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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

# THE RELEVANCE OF DEMOCRATIC PEACE THEORY IN THE CONTEMPORARY INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM

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## Abstract

The democratic peace theory is a liberal approach to international peace that has dominated international relations since the post-Cold War era. The theory is a modern formulation and a clear explanation and logical reasons that global spread of democracy is a fundamental source of peace in the international system. The mainstream argument is that states that have democratic institutions are unlikely to go to war and will not pursue aggressive policies against each other. The theory contends that democratic states behave distinctly different from non-democratic states, and declaring war requires citizen's support and legislative approval. However, the paper argues that the relevance of the theory in the contemporary international system has been challenged by recent developments; the ongoing trade war between the United States and other Western liberal democracies, and Trump's recent threat to annex Greenland Island. The paper maintain that Trump trade war, though a none-physical violence war and threat to annex Greenland have undermined the theory of democratic peace, and has raised serious questions concerning the continued relevance of the theory in the international system. The paper posits that notwithstanding the said challenges in the post-cold war multi-polar world and complex globalization, the democratic peace theory has more than ever gained relevance. The paper argues for the humanization and democratization of the United Nations Security Council to reflect geographical spread, and for the democratization process of illiberal democracies and non-democratic countries, which would extend the democratic peace to many countries of the world, and make the democratic states to be rationale in the conduct of foreign policies.

**Keywords:** Democratic Peace, Democratic Values, Democratic Institutions, Contemporary International System, Western Democracies, Trade War and Political Institutions.

## INTRODUCTION

### Background to the Study

Democratic Peace theory is one of the most influential research issues in the study of the contemporary international relations. . It is anchored on the intellectual argument that states that has democratic institutions are unlikely to go to war against each other. The intellectual precursor of the theory is Immanuel Kant, a German political philosopher and social theorist. In his 1795 essay entitled "Perpetual Peace"

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he argued that nations with constitutional republic governments are less likely to go to war because doing so requires the consent of the people who would actually be fighting the war. He maintains that governments chosen by the people take the decision of declaration of war more seriously (<https://www.thoughtco.com/kantian-ethic-moral-philosophy-immanuel-kant-4045398>).

Democratic Peace thesis contains the seed of core liberal ideas and holds that reason could deliver freedom and justice in international relations (Dunne, 2008; 112). In the same vein, in Monroe Doctrine of 1823, as a historic international policy document, the United States has argued that democracies are fundamentally unique and special; hence they don't go to war with each other. The democratic governments and nations behave distinctly different than non-democratic ones (<https://study.com/pages/working-scholars-overview.html>). Monroe Doctrine is anchored on the fact that declaring war in democratic countries requires citizen's support and legislative approval (Longley, 2019). However, the theory was taken to higher level of intellectual analysis by the propagation of Monroe Doctrine as an instrument of America foreign policy. Recently in history,, Woodrow Wilson , a scholar of high repute and the 28th president of the United States (1913–21), in his 1917 World War 1 message to the United States Congress remarked that "The world must be made safe for democracy"(Wilson, 1917; Encyclopedia Britannica,2025) . The speech added vigor to the propagations of the democratic peace thesis and has remained a valued asset of liberal democratic scholars.

Immanuel Kant's thesis that Liberal states are pacific in their relations with other states was revived and popularizes by series of influential articles published in the mid-1980s by Michael Doyle, an American international relations scholar who argued that the liberal states have created a separate peace. According to Doyle, there are two elements to the Kantian legacy; restrain among liberal states and international prudence in relations with non-liberal states (Doyle, 1986). Doyle argues that the zone of peace envisioned by Kant has gradually become reality, especially after the end of the cold war.

Developments in the International system since the end of the World War 11 have demonstrated the fact that the democratic peace is a historical fact. Obtainable facts has shown that wars between non-democracies, or between democracies and non-democracies, have been frequent, and have also demonstrated that, although inter-state war is a rare event in general, wars between democracies have been even rarer (Oren, 2019). The core explanation of democratic peace logic is that liberal states tend to be wealthy and therefore has less to gain and more to loss by engaging in conflict than poorer authoritarian states. Wendt (1999) agree that war between Canada and the USA is unthinkable, perhaps not because their liberal democratic constitution, but because they are friends with a high degree of convergence in economic and political matters (Dunne, 2008).

According to Longley (2019) the following are the reasons cites by the Proponents of the Democratic Peace theory as per the tendency of democratic states to maintain peace,

The citizens of democracies usually have some say over legislative decisions to declare war.

In democracies, the voting public holds their elected leaders responsible for human and financial war losses.



When held publicly accountable, government leaders are likely to create diplomatic institutions for resolving international tensions.

Democracies rarely view countries with similar policies and form of government as hostile.

Usually, possessing more wealth than other states, democracies avoid war to preserve their resources.

These are the reasons why scholars like Francis Fukuyama, a US based intellectual, a famous liberal writer and conceptual guru, in his highly esteemed views in his article, "The End of History" (Ojinnaka, 2024) contend that liberal states were more stable internally and more peaceful in their international relations (Fukuyama, 1989; 3-18). Notably, the democratic peace theory is linked to many other theories connecting or linking domestic politics and international relations. These includes the assumptions (i) that democracies are more likely to cooperate with each other, (ii) that democracies are more likely to win the wars they fight, (iii) that escalating military casualties degrade public support for war (example of Israel-Hamas war, where domestic support for the government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu have suffered set back due to the escalatory military actions) (iv) that leaders initiate conflict to secure their domestic hold on power (V) Be it as it may, these propositions lay out the philosophical and theoretical basis of the democratic peace.

### CONCEPTUALIZING DEMOCRACY

Democracy as an omnibus construct has several distinct applications. This is remotely responsible for the difficulties often encountered by scholars in defining the concept (Ojinnaka, 2002). Victor Dike (2001) in broadening the definition of democracy contends that the terms democracy denotes a system of government whereby the rights of the individual person, political, civil, and economic rights (eg property rights) are respected and protected by the forces of government. He added that democracy is also a political system whereby the citizens determine the mode of the rule directly through participation (Direct democracy or indirectly, representative democracy) by selecting government officials to whom they grant the Mandate to rule.

According to Okere (2002; p, 13) the most inspiring definition of democracy was made by the indefatigable 19th century American President Abraham Lincoln who defines democracy as "the government of the people, by the people and for the people". In the real sense, the definition given by Lincoln is considered the best, because it is brief and capturing. It also makes clear meaning of democracy. Similarly, Scranton, Roger in an attempt to provide a guide to proper understanding of the concept of democracy define it as the government by the people as a whole rather than by any section, class or interest within it (Scranton as cited in Ojinnaka, 2002; p.82).

Heineman (1996) argues that in democracies, political processes are decentralized and flexible. Democratic systems utilize interest groups, elections and political parties to articulate and integrate a wide variety of opinions into public policies. Proceeding definitions has shown that democracy may be either direct or indirect otherwise known as representative democracy. In direct democracy all qualified citizens of the state participate effectively in political decision exerted by popular assemblies or by plebiscites on all issues. Under direct democracy all

mentally healthy and competent citizens participate in decision making usually by voting (Ojinnaka, 2002).

Also in representative or indirect democracy, the people choose representatives who are answerable to them. These elected officials further get involved in business and practice of governance (Dike, 2001). Mayor (1960) cited in Ojinnaka (2002;p.85) maintain that in democracy, there is general argument that governance should be in the interests of the people, that government should be responsive to popular wishes, and that every citizen must have some share in the decision making process either by direct participation or by way of electing the decision makers.

However, proper conceptualization of democracy lies in the understanding the meaning of key democratic terms like popular sovereignty, equal opportunity, for all, regular elections, majority rule, liberty, human rights, rule of law, separation of power, Freedom of speech, freedom association and freedom of movement, due process etc. The beauty of democratic system of government is that the citizens contribute their thinking to the government decisions and take some responsibility for those decisions once they are made. In essence, the social contract has underpinned the development of democracies since it is the glue that holds the democratic societies together (Selbourne, 1994).

Francis Fukuyama (1989) in his well-conceived article called the "End of History" suggested that the idea of liberal democracy has triumphed, replacing competitors including hereditary Monarchy, Fascism, and most significantly, Communism. Since democracy are in prospect in many parts of the world, there would be no wars because the democratic market economies would have few ideological differences to fight about (Kinght, Chigudu and Tandon, 2002). Paul Collier in his book; Wars, Guns and Votes; Democracy in Dangerous Places inquired whether democracy is answer to political violence and Wars in the international system. He notes that the peace promoting benefits of democracy have become one of the fundamental certainties of the policy world (Collier, 2010). His liberal approach to international security is anchored on the belief that democracy is a major source of peace in the international system. Therefore, the relevance of the democratic peace theory in the contemporary international system as the maintainer of world peace underscore the efforts of the United Nations, America and its harmony of Western democratic nation in promoting democratization processes across the world.

### **CONCEPTUALIZING PEACE**

The tragedies and human catastrophes of the First and Second World Wars greatly influenced and conflict studies and the definition peace as construction of approaches to dealing with conflict. This is why most scholars conceive peace the opposite of war. Thus peace is seen as the absence of war, as Matsuo (2005) posits that the early peace studies was strongly motivated by the reflection on the tragedies of the First and Second World Wars, and by a sense of crisis of human survival caused by the danger of a total nuclear war between 'America and Its harmony of nations' and the Soviet Russia (the two superpowers).

However, Nankap and Adzuayi (2022) posits that the word peace is derived from the original Latin word 'pax' which means a pact, a control or an agreement to end war or any dispute and conflict between two people; two nations; or two antagonistic groups of people. Nankap and Adzuayi (2022) further states that the

term peace as used in the contemporary domestic and international political systems is used in a wide sphere, and has a variety of meanings that are different in accordance with the context of usage. Citing American military history, the scholars posits that the word peace fundamentally means the absence of war and by military standards; peace is seen as an ultimate or ideal goal rather than a means to an end. Historically, going by this point of view, Nankap and Adzuayi contends that this is why peace is mostly defined as an absence of war. Richmond (2008) observed that as simple as the word “peace” may appear, providing a clear-cut definition of peace in peace studies seems more challenging as historic events, ideologies and peculiar regional circumstances have shaped the meaning of peace to mean a different thing to different people in different context.

Aja (2007) posits that peace is a relative condition of security friendly climate that allows individuals and group relations to progressive order and stability. Citing Ibeanu (2006) Aja maintain that peace does not mean absence of war or conflict. It reflects that security friendly system that frees individuals and groups of people from fears and dangers of losing such inalienable human rights as life, liberty and property. The scholar further states that peace is a human desired condition and other of existence that allows the ruler and the ruled fulfill life obligations without minimum fear or danger on life, liberty and property. Aja observed that peace has been severally linked to justice, development and security. Professor Aja further states that peace is no fixation but can be achieved through a process. He notes that peace does not exist in situation of violence and flagrant abuse of power or fundamental human rights is a negation of the security and human desire for an ordered setting that sustains human mutual co-existence (Aja, 2007). Equally, Cuzzort (1989) contends it is undeniable that peace has proven challenging to define and because it has rhetorical uses for political leaders who benefit from the ambiguity of the term.

Miller and King (2003) highlights Peace is a political condition that endures justice and social stability through formal and informal institutions, practices and norms. Also, Richmond (2005) in his work ‘Conceptualizing Peace’ asserts that constructing peace has moved away from the notion that peace was geographically contained or contained and constructed by race, identity, or power, and also away from the notion that universal peace was an unlikely achievement. Richmond further states that in the recent developments there is an understanding of a certain version of peace, the liberal peace, as being universal and also as being attainable. He argue that if the correct methods are concerted and consistently applied by a plethora of different actors working on the basis of an agreed peace building consensus, and focusing on the regimes, structures, and institutions required at multiple levels of analysis and in multiple issue areas by liberal governance, peace could be achievable. Richmond outlined versions of peace as the victor’s peace, constitutional, institutional, and civil approaches.

The inability to achieve a more peaceful word or realize a war free world is due to conceptual disunity, a failure to use the concepts of peace to direct the pursuit of peace efforts. Reardon (1988), Hall (1984) and Darnton (1973) as cited in Nankap and Adzuayi (2022) suggest a relationship between peace definitions and peace action. According to the scholars Peace definitions or concepts are the basis on which we decide how to make peace. For example, if we define peace as not war, then we would attempt to make peace by attempting to eliminate war or at least



mitigate its severity. On the other hand, if we defined peace as inner harmony, we would meditate as much as possible in order to make peace. Nankap and Adzuayi argue that the basis for peacemaking is hinged on the concept or definition of peace. The scholars strongly argue that what one does to achieve peace depends on how one image, defines, or conceptualizes peace. If our present peace efforts are in danger of catastrophic failure then our concepts may need modification. Perhaps it is also our inability to make those concepts clear that has led to their failure. Nankap and Adzuayi further posits that it is dangerously misleading to think that the absence of war means the presence of peace, and it is also important to know that simply avoiding conflicts, does not mean peace, but acting in accordance to some of the conditions that must be met to guarantee peace in any society.

Richard (2019) argues that different conceptions of peace have different implications for devising strategies of peace-building and peace maintenance. What it takes to achieve a negative peace is very different from what is required to achieve a positive peace. The scholar notes that principal relevant peace-building actors in the international system are: the United Nations, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, the African Union, the World Bank, and other leading non-governmental organizations in the business of peace building. Richard contends that the primary features of these organizations' approaches to peace-building differ according to their understandings of the characteristics of, and requirements for, a stable peace.

In the same vein, John Galtung in his study "Violence, Peace, and Peace Research" highlights three different conceptions of peace; (i) "peace as a synonym for stability or equilibrium which see peace as the internal states of a human being, the person who is at peace with himself (ii) peace as "the absence of organized collective violence between major human groups; particularly nations, but also between classes, racial and ethnic groups. This type of peace is what Galtung called "negative peace". (iii) 'Positive peace' refers to peace that ensure all other good things in the world community, particularly cooperation and integration between human groups, with less emphasis on the absence of violence (Galtung, 1969). Drawing from the democratic peace theory, the idea of peace as absence of any mutually agreed hostility, otherwise known as "negative peace" ruled out the existence of deliberate violence between states in the international system. Also positive peace made possible by respect for human socio-cultural diversity where multi-culture is respected; multi-ethnic is loved; multi-idea is welcomed; multi-religion in embraced; minorities are protected; equality of rights, equity, justice, guided liberty and freedom are guaranteed (Nankap and Adzuayi, 2022). Grewel (2003) as cited in Nankap and Adzuayi, 2022) explained Galtung's classification of peace thus; negative peace: is pessimistic, curative, peace not always by peaceful means. Positive peace is structural integration, optimistic, preventive, peace by peaceful means.

Nankap and Adzuayi (2022) acknowledge that there is no universal definition of peace processes among scholar of peace and conflict studies, however, several scholars have attempted to define peace processes in many different ways. It is amongst the most extensive, most high profile and arguably, most vital phenomena in contemporary world system. Harold Saunders, a well-known American diplomat, a peace negotiator and former United States Assistant Secretary of States for Near Eastern Affairs (1978-1981) developed a sustained dialogue model for peace and

conflict resolution. Saunders, defined peace process as, “A political process in which conflicts are resolved by peaceful means, they are mixture of politics, diplomacy, changing relationships, negotiations, mediation and dialogue in both official and unofficial arenas”(Saunders,1999). Saunders constructed four arenas of peacemaking as: the official arena includes the official diplomats, the Track I diplomats whose focus is on the establishment of relationships with the opponent party, negotiate interim and final agreement. The Quasi-official arena, which includes the track I as well as track II diplomats’ are not official but yet they have close ties with the government. Thus the public peace process includes the non-officials whose entire focus is on the “human” cause of conflict, perception, stereotypes, distrust and sense of hopelessness. The civil society, whose focus is on the civilian life and their work” (Saunders, 1999). According to Saunders in the contemporary international system, these are the total whole of peace making process.

In the same vein, Timothy, D. Sisk, a Professor of International and Comparative Politics at the Josef Korbel School of International Studies, University of Denver, in his research and policy-oriented work focusing on armed conflict and political violence together with understanding and evaluation of processes of conflict prevention, management, and peace-building in fragile deeply divided societies outlined the dynamics and fundamentals of peace and conflict. Timothy (2025) defined peace process as, “Step by step reciprocal moves to build confidence, resolve issues such as disarmament, and carefully define the future through the design of new political institutions. Professor Sisk argues that international and regional organizations, particularly the United Nations play significant role in peace operations, peacemaking, and peace-building.

Ojinnaka (2023) state that for the harmonious, peaceful co-existence and the stability of the international system the institutional mechanism for peace and conflict resolution is necessarily a unique roadmap to peace. Arguing that peace is both natural and human creation, the scholar posits that the only condition necessary for peace and stability of both domestic and international systems is prevalence of social justices, which is prime value of human existence. Ojinnaka concludes that peace as an end in itself is a human desire against injustice which breeds anarchy, lawlessness and conflict.

### Historical Evidence of Democratic Peace

Historically, the democratic peace propositions are as old as the contemporary international system. It was Immanuel Kant that provides the first modern formulation of the idea that global democracy would provide a solid foundation for global peace. In the same vein, Monroe Doctrine of 1823, as a historic international policy document of the United States Foreign Policy, has argued that democracies are fundamentally unique and special; hence they don’t go to war with each other. The democratic governments and nations behave distinctly different than non-democratic ones (<https://study.com/pages/working-scholars-overview.html>). The Monroe Doctrine is anchored on the fact that declaring war in democratic countries requires citizen’s support and legislative approval (Monroe Doctrine, 1823; Longley, 2019). However, the theory was taken to higher level of intellectual analysis by the propagation of Monroe Doctrine as an instrument of America foreign policy.



Recently in history,, Woodrow Wilson , a scholar of high repute and the 28th president of the United States (1913–21), in his 1917 World War 1 message to the United States Congress remarked that “The world must be made safe for democracy”.(Encyclopedia Britannica).The speech added vigor to the propagations of the democratic peace thesis. To Woodrow Wilson, it was a justification for American entry into World War I and then as part of his vision for a new world orders. In modern political circles, first notable of the dyadic democratic peace was in the 1970s.This trend became accepted as real with the 1983 influential essays by Michael Doyle, which was republished in 2001.The theory was supported by theoretical and empirical evidences provided by Fukuyama’s significant argument that humanity has reached “End of History”, which supports the democratic peace ideals.

Possibly, the substantiations supporting the Democratic Peace Theory is the fact that since the 20th century there has been no wars between democracies in the world. .During the world war I, the U.S. allied with the democratic European countries to defeat the authoritarian and fascist regimes in Germany, Austro-Hungary, Turkey, and their allies. This led to World War II and eventually the ColdWar of the 1950s-1980s, during which the U.S. led a coalition of democratic nations in resisting the spread of authoritarian Soviet communism ([https://www. thoughtco.com/issues-4133022](https://www.thoughtco.com/issues-4133022)).

Most recently, in the Gulf War (1990-91), the Iraq War (2003-2011), and the protracted Afghanistan war, and the War against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) a transnational SALAFI Jihadist organization, an unrecognized quasi-State, the United States, along with various democratic nations fought to counter their international terrorism. These radical jihadist factions of authoritarian Islamist governments posed serious threats to international peace and security. Indeed, after the September 11, 2001, terror attacks on the United States, the George, W. Bush administration used military force to topple Saddam Hussein’s dictatorship in Iraq on the belief that it would bring democracy to the country, thus peace to the Middle East ([https://www. thought co. com/ issues-4133022](https://www.thoughtco.com/issues-4133022)).

Immanuel Kant’s writings about democracy and warfare was revived and elevated to the level of intellectual analysis by Micheal Doyle in the 1980s. Contemporary scholars of international relations have provided the historical credibility to the theory on the fact that since 20th century there have been no wars between democratic states. International relations Scholars like Christopher Muscto of the University of Northern Colorado opine that since 20th century, there has been a general belief in the solidarity of democratic states. There's still a belief that if every nation is a democracy, we can achieve global peace .The democratic peace theorists inquisition on why democratic states don’t go to war with each other was a demonstration of the U.S. resolve not to tolerates any attempt by European monarchies to colonize any democratic nation in North or South America during the postulations of the famous Monroe Doctrine of 1823, which has argued that democracies are fundamentally unique; hence they don’t go to war with each other. It laid out the philosophical and theoretical basis of the democratic peace.





However, some scholars and specialist in international relations have questioned authoritatively the authenticity of the propositions of the democratic peace theory. Though the claim that democracies do not fight each other continues to be widely accepted in the international relations discipline, there is less understanding and consensus on why the democratic peace exists in the international system.. The major contending and equally fashionable explanations are that democracies are more peaceful to one another because of a shared democratic culture, others consider the main factor to be structural and institutional (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/culture>).

Scholars like Micheal Doyle (1989), Layne, Christopher (1994), and Russett Bruce (1993) argue that the political culture of democratic societies agree by the norm that disputes are to be settled by peaceful means. Democratic citizenries, the argument goes, apply that norm to their relations with other democratic societies; hence, when two democracies are locked in a dispute, their leaders expect each other to shun violent means of resolving the dispute. Again, institutional relations scholars like Boylis (2008), and Dunne (2008) argues that the political institutions in democracies matter more than the norms in the thinking of their citizens. The separation of powers and the checks and balances characteristic of democratic political systems constrain the ability of elected leaders to move their countries rashly toward war (<https://www.britannica.com/topic/decision-making>). Thus, when a conflict arises between two democratic countries, their leaders need not fear a surprise attack; the inherently slow process of national-security decision making on both sides allows ample time for diplomats to resolve the conflict peacefully (<https://www.britannica.com/topic/decision-making>). According to international relations theory of Neo-Liberal perspective, the democratic peace is closely associated with the liberal claims that international peace is promoted by (i) economic interdependence between states and (ii) international institutions.

President Bill Clinton's foreign policy rhetoric's in the 1990s had maintained that spreading democracy throughout the globe was a principal aim of the United States foreign policy. Even before the Clinton administration, the United States had used the democratic peace ideals to justify its policies across the globe, by arguing that if the formerly autocratic nations of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union democratized successfully (<https://www.britannica.com/place/Soviet-Union>), the United States and its NATO harmony of nations would no longer maintain a large armies to contain these countries militarily, hence, democracies do not have the history of fighting each other. Also, shortly after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States, the democratic peace thinking also shaped the American foreign policy under Bush administration. It was the conviction that a zone of democracy equaled a zone of peace and security that informed the foreign policy decisions of George Bush administration to use gun boat diplomacy and forcefully overthrow the government of Saddam Hussein in Iraq. This was in the belief that removal of the Iraqi strongman would lead to democratization of the country and by extension the Middle East region (<https://www.britannica.com/topic/decision-making>).

### Critique of the Democratic Peace Theory

The contemporary international relations scholars has continued search for answer to the question, why democratic peace? Whether being merely being



democratic is the primary reason for peace between democracies. The Democratic Peace Theory states that countries with liberal democratic forms of government are less likely to go to war with one another than those with other forms of government..” Critics argue that the simple quality of being democratic in nature may not be the main reason for the historic tendency of peace between democracies (Longley, 2019).

While the claim that democracies rarely fight each other has been widely accepted as a historical fact, there is less agreement on why this so-called democratic peace exists. Some scholars argued that it was actually the Industrial Revolution that led to peace during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The resulting prosperity and economic stability made all of the newly modernized countries, democratic and nondemocratic states much less belligerent toward each other than in preindustrial times. Several factors arising from modernization and global interconnectedness may have generated a greater aversion to war among industrialized nations than democracy alone. Such factors included higher standards of living, less poverty, full employment, more leisure time, and the spread of consumerism. Hence, the economically modernized countries simply no longer felt the need to dominate each other in order to survive (<https://www.thoughtco.com/issues-4133022>).

This potent argument has greatly undermined the realist theory which as a major rival of international liberal theory contends that the foreign policy behavior of states is fashioned primarily by the anarchic structure of the international system, meaning that the absence of a supranational authority capable of effectively providing for the security of individual states (<https://www.britannica.com/topic/foreign-policy>). According to realist’s thesis, so long as the international system is anarchic, violence will remain dormant in world politics, not considering the internal dynamics of individual states. However, the emergence of the said perpetual state of peace existing among the liberal democracies as a historical fact, fundamentally contradicts realist thesis, and strongly undermines the place of realism as the leading theory of international relations.

Again, war between states with contrasting political and economic ideologies may also be unthinkable when they have history of friendly relations. An example here is Mexico and Cuba which maintain close bilateral relations despite their history of divergent economic ideologies (Dunne, 2008). Democratic Peace Theory has also been criticized for failing to show a cause-and-effect relationship between wars and types of government, and the ease with which definitions of “democracy” and “war” can be manipulated to prove a non-existent trend. While its authors included very small, even bloodless wars between new and questionable democracies, one 2002 study contends that as many wars have been fought between democracies, as might be statistically expected between non-democracies (Dunne, 2008). Other critics argue that throughout history, it has been the evolution of power, more than democracy or its absence that has determined peace or war. Specifically, they suggest that the effect called “liberal democratic peace” is really due to “realist” factors including military and economic alliances between democratic governments (<https://www.thoughtco.com/issues-4133022>).

Christian and David (2004), in their “Democracy and the Violation of Human rights notes that if political institutions are weak at the early stage of democratization, there are two notable reasons, however, why the global spread of

democracy may actually undermine prospects for international peace and they both have to do with the difficulties associated with the process of democratization. The scholars argue forcefully that a number of studies have shown that democratic transitions which occur when a country's political institutions are particularly weak (often at the outset of the transition from autocracy to democracy), or when the elites within that country are threatened by the democratization process itself (by having to respond to a wide and divergent range of newly-formulated interests), have a greater likelihood that this process will trigger aggressive nationalist sentiment and/or the outbreak of civil or inter-state war (Christian and David, 2004).

Thus the argument is that if political institutions are weak at the early stages of a transition, the rising demand for mass participation can provide an incentive for elites to adopt nationalist, ethno-religious, or populist policies, yet, crucially, before these elites can be held sufficiently accountable to the wider electorates (Mansfield and Snyder, 2005). This also extends to the observation that the vast majority of civil wars over the past century have occurred within transitional or mixed regimes, as opposed to either democratic or authoritarian regimes, which are more able to effectively contain repression by democratic or violent means, respectively (Russett and Oneal, 2001). Taking this into account, therefore, it is far more likely that a country will be able to successfully consolidate its transition if democratization occurs according to a particular historical sequence: the emergence of a national identity, followed by the institutionalization of the central government, and then mass electoral and political participation (Mansfield and Snyder, 2005).

However, the democratic peace theory has been challenged by some recent developments in the international system. The international system has since the emergence of Donald Trump as the President of the United States seen complex geopolitical power play that is a negation to the theory of democratic peace and constitutes threat to the unity of America and other Western democracies. The recent threat by President Trumps to use military force to occupy Greenland, a massive and resource-rich island, which he insists the US needs for national security purposes. Trumps resolve to use military force to occupy Greenland which is sparsely populated and currently an autonomous province of Denmark has been seen as a threat to the Denmark's sovereignty (Nick, 2025). The Trump threat to make the self-governing Danish territory a part of the United States (Nick, 2025) has left many scholars of International relations to wonder about the fate of militarily weak nations in the face of the new international reality.

According to the French Foreign Minister Jean-Noel Barrot "There is obviously no question that the European Union would let other nations of the world attack its sovereign borders, whoever they are" (Barrot 2025). Equally, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz said violating Greenland borders would be a breach of Western values (Nick, 2025). Olaf Scholz have argued that the principle of the inviolability of borders applies to every country, regardless of whether it lies to the east of us or the west, and every state must keep to it, regardless of whether it is a small country or a very powerful state. Olaf Scholz states that it is a fundamental principle of international law and a key part of what we call Western values (Nick, 2025). However, Trump was quoted as have said "We need Greenland very badly." "Greenland is a very small amount of people, which we'll take care of, and we'll cherish them, and all of that. But we need that for international security"(Jessie and Piper, 2025). Trump has repeatedly expressed interest in buying the island, or

the US taking it by force or by economic coercion, even as NATO ally Denmark and Greenland have firmly rejected the idea (<https://www.cnn.com/2025/04/03/Europe/Greenland-us-annex-trump-latam-int/index.htm/>; Jessie and Piper, 2025). There are a few factors driving American interest; Greenland occupies a unique geopolitical position, sitting between the US and Europe, which could help repel any potential attack from Russia. Equally, Greenland lies along a key shipping lane, and are part of the Greenland-Iceland-United Kingdom axis. It is a strategic maritime region (<https://www.iiss.org/sv/publications/strategic-comments/2019/the-giuk-gaps.strategic.significance/>). The suggestions that Trump is eyeing other aspects of Greenland such as its trove of natural resources, which may become more accessible as climate change melts the territory's ice. These include oil and gas, and the rare earth metals in high demand for electric cars, wind turbines and military equipment (Jessie and Piper, 2025).

In the same vein, the ongoing trade war between the United States and other western liberal Democracies like Britain, EU members and Canada has rumbled their economies over the 25% tariffs imposed by the US on steel and aluminum importation into America, forcing the western democracies to take emergency financial measures to preserve the fragile global economy (Liam 2025). The US imposed tariffs is intended to reorder trade in American favour and as a measure to correct trade imbalances and protect US industries. It have the potential to significantly reshape international trade relations and supply chains, with notable consequences for the EU, Canada (US is Canada largest trading partner) and economy of other democracies (Aurélien, 2024). President Trump contends that the United States is ultimately losing out on International trade and is now aiming to renegotiate trade with her western democratic allies (Aurélien, 2024). Trump has stated the fact that Europe sells more things to Americans than it buys from Americans. The difference or the trade deficit in goods, last in 2024 was 157 billion Euros (\$178 billion). But Europe says that when it comes to services, particularly digital services like online advertising and cloud computing, the U.S. sells more than it buys and that lowers the overall trade deficit to 48 billion Euros, which is only about 3% of total trade. The European Commission argues that based on this, trade relation with America is "balanced" (David and Paul, 2025). The trade war has unarguably harmed the western economies that are already in a fragile state due Russia-Ukraine war. Added to this, the spectra of a transatlantic trade war have send shockwaves through the western economies and the results has been catastrophic (Sophia , 2025).

Contrary to the assumption of the democratic peace theory that because of shared democratic values and institutions democracies will not pursue policy of aggression against each other. Trump trade war, though a none-physical violence war have undermined the theory of democratic peace, and constrained the seemingly positive relationship between the US and other democracies. Not only that the trade war between them has posed serious challenges to the continued relevance of democratic peace theory in the contemporary international system, the destabilizing impact of the trade war on the global economy (<https://www.mirror.co.uk/all-about/global-economy>) its punitive financial measures particularly, on the Western democracies has proven to be hugely damaging and threaten (Alasdair, 2025) to the global peace and economic stability.





Since the global economy is today based on deeply interconnected supply chains. This means that any America 25% tariff on selected items will reflect immediately these produce and make the price more expensive. Thus the overarching trade wars would have a "bad" impact, as price increases across the supply chain would mean economic hardship and suffering for the people (Renaud, 2025). However, with the greatly strain and tense transatlantic relations, trade war between the United States and the Western democracies will prove devastating for Canada and Europe, as the world fraught with geo-economic and political uncertainties, and certainly, not in their our common interests to burden our economies with such tariffs (Ursula von der Leyen, 2025). According to Foucart, as cited in Euro-News (2025) the most significant impact of the ongoing western trade war between western partners is playing in the hands of Russia, (<https://www.mirror.co.uk/all-about/russia>) by making them poorer and less united. And perhaps less focused on the joint support for Ukraine. The trade war is indeed, damaging for global trade and international relations (Sophia, 2025).

Not only that Trump's strategy is anti-free trade, the uncertainty around U.S policy that is paralyzing business across the world suggests that the United States is an unreliable ally, and a trading partner that operates on whims and not on rule of law (David and Paul, 2025). Against the background of the foregoing, the trade war between the US and other democracies in the Western Europe and North America have significantly undermined the validity of democratic peace assumption.

### **The Relevance of Democratic Peace Theory in the Contemporary International System**

Democratic peace theory as a liberal approach in the international peace and conflict studies has dominated international relations since the end of the cold war. The mainstream of the argument is that democratic states tends not to fight each other democratic states, hence the democratic system of government is seen as a fundamental source of peace in the international system.

Empirical evidence supports the democratic peace thesis. Doyle contends that a restraint among the liberal states and international imprudence in relation with the non-liberal states has made wars almost unthinkable in the international system. Because of the growth of number of democratic states in the international system, frequency of conflicts has been reduced drastically. This is majorly because in a democratic system of governance declaration of war undergoes some due processes which make it logical for nations to adopt caution in their approach to war situations (Doyle, 1989). Equally, in the contemporary international system, the liberal states are wealthy; therefore have less to gain and more to loss in event of conflicts than poorer authoritarian states.

Also, because of historical economic ties between liberal democratic states and the fact that they are in friendly relations with each other make it unlikely for them to go to war against each other. Today, war between America and Great Britain, America and Canada, Canada and New Zealand are unlikely not only because of their democratic heritage, but also because of their deep rooted economic ties. These are friendly and harmonious countries with high degree of convergence in political and economic matters (Dunne, 2008). Furthermore, because of the increasing impact of the rapid globalization of the world economy on the international system, the likely hood of wars among great players is very remote.



Notwithstanding their divergences in political and economic issues France and China, and or other West European countries have maintained close bilateral ties. In spite of their history and differences in political and economic systems, these Western nations cannot easily go to war against China.

Nevertheless, in the contemporary times, contending international security issues in the Post-Cold War era indicates that peace is not a natural condition, but is one which must be constructed (Dunne, 2008). Political Scientist Leonard Woolf maintains that peace and prosperity requires consciously devised machinery (Luard, 1992). In his state of the Union address in 1994, Bill Clinton the former United States President, forcefully argued that the absence of war between the democracies was a justification of American and Western policies of promoting the process of democratization, particularly, in East and Central Europe, and Africa since the end of the cold war.

Nevertheless, the increase in the number of democracies, and the decline in number of wars in the international system since the end of the cold war has proved Professor Aja Akpuru Aja's thesis that there are more gain in peace approach than in war, hence crisis decision Management approach can save potential escalations of international crisis (Aja, 2008 as cited in Ojinnaka, 2020). Since Peace brings prosperity, progress and development, while war ensure destruction, the leaders of the contemporary international system should think more strategically, dismantle the forces that makes for war and work to engender peaceful co-existence among both liberal and non-liberal states in the international system (Ojinnaka, 2020). It is highly significant that the stakeholders and the leaders of the contemporary international system imbibe the virtues of the democratic peace theory by adopting the necessity for mutual co-existence and bringing ideological conflicts into constructive engagement.

Since national interest is better protected and actualized under the atmosphere of international peace and security (Ojinnaka, 2020), as well as democratic representation, an ideological commitment to human rights, transnational interdependence provides an explanation for peace prone tendencies of democratic states (Doyle, 1995). Due to the domestic values and restraints of the logic of power, the liberal logic of accommodation (Doyle, 1995) has weakened the prospects of war in the international system. Because of the value of peace and recognition of the role of democratic institutions in the promotion and maintenance of peace in the international system, the United Nations Organizations have through its Agencies supported, and have continued to support democratization process, as a way of promoting peace in the international system. But, as stated earlier, the very political institutions and patterns of behavior that characterize liberal democracies also allow these states to best defend themselves and adopt a more cautious and effective approach to the use of force, thereby achieving the 'best, securest, and safest outcomes for the most people (Reiter and Stan, 2002). Layne Christopher cited in Kavin (2020) contends that this did not only challenges the key assumptions underlying realism, that normative goals preclude a clear and accurate analysis of international affairs, but the idea that relative military capabilities and the distribution of power among great powers alone should dictate foreign policy strategy (Layne, 1994).

Russeett (1993) has argued favorably that the recent increase in the number of democratic states in the post-cold war international system provides a unique

opportunity to reconstruct the norms and values underpinning the international system to more accurately reflect the peaceful interactions of democracies. This would mean strengthening the international organizations like the UN, EU and African Union, and economic interdependence would enhance the democratic peace and make the liberal state more able and prepared to sustain the economic and political foundations of the wider liberal international system. In the same vein, Russett, and John (2001; 280-81) in their influential book entitled 'Triangulating Peace: Democracy, Interdependence, and International Organizations' has argued forcefully that Strengthening a dense network of inter-governmental organizations (IGOs) that extend this responsibility to a larger number of democratic states and encourages greater cooperation among members through greater consultation and coordination, such as the WTO, IMF, World Bank, UN, and International Criminal Court, would arguably provide a stronger foundation for extending this perpetual peace outwards in the contemporary international system.

Furthermore, Russett and John (2001;280-81) cited in Kevin Placeks "Democratic theory" maintain that recent studies have shown that the constraining effect of IGOs is greatest for politically relevant dyads, 'contiguous pairs of states and pairs that include at least one major power', which also happen to account for the majority of interstate disputes and conflicts to be managed. Inter- Governmental Organizations (IGOs) will be of great resource to focus efforts to the non-democracies like China, Vietnam, Russia, Iran as well as illiberal democracies like Malaysia, Nigeria, Belarus, Bangladesh and Romania by attracting them into liberal international order, and to strengthen those elements of constitutional liberalism like rule of law, institutional checks on power, individual freedoms which are lacking in illiberal democracies would arguably help consolidate the democratic peace most effectively (Zakara,1997).

An academic writer Kevin Placek of University of Melbourne, writing for the honour of Dr. David Mickler, maintained that the relevance of democratic peace theory in the contemporary international system is much more visible in the realm of economic cooperation and interdependence among states (Kevin, 2011).The observation that the likelihood of conflict between any two states with high levels of bilateral trade will be 33% lower than if those states only had an average level of economic interdependence suggests that democratic states will greatly benefit from upholding a liberal international economic system free of protectionism and mercantilist policies (Doyle ,1983).

Be it as it may, maintaining free and open trade relations rests on the assumption that market-based forces, rather than violence or coercion, will determine future economic transactions, the accompanying sense of mutual dependence will often act as a restraint on the use of military force (Doyle, 2003). Choi (2003) consent that any accompanying increase in the quantity or quality of interstate communication is also likely to make it easier for democracies to understand the intentions and preferences of non-democracies as well as their willingness to adhere to mutual agreements and commitments. Against this backdrop, democratic peace theory has proved to be of historical validity. The fundamental factors of economic interdependence and complex interdependence rooted on the ideals of liberalism and a web of diplomatic interchanges among states in the contemporary international systems has made wars almost unthinkable.



Again improved communications and information technologies in a rapidly globalized world have also strengthened the relevance democratic peace theory and its applications in the contemporary international system. Due to improvement in communication as result of technologies of globalization, the world is at a reach as policy makers from different states are now in better position to understand each other and avoid misperception that goes with miscommunication. Nevertheless, In the post-cold war era of multi-polar world and complex globalization of the world economy, the democratic peace theory has more than ever before become relevant in the management of conflicts that will arise as a result of interactions between nations in the international system. This paper therefore, argue for the humanization and democratization of the United Nations Security Council to reflect geographical spread , and for increase in the efforts to encourage the democratization process of illiberal democracies and non-democratic countries in the world.

### CONCLUSION

The democratic peace theory provides a clear explanation and logical reasons why the global spread of democracy will result in greater international peace. The theory has proved that democratic political institutions make it difficult for governments to initiate war without the agreement of the people. This means democracies supports' peaceful means of conflict resolution among them. Because the democracies are less likely to initiate wars, escalate non-violent disputes into full-scale war, or engage in long and protracted military conflicts, the democratic peace has helped to reduce the incidences of war in the international system. It is the position of this paper that the increase in the number of democratic states would extend the liberal peace to many countries of the world and would make these democratic liberal states to be rationale in the conduct their foreign policy.

In view of the difficulties involved in the democratization process, it is necessary to lay foundation for democratic political institutions to ensure enhanced mass electoral participation in the emerging democratizing states. Equally, reinforcing the capacity of international organizations like the United Nations (UN) that encourages Liberal norms, democratic values, and economic inter-dependence between the authoritarian states and democracies would also help mediate the strategic uncertainty and misperceptions that may arise in the course of their interactions. Though political institutions and the patterns of behaviour that characterize liberal democracies allow them to defend themselves and adopt a more cautious and effective approach to the use of force in the international system. On this note the Western democratic states have proved their ability to defend themselves and adopt integrative approaches in an event of conflict with non-democracies. It is of great interest to note that democratic systems of government enhance military capabilities and the distribution of power among great powers; hence the Democratic Peace Theory has historical validity.

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