials tend to be sensitive about making comments that denigrate the reasoning capacity of constituents. But perhaps he wasn't being careless. Instead, his remark may be seen as a recognition of the need for leaders to respond, educate, and shape a public opinion that although not well informed, has structured attitudes that policymakers must skillfully tap into when legitimating the choice to go to war.

One also must wonder to what degree the Bush administration policy was shaped or constrained by the need to present "a new product" in the democratic marketplace of ideas. After all, Card's remark is an implicit acknowledgment that there are limits beyond which marketing techniques fail. Why else be concerned about the timing of the marketing campaign? Moreover, there must have been much consternation and debate in the White House over the content of the "new product" introduction. Supposedly, then, there are boundaries of democratic acceptance for wars of choice, and Card's metaphor refers to the Bush administration's efforts to find and test them. Is there a magic ingredient to a successful campaign to gain public support for a democratic war of choice?

The essence of democratic governance is that citizen preferences somehow flow to leaders and that policy, domestic or foreign, reflects the popu-

lar will. Yet the process through which public preferences and policy inter-
act remains underexplored. If, as realists contend, the national security
interest reflects an objective reality undifferentiated by regime type, the
only contrast between democratic regimes and others will be found in the
necessity to persuade a sometimes skeptical, usually gullible public of its
importance, not in the leadership's decision to choose war. Thus, Card's
reference to marketing strategy pays lip service to the need to build domes-
tic support for foreign policy, while it nevertheless reinforces the realist
notion that foreign policy flows from the top down. In trying to persuade
the home audience to support a war of choice, are officials constrained by
the liberal sensibilities of their constituents?

Persuading the home audience of the necessity for war may be an
essential part of any state's road to belligerence. Surely democracies, unlike
other political systems, are designed to provide a multiplicity of channels
for domestic interests to influence policy. When the policy at issue is
whether to go to war, the rationale offered by officials must be vetted in the
marketplace of ideas. Importantly, in this arena the chief executive does
not always win. Democratic leaders must be attentive to winning framing
contests to assuage citizen reservations about risking blood, treasure, and
their liberal identity. Democratic peace theory and other liberal approaches
highlight the significance of internal politics to external policy but fall
short of explaining the circumstances under which democracy constrains
the use of force. I explore this theoretical and practical tension in the dem-
ocratic marketplace of ideas, the crucible in which those in favor of a war
of choice must make their appeal. I provide an overview of democratic
peace research in the next section, focusing on the key theoretical gap left
exposed in this literature.

The Democratic Peace

It began with a nugget of a finding. As students of international politics
began to accumulate data in pursuit of a scientific understanding of the
causes of war, they stumbled on a finding so potent that it has been lauded
as among the most significant empirical determinations in political science:
democracies do not fight other democracies.[14] Even though there is scant
evidence of a democracy warring on another democracy, scholarly consen-
sus on the value or meaning of this historical observation remains elusive.
Some skeptics practically ridicule the so-called dyadic peace as sophistry.[15]
Miriam Elman bemoans "the cantankerous narrow-mindedness exhibited by
some of the participants in the debate."[16] Critiques of the democratic peace
finding explain the apparent absence of war among democracies as the prod-
uct of realpolitik assessment of power balances,[17] of common interests,[18] or

of shared preferences.[19] An alternative explanation of the democratic peace focuses on audience costs, which make democratic threats credible, thus causing adversaries to back down short of war, and democratic leaders reluctant to embark on risky foreign policies.[20] Some consider the democratic peace overdetermined, with multiple factors combining to account for the apparent absence of wars among democracies.[21]

If democracies do not fight other democracies but engage in many other forms of aggression against a range of targets, why is this the case? Advocates of the liberal peace identify democratic norms and institutions as the causal factors that explain why democracies are inhibited from engaging fellow democracies in war yet allow for democratic war against other regime types. According to this view, the liberal norm of peaceful conflict resolution along with the institutional checks and balances of democratic systems work in some undetermined combination to stop conflicts among democracies from escalating to war. Democracies thus belong to a community sharing the norm of live-and-let-live, so just as disputes within these states are resolved short of violence, so is the expectation—and the empirical reality—that disputes between democracies will not escalate to war.[22]

If we accept that democracies do not wage war against other democracies, they still fight nondemocracies and use violent means short of war against all types of targets. Indeed, acts of liberal aggression in the form of armed intervention, covert penetration, colonialism, and the like provide ready examples to discredit anyone's vision of pacifistic democracies.[23] Nevertheless, the monadic variant of the democratic peace that democracy constrains state behavior has its adherents. For example, R. J. Rummel has been a leading proponent of the monadic proposition, presenting evidence in a series of essays that democratic or (as he calls them) libertarian states are less violent.[24] Elaborations of the monadic thesis include studies finding that democracies are less likely to join wars,[25] and democracies are more likely to resolve disputes at a lower rung on the conflict escalation ladder.[26] Over the past century democracies have proven less prone to domestic collective violence than nondemocracies.[27] In addition, democracies experiencing relative decline have been shown to adopt strategies other than preventive war to maintain their position in the international hierarchy.[28] Democracies have been found to be less likely to initiate crises, and established democracies with proportional representation systems are least likely to be involved in war.[29] Looking at the role of democracy on international affairs from a different perspective, Reiter and Stam conclude that democracies are more likely than other states to avoid initiating risky wars and to win the wars in which they engage because their leaders are accountable to their constituents.[30] Collectively these findings suggest that the interaction of liberal norms and democratic institutions combine to restrain democratic behavior in a range of circumstances. However, the conditions under which norms

become a factor in the deliberations of democratic institutions and thereby constrain the conduct of democracies in world affairs remain a puzzle.

Democratic Wars of Choice and the Marketplace of Ideas

Skeptics of democratic peace theory point to the selective application of the norm of peaceful conflict resolution, which does not prevent democracies from using force when it suits them, as well as the complicity (if not encouragement) of democratic institutions in promoting war, to discredit the leading causal mechanisms of the democratic peace.[31] If the question of why democracies come to reject certain types of wars yet embrace others lies at the crux of the democratic peace controversy, weighing the relative significance of norms and institutional structures in producing the phenomenon has been the essence of scholarship among the theory's advocates.[32] Russett considers the two "not fully separable in theory or in practice."[33] Clearly, both are essential; how they interact and reinforce each other requires further investigation.

It would be fair to assume that political structures, particularly popularly elected legislatures, provide meaningful insight into a society's norms.[34] Important case studies demonstrate that these factors affect the democratic peace. For example, Barbara Farnham finds that Franklin D. Roosevelt's evaluation of the threat posed by Adolf Hitler changed as Roosevelt came to view him as dismissive of democratic norms at Munich.[35] Meanwhile, a case study analysis of war between four mixed pairs of states by Miriam Fendius Elman concludes that different democratic institutional structures have varying impacts on decisions to use force.[36] Such intensive examination of democratic decisions to begin, continue, or end involvement in war can clarify our understanding of how democratic norms and institutions interact and shed light on the evolutionary process that narrows the range of appropriate democratic uses of force.

Democratic wars of choice become possible when officials succeed in arguing for the prudential necessity and normative legitimacy for using force in the marketplace of ideas. Whether through persuasive power, stealth, inadequacy of the political opposition, or rapid military success, democratic leaders intent on using force secure domestic support by appealing to the voters' interests and normative beliefs about the state's role in international politics. Democratic wars of choice become unpopular not just because official goals are more difficult to achieve than anticipated but because contestation over the war's purpose provides a normative basis for opposition to the war that resonates among citizens. Potentially, through a process of norm diffusion, these arguments become the root of a normative prohibition embraced by democracies in general.[37]