

Dodging a Bullet:
Democracy's Gains in Modern War*

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That war drives state-building is virtually a truism of historical sociology, summed up in the late Charles Tilly's well-known aphorism that states make war, and war makes states. (Tilly, 1990) But if war and state-building merely reinforce each other, why have liberal democracies flourished and proliferated during the past two centuries when war reached unprecedented dimensions? Why not militaristic autocracies? What role, if any, has war played in the formation and spread of liberal democratic regimes?

To raise these questions is not to suggest that war is one of democracy's primary causes, but rather to ask how democracy and, more particularly, liberal democracy dodged a bullet--a bullet that, according to many ancient and plausible theories, might well have been fatal. The belief that democracy is a liability in war has been a staple of political thought, beginning with Thucydides. If liberalism and democracy had been sources of severe military disadvantage during the past two centuries, liberal democratic regimes should have perished in wars as they were conquered and eliminated by other states, or when their own populations rose up to overthrow them in the wake of defeat, or because they were forced to abandon their institutions in order to survive. That this was not their fate suggests a range of possibilities. At a minimum, their institutions have not been a disabling handicap in war, and no consistent relationship may exist between war and democracy. Alternatively, war may have contributed to the spread of democratic regimes if democracy itself or features correlated with democracy have increased the chances of a regime's survival in war, or if war has promoted changes favorable to democratic institutions.

As these reflections suggest, war may affect the population of liberal democracies in two ways. It can act as a selection mechanism insofar as it results in the elimination or establishment of different types of regimes, and it can affect regimes from within by

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acting as a catalyst in bringing about changes that advance or damage one or another aspect of liberalism and democracy.

War as a selection mechanism raises a Darwinian problem. Through much of history, wars have often functioned as “elimination contests,” to use Norbert Elias’s term, with its wry overtones of a tournament (Elias, 1993). Tilly argues that war was central to the winnowing process that took Europe from about 500 “more or less independent political units” at the beginning of the sixteenth century to only 25 by the beginning of the twentieth (Tilly, 1975: 15). Moreover, according to Tilly (1990), this process led to the emergence of the national state as the virtually exclusive state form and consigned to history’s graveyard two other types that he categorizes as “tribute-taking empires” and “fragmented systems of sovereignty” such as federations of city states. To be sure, history has been no neat linear progression, and wars have also worked in the opposite way. Redrawn maps at the end of wars have added new states, imperial wars have turned nations into empires, and civil wars have fragmented power and sovereignty. But the net effect of war in modern Europe, as Tilly presents it, was to winnow down states and state types roughly in line with determinants of their military capacity. In his work on state formation, Tilly makes no suggestion that liberalism or democracy advanced as a result of this winnowing-out process, though elsewhere (Tilly, 2004) he identifies conquest as one of several developments that under certain conditions fostered democratization.¹

Besides eliminating or creating democratic regimes, war may also have a catalytic effect in bringing about institutional change within a regime that already has some elements of constitutionalism or democracy. Catalysts, of course, are never sufficient causes of their own, and some may object that they only affect the timing of events, as if time were homogenous. But historical developments are unlikely to play out exactly the same way at different times. Like such shocks as natural disasters and economic crises, wars may bring to the surface suppressed problems in a society, release pent-up demands for change, and concentrate at a particular moment what would otherwise be slow-moving developments. Every society has stalled tendencies and blocked initiatives. Wars open up a path for realizing some of those latent possibilities by bringing into alignment an array of forces that would otherwise be unsynchronized and less consequential. Wars seem more likely to have those kinds of catalytic effects on a given country the higher the

level of mobilization, the longer the duration of the fighting, the greater the casualties and the costs (possibly including the costs of defeat), the more global the conflict, and thereby the greater the potential effect of the outcome on the postwar structure of international politics. High-impact catalytic wars may have many of these characteristics, sometimes with radical repercussions. “All great convulsions in the history of the world, and more particularly in modern Europe, have been at the same time wars and revolutions,” Elie Halévy (1966: 212) writes. Tilly (1990: 186) makes a related point: “All of Europe’s great revolutions, and many of its lesser ones, began with the strains imposed by war.”

But why might the effects of these convulsions in the past two centuries have favored liberal democracy? Here it makes sense to break down that compound concept because the effects on constitutionalism and the protection of individual liberties may differ from the effects on such aspects of democracy as the breadth of citizenship. The idea that constitutional government and liberalism are unsuited to the rigors of war has a long genealogy, and for a time the historical evidence was at least ambiguous. When classical liberalism had its heyday in the mid-1800s, the conditions of world politics were relatively benign. As the twentieth century began, it seemed reasonable to suppose that, like a plant that grows only in bright sunshine, liberalism flourishes only in peace. And while liberal governments have since performed effectively in war, wartime has continued to furnish examples of the curtailment of constitutional liberties. Yet many of the landmark expansions of the franchise in both Europe and the United States also occurred in close conjunction with major wars. Insofar as these two cross-cutting developments occur together, they form a pattern that might be called the *skew of war*—that is, a tendency to move societies in both an illiberal and a democratic direction.

The puzzle of war’s impact on regimes, therefore, resolves into two questions that correspond to war’s Darwinian and catalytic potentials: First, why didn’t war winnow out liberal democracies? And second, why weren’t liberal democracies transformed from within into the “garrison states” that many in the mid-twentieth century feared they would become?

The answers, this paper claims, hinge on historically contingent relationships. Through most of human history, war did not create any tendency toward democracy; if we had data on all wars in all societies throughout history, anyone looking for a causal

relationship between war and democracy would almost certainly come up with nothing. The connection, such as there is, has depended on a peculiar and likely temporary conjuncture. The advent of “the nation in arms” in the late eighteenth century and the later rise of total war created an isomorphic fit between mass democracy and the demands of war-making in the modern world. While democracy spread for many reasons unrelated to war, warfare contributed to that process because of both selection effects (war killed off more authoritarian regimes because of liberal democracies’ military success during the past two centuries) and catalytic effects (the role of war in promoting the extension of the franchise). These relationships would not have existed, however, if war had not earlier had a formative, toughening influence on constitutional liberalism, enabling liberal states subsequently to meet the challenges of war and to withstand its pressures. History offers no guarantee that these relationships will continue, and there is some reason to suspect that they are coming to an end. If there is no longer a fit between democracy and the exigencies of war-making—if war now skews regimes in an illiberal direction without any compensating democratic tendencies—the future of the liberal democracies may depend more than ever on the capacity to create collective international means to protect liberty as well as security.

I. War as a selection mechanism: the Darwinian problem

It is a striking pattern: According to Bermeo, more than half of the 73 democracies established after 1945 and still in existence in 2003 “emerged either in the immediate aftermath of a war or as a means of bringing an ongoing war to an end” (Bermeo, 2003). Conversely, many authoritarian governments collapsed after wars, particularly after failing militarily. But is this a mere coincidence--perhaps only a reflection of the Allied victory in 1945 and the subsequent hegemony of the United States--or is it part of a longer-run pattern? Elsewhere in this volume, Mansfield and Snyder find only scattered evidence for a positive relationship between war and democracy over the period from 1816 to 1997.

A regime can die as a result of war in three ways: by being defeated and wiped off the map, by being defeated and having a new regime imposed upon it, or—whether or not defeated—by being overthrown internally during the conflict or immediately in its wake.

Failure in war has often been a prelude to revolution, and nothing has had more dire consequences for a regime than starting a war and losing it. From 1818 to 1975, according to Bueno de Mesquita et al. (1992), defeated regimes were more often overthrown internally than victors, and the probability of collapse was greatest for regimes that lost wars they had initiated. The vast majority of these overturned regimes were authoritarian (see Appendix, Bueno de Mesquita et al., 1992).

Autocracies were more likely to suffer this fate not only because changes of leadership in a democracy do not necessarily require the regime's overthrow, but also because authoritarian regimes have lost wars more often than democracies. According to Lake (1993), of the 26 wars that pitted autocratic against democratic states between 1816 and 1965, the democracies won 21 (81 percent); of the 121 individual countries that participated in those 26 wars, the winners had a mean score of 5.60 and the losers a mean of 2.55 on an 11-point democracy index. A more extensive analysis by Reiter and Stam (2002) finds that between 1816 and 1990 democracies won more than three-fourths of the wars in which they were involved. Although the cause of democratic regimes' winning record is disputed, even the skeptics acknowledge that democracy has been correlated with military victory during the past two centuries (see Desch, 2002, 2008). Democracies have also been far less likely to initiate wars that they end up losing. According to Reiter and Stam (2002), when democracies have attacked first, they have won 93 percent of the wars, whereas dictatorships that have struck first have lost four out of ten times. When attacked, democracies have also been more successful, prevailing in 63 percent of the cases, compared with just 34 percent for dictatorships. "Given democracies' greater propensity to win wars and greater propensity to emerge from defeat with the *regime* intact, war should lead to greater democratization," McLaughlin et al. hypothesize, and their data on levels of warfare and democratization in the international system from 1816 to 1992 are consistent with that hypothesis (McLaughlin et al, 1999). Taken together, these findings suggest that democracy has spread partly by process of elimination, precipitated in some cases by authoritarian governments' self-inflicted injuries when they gambled on war and lost.

The role of war as a selection mechanism for democracy does not depend on whether democracy itself has been a cause of military victory or has merely been

correlated with factors such as wealth that may be causally effective. Either way, war has favored the survival of democratic over authoritarian regimes, though the question of causation is crucial in explaining democratic military success and the growing prevalence of democratic regimes.

While providing relevant evidence on the relationship of war and regime type, the quantitative studies such as Lake (1993), Reiter and Stam (2002), Desch (2008), and Mansfield and Snyder (in this volume) have three limitations from the standpoint of understanding the historical impact of war on the population of regimes. First, they count all wars equally, but not all wars matter equally for survival. The conflict between Honduras and El Salvador in the Football War of 1969 weighs as much in the results as the conflict between Germany and the United States during World War II. Yet the statistical relationships would be less impressive if World War II was among the one-fourth of wars lost by democracies. From the standpoint of the Darwinian problem of the life and death of regimes, the Football War was irrelevant, whereas World War II was a war of elimination, and it was the Nazi regime that was eliminated.

Second, the studies typically conceptualize the effects of war as involving only the participating states, even though global wars involving great powers have far-ranging repercussions, even for non-belligerents. World War I, according to Tilly, not only brought “significant shifts with respect to breadth [of citizenship], equality, consultation, and protection” among all 15 European countries involved in the war. “The Austro-Hungarian, Ottoman, and Russian empires collapsed. Germany, Hungary, Ireland and Russia all broke into revolution and/or civil war. Elsewhere, widespread demands for democratization arose. ... [E]very country [of a list of 18 major European states] that had not done so earlier installed manhood suffrage, and a majority enacted female suffrage as well.” (Tilly, 2004: 216) The outcome of World War II led to decolonization in Africa and Asia and influenced the kind of regimes that were established there. A method that looks only at the belligerents misses these effects.

A related point has to do with the meaning attached to wars and their long-term impact on political understanding. The great revolutionary and world wars have been understood as tests of ideas, sometimes democratic ideas. If the Axis had prevailed in World War II, it would have confirmed the ancient belief in the weakness and

incompetence of democracies and would likely have had wide and lasting ramifications for regime formation as well as political ideology.

These types of effects of war help to explain why some wars have triggered waves of democratization. In European history, of the four major clustered transitions to democracy--the 1840s, World War I, World War II, and the collapse of the Soviet bloc in 1989--two have been directly related to war, and the fourth was arguably related. The Soviet war in Afghanistan contributed to the exhaustion of the Soviet military in the years leading up to Gorbachev's announcement that he would not use force to defend Soviet-bloc governments in Eastern Europe. Those regimes fell soon afterward.

As Mansfield and Snyder have ably demonstrated, it is possible to construct a study of war's influence on democracy that excludes these larger effects; indeed, their study does not register an effect of World War II on Germany and Japan. The two cases, they explain, "do not appear as war-caused democratization in our results--West Germany because we code it as a new state [they do not count new states], and Japan because the democratization occurs later than our five-year time horizon."

Nonetheless, the fact remains that the defeat of Nazi Germany and fascist Japan removed two of the major sources of antidemocratic military power in the world. Earlier in American history, the Union's defeat of the Confederacy eliminated what might have become another major illiberal military power. War also contributed to the collapse of France's Second Empire,² Wilhelminian Germany, the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Russian Empire, Ottoman Empire, fascist Italy, and the Soviet Union as well as various authoritarian governments in the Third World. Even though not all of these were replaced by democracies, the destruction of these regimes led to the predominance of liberal democracies among the great powers and the establishment of a hegemonic model of constitutional government emulated by other states.

How best to account for democratic military success and the gains achieved by democracy through war during the past two centuries? According to one view, democracy itself has nothing to do with the military victory of democratic regimes. Desch (2008) argues that "the association between democracy and victory appears to be spurious: factors such as wealth and power that makes states more likely to win their wars also make it more likely that they will be democratic." In Desch's view, most of the

wars included in the analyses of Lake (1993) and Reiter and Stam (1993) are not “fair tests” of the hypothesis that democracy itself is the cause of victory chiefly because of “gross mismatches” (the democracies were so much stronger that the outcome was a foregone conclusion) or “asymmetrical interests” (the democracies had more at stake and therefore fought harder). For example, Desch disqualifies the war in the Pacific in World War II as a fair test because Japan was grossly mismatched against the United States and its allies. After deleting all such cases, he is left with just eight wars that meet his restricted criteria, and though democracies won five of those, the data no longer provide any basis for confident generalization (Desch, 2008: 31-35). As an alternative, Desch offers the “theory that power is the best explanation of victory in war,” a proposition that few would dispute, particularly if power is defined in classic Weberian terms as the capacity to overcome resistance. The relevant question, however, is whether liberalism and democracy are advantages, liabilities, or of no consequence in the creation and mobilization of the kind of power that decides wars.

Realists and materialists would generally agree with Desch’s view that “regime type hardly matters” in producing the power that decides wars. Similarly, Tilly’s work on war and state formation, which has been aptly characterized as a form of “political materialism” (Collins, 1999), treats constitutionalism and law as irrelevant fictions. In an influential essay building on the work of Lane (1979), Tilly argues that the state is best conceptualized as a “protection racket” whose basic functions (war-making, state-making, protection, and extraction) come down to “eliminating or neutralizing enemies” and acquiring the means to do so (Tilly, 1985). And in respect to the latter, he focuses wholly on the state’s capacity to extract wealth and labor through such mechanisms as taxation and conscription, ignoring the effect of different regimes on economic growth. Whether a regime is constitutional or democratic plays no part in Tilly’s analysis of state power.

An alternative perspective emphasizes the positive contribution of constitutional liberalism and democracy to state capacity and performance, including performance in war. The basic counterintuitive proposition of the liberal theory of power is that constitutionally limited power, as Holmes (1991, 1995) suggests, can be “more powerful than unlimited power.” Or to put the point another way, it is not just the engine that

determines how fast a vehicle can run; it is also the brakes. Constitutional constraints, besides protecting citizens from tyranny, protect the state itself by inhibiting capricious or overreaching decisions by political leaders, such as ill-considered decisions to go to war. By binding those in power, making their behavior more predictable and reliable, and thereby increasing the trust and the confidence of citizens, creditors, and investors, constitutionalism amplifies the long-term wealth and power of a state (including its capacity to wage war). Credible commitments to property rights are only one aspect of this pattern (North, 1990). Other aspects of constitutional liberalism, such as the separation of powers and requirements of transparency in government, limit the ability of officials to pursue their own private interests and to hide incompetence and corruption. Public discussion is a vital error-correction mechanism.

Modern democratic liberalism extends the same logic, both constraining and enlarging the state's power. To make the government accountable to the entire public is a way not just of limiting the power of officials but also of strengthening public responsibility and patriotism. Rights to education and other requirements for human development and security aim to advance equal opportunity and personal dignity and to promote a more creative and productive society (with indirect, though sometimes conscious and deliberate effects on the human and technological capabilities for war). Liberalism has thereby served as a method not only to protect rights from power, but also to create power to achieve rights--and to project both soft and hard power internationally.

These various aspects of constitutional liberalism and democracy, so obviously relevant to war-related capacities, seem to have become increasingly important in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as the financial and human resources required for military superiority increased. This is where the structure of regimes intersected with the history of warfare. Something changed in the modern world that led war to begin tilting the population of regimes toward democracy. Perhaps the growing wealth of democracies began to give them an edge in war. And perhaps the rise of large-scale warfare with mass armies also conveyed an advantage to regimes that were best positioned to generate and mobilize wealth and popular support.

The mechanisms associated with constitutional liberalism and democracy may have even improved state performance of the extractive tasks that Tilly specifically

emphasizes—finance and conscription. The differences in fiscal effort and tax resistance in Britain and France in the eighteenth century illustrate how constitutional liberalism affected compliance with fiscal demands. According to Brewer (1989), even though they were far more heavily taxed per capita than the French, the British accepted the taxation imposed upon them as legitimate because both taxes and spending were subject to parliamentary approval and investigation, whereas France clothed its finances in secrecy, lacked the mechanisms for obtaining the consent of the propertied classes, and thereby brought upon itself the fiscal crisis that preceded the Revolution. Precisely because it was suspicious of malfeasance, Brewer argues, Parliament enlarged the power of the British state: “Public scrutiny reduced peculation, parliamentary consent lent greater legitimacy to government action.” (Brewer, 1989) In a related vein, Levi (1997) argues that citizens have been more likely to comply with conscription the more democratic a regime and the more universalistic its rules. And because the soldiers in a democratic army, as Washington learned, could not “be drove” but had to be led, democracy may have promoted qualities of leadership that improved military performance (for an example, see Fischer, 2004).

Reiter and Stam’s analysis of the military success of democracies is consistent with some of these arguments. They maintain that democracies tend to win the wars for two sets of reasons--self-selection³ (that is, democracies initiate wars only when the odds are overwhelmingly in their favor) and military effectiveness. The former arises out of democracy’s role in both constraining and informing decisions. Drawing on historical cases as well as quantitative analysis, they argue that whereas democratic leaders usually refuse to launch a war unless they are virtually certain of victory, authoritarian regimes are far more prone either to miscalculate the odds of victory or to gamble on war even when they recognize the risks. Dictators are prone to miscalculate because they have poor information and wax overconfident as a result of making decisions in secret, suppressing political opposition, and refusing to tolerate public criticism. And they may be willing to gamble on a high-risk attack because, though they may get overthrown if they lose, they do not have to face the voters at an election and are therefore more likely than democratic leaders to be able to ride out a defeat. In response to Desch’s argument that many wars are not “fair tests” because of gross mismatches, Reiter and Stam (2003) insist that gross

mismatches are precisely what one should expect to find because democracies initiate wars only when they are virtually certain of winning.⁴

The second set of factors has to do with how well states fight once wars have begun. Here Reiter and Stam look at the outcomes of individual battles during the past two centuries, using a database originally created by military historians for other purposes. The key factors in democracies' war-fighting advantage, according to Reiter and Stam, are greater initiative among the soldiers of democratic armies than among soldiers of autocratic regimes (which they attribute to differences in political culture) and better military leadership (which they attribute in part to the greater ability of democracies to make merit rather than political loyalty the basis of military promotion). Unlike Lake, Reiter and Stam finds that neither overall wealth nor military support from other countries explains why democracies are more likely than dictatorships to win wars that their adversaries have initiated.⁵ But even if that is a valid generalization when counting all wars the same, the contrary cases of the two world wars--where the outcomes clearly did turn on both wealth and coalitions--simply matter more to the fate of regimes and the course of world politics.

Total war could have given totalitarianism an edge. Lacking accountability to voters, internal checks and balances, a free press, and independent power centers in civil society, the fascist and communist regimes had a relatively free hand in conscripting, taxing, and otherwise extracting resources from their societies. If that were the sole determinant of state capacity and military performance, they should have prevailed. But by virtue of their political structure, the totalitarian states also suppressed initiative, lagged in critical technological innovations, and lacked means of self-correction. These deficiencies had fateful consequences for the creation of wealth and power. As it turned out, the modern forms of despotism were not a winning national strategy in the twentieth century. As before, governments with constitutionally limited powers proved to be more powerful than governments with unlimited powers. Moreover, by the end of World War II, the liberal democracies had learned that it was imperative for them to build international alliances and institutions to have any chance of stopping aggressive wars and maintaining peace and security. Whether or not the "democratic peace" is a

generalizable pattern, the recent pattern of cooperation among the liberal democracies has enabled them to maintain their regimes and conserve their power.

With the ascendancy of the United States, a variety of secondary forces have come into play that make it difficult to distinguish the general relationship of war and democracy from the singular effect of American hegemony. Of course, if war had served as a selection mechanism to kill off liberal democracies earlier, the world would never have reached this point. It is only because the democracies repeatedly avoided elimination through war that the second set of effects came into play—war as a catalyst in the extension of democracy.

II. War as Catalyst

No one doubts that wars have large short-run effects; the harder question is whether those effects last or get washed out by later developments. For example, for the period 1950 to 1990, Przeworski et al. (2000) find that in the short term, wars cut economic growth in half and authoritarian regimes suffered more damage than democracies did, but over the long term even the dictatorships' economic growth was little affected. Some evidence seems to bear out the intuition that the greater the scale, duration, costs, and global reach of war, the more likely it will leave a lasting effect on the structure of states and societies. In Latin America, according to Centeno (2002), a history of limited wars of limited duration has failed to have the state-building effects that Tilly attributes to war-making in Europe. Conversely, Rasler and Thompson (1985, 1989) provide evidence that global wars have had precisely those effects on their participants. But this contrast underlines that the context of war, not just its dimensions, may be what matters. In certain circumstances, limited wars do have large effects, as in case of the Falklands War, which brought about the collapse of the Argentine junta that started it.

Our concern here, however, is not about state-building in general or regime change (the subject of the previous section), but only about the catalytic effects of war within liberal and democratic regimes. In liberal democracies today, war raises anxieties about the suspension or compromise of constitutional liberties, but it would be a mistake to see war only as a source of deviation from constitutional traditions. Taking Britain and the United States as the classic paradigmatic cases, the modern liberal state has had three

principal moments in the development of rights: the inception of constitutional government, the extension of democratic citizenship to groups previously excluded from the political community, and the establishment of social rights. And war has played a role in each phase.

In both England and the United States, war had a formative influence in the shaping of constitutional government. In seventeenth- and eighteenth-century England, the need to raise armies and obtain new revenue led the monarchy to concede authority to Parliament, which under the pressure of war authorized taxes and debt but introduced new methods of oversight, control, and accountability to curb corruption and waste and thereby made the state even stronger. The suspicion of centralized power was even more acute among the American revolutionaries, whose original national charter, the Articles of Confederation, established a government without fiscal powers or an executive. It is sometimes said that the United States owes its distinctive political development to the security afforded by the protection of the Atlantic Ocean, but this is to forget the country's beginnings, when its trade was shut out of European ports as well as the Mississippi and the republic might well have collapsed and been dismembered by foreign powers. War was the formative experience for the federalists who wrote the Constitution; they had come of age during the Revolution, and many believed that the weakness of the Confederation, particularly its dependence on the states for revenue, had caused them needless privation as soldiers, prolonged the fighting, and nearly cost them victory. Of the 55 delegates who attended the Constitutional Convention, 26 had served in the war, 18 of them as officers (McGuire, 2003: 53). Nearly half the delegates in Philadelphia, in other words, were veterans, presided over by their former commanding general. Their bitter memories of an impotent Confederation may help explain why the Constitution they wrote in the crisis of the 1780s so radically extended the federal government's fiscal and war powers. War, in other words, may have been the source of a healthy constitutional realism and an endowment of powers that although not fully exploited in the early republic, proved sufficient for the national government to overcome secession and later enabled it to meet other challenges.

War has also had a connection with the second phase of democratic development—the extension of the franchise. In the United States, constitutional amendments have been rare events, but wars have helped to overcome the obstacles. The expansion of voting rights to African Americans after the Civil War in the Fifteenth Amendment, to women after World War I in the Nineteenth Amendment, and to eighteen-year-olds during the Vietnam War in the Twenty-Sixth Amendment were all cases of war-related democratization. In Europe, the end of both world wars saw not just the replacement of authoritarian regimes, but also further extensions of the franchise in democratic countries as well as expansions of social rights—the third phase in the formation of modern liberal democracy. Relatively few wars have been of sufficient magnitude to catalyze democratization or occurred at a moment when such effects were possible (Barbalet, 1998). Nonetheless, in the states that have served as models of constitutionalism and democracy, war served in precisely that role as a catalyst.

These moves toward broader citizenship in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries admit of both functional and class interpretations. Large-scale war, especially total war, made it imperative for states to generate popular loyalty; concessions of wider political and social rights served, in effect, as a way of buying that commitment or rewarding it after the fact. War also created tighter labor markets and strengthened the ability of groups previously denied their full rights to make claims on the state. Both lines of interpretation are consistent with Andreski's proposition that the higher the military participation ratio (the proportion of the population under arms), the more likely war will have a socially leveling impact (Andreski, 1968). Here again is a kind of isomorphic fit between total war and democracy. Indeed, it seems scarcely surprising that total wars requiring mass conscription and popular participation would break down social hierarchies.

The expansion of social rights may also be related to the historical “ratchet” effect of war on state capacity—that is, the tendency for taxes and spending not to shrink back fully to prewar levels after expanding sharply during war (Peacock and Wiseman, 1961). The evidence on the “displacement hypothesis” is contradictory; it is certainly not a law of public finance. Yet, taking into account the scope of government intervention as well as the level of spending, there is evidence of a ratchet-like pattern for the largest global

wars (Rasler and Thompson, 1985). The twentieth-century democratic state, particularly its fiscal and bureaucratic apparatus, was the quintessential legacy of catalytic war.

But by virtue of the same mechanism, why didn't war ratchet up the suppression of civil liberties? Infringements of free speech, attacks on dissenters and suspect minorities, governmental suspensions of habeas corpus—these have been the historical companions of war. But once wars have ended, their illiberal effects have typically been reversed, while the democratizing and state-building effects have remained.

The skew of war has been temporary in the United States, Britain, and other major liberal democracies for several reasons. First, infringements of civil liberties and human rights have generated protest and opposition, albeit often after the fact, from both organized forces in civil society and the courts, and these groups and institutions have been able to reassert themselves when the sense of crisis has passed. The long-run danger of infringements during wartime—of emergency laws and states of exception—is that they become normalized and integrated into official doctrine. This was Justice Jackson's fear when he dissented from the Supreme Court's decision in *Korematsu* (1944) approving Japanese internment and argued that the Court should never have taken up the case in the midst of war; the majority opinion, he warned, would lie about "like a loaded gun," ready to be used by some future administration oblivious to liberty. But while Jackson's worry has been often cited approvingly, *Korematsu* itself has never been cited as a valid precedent, and the decision is long discredited. It ought to be some comfort that that particular loaded gun has never gone off. The same year as *Korematsu*, one legal commentator, Wiley Rutledge (quoted in Brandon, 2003) wrote, "War is a contradiction of all that democracy implies." If that had literally been true, the United States would have suspended its national election in 1944, yet the nation voted, despite the shadow of war, as it had 80 years earlier in the midst of the Civil War. War has injured and imperiled liberty, but the surviving, healthy core institutions of democracy have been able to repair the injuries.

What is especially surprising is that, on the whole, despite bouts of collective anxiety and repression, the liberal democracies also grew more liberal as well as more democratic over the course of the twentieth century. Instead of collapsing in the face of war, the institutions and ideas of constitutional liberalism shaped and limited policies to

meet the challenge. And when they mattered most, in the world wars and cold war, those choices proved successful.

The explanation for this deepening of liberalism also lies in the particular adversaries that the liberal states faced in the twentieth century. Fascism and communism posed threats to liberal democracy that were simultaneously ideological and strategic. In opposing and fighting totalitarian regimes, the democracies appealed for international as well as domestic support on the basis of ideals of freedom and equality, and in the process were forced to confront such contradictions as racial injustice at home and their own role as colonial powers. Those facing repression, including political dissenters, could appeal to the banner of liberty that the democracies held up as the very heart of their own cause.

Finally, the effects of the world wars, like other wars, have depended on the meaning that societies have attached to their collective experience. A war seared into collective memory as a horror will likely influence political choices differently from a war celebrated as a triumph. Consider two contrasting interpretations of Europe's turn away from war-making in the second half of the twentieth century. In *Coercion, Capital, and European States* (1990), Tilly's main thrust is to explain the triumph of the national state over other political forms; he views the recent decline in the military's share of government budgets as the result of the expansion of other state functions, as if military spending were merely being crowded out. But this is to underestimate the significance of the change in political culture and institutions since 1945. In *Where Have All the Soldiers Gone?* (2008), Sheehan argues that Europeans drew lessons from the horrors of the world wars, and their revulsion was itself an important source of change, including the movement toward a new transnational form of political organization, which has supported guarantees of what have become European, not merely national, standards of human rights and social protection (Sheehan, 2008). If we are to understand why liberty has survived war in the democracies, this too must be part of the story.

The End of the Conjecture?

There is an implicit assumption in much work on democratization that when states become democracies, especially rich democracies, they remain democracies. In fact, that has been the recent pattern. Since 1950, according to Przeworski et al. (2000), no democracy that has reached a high level of economic development (per capita income of \$6,000 or more) has turned authoritarian. But this durability has been due to an unmentioned factor. Democracies have been winning the modern wars of elimination, and in certain contexts, albeit far from universally, wars have had a catalytic effect in extending democracy. This surprising bias of war has been enough to change the course of world politics. War is not democracy's primary cause, but the military success of democracies has been an essential and necessary condition for their predominance among the great powers, and that predominance has set in motion secondary effects favorable to constitutionalism and democracy elsewhere in the world.

Humanity has thereby avoided the fate that so many feared. The danger of states making war and war making states is a spiral of force, ending in a thoroughly militarized world. But because liberal democracy and liberal internationalism proved an effective strategy for creating power and prevailing in conflict, a different self-reinforcing cycle set in, at least for a time. Liberal democracies fought and won wars, which led to further democratization, which helped to protect individual liberties once the war emergencies ended.

Unfortunately, there is nothing inevitable about this cycle. If the positive effects of war on political and social equality depend on a high military participation ratio, the connection may have disappeared. The kind of technological war now waged by the advanced societies no longer requires mass enlistment or popular mobilization and consequently seems to generate no pressure to expand rights or benefits. Indeed, if the recent experience of the United States is any indication, the ability to wage war without conscription and with so little call for personal sacrifice from the public may reduce the high threshold for starting wars that has been partly responsible for democracies' military success. And if reversing the illiberal effects of war depends on bringing war to a close, what of a global "war on terror," which it will be impossible ever to say has ever come to an end? The threat of terrorism puts at perpetual risk the equilibrium on which liberty

rests. In a world where one country's political instabilities, economic miscalculations, and failures in public health so easily propagate to the rest of the world, the need is evident for international arrangements to protect security. But if war no longer works to the advantage of liberal democracy, there will also be greater need than ever of an alert global civil society as well as international institutions to protect rights and liberties. They may have to be the catalysts now.

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¹ In his books on democracy and democratization, Tilly hardly mentions war, and he is not a proponent of the hypothesis that war generally leads to democratization. “[T]he social world’s order,” Tilly writes, “does not reside in general laws, repeated large-scale sequences, or regular relationships among variables. We should not search for a single set of circumstances or a repeated series of events that everywhere produces democracy.” (Tilly, 2004: 9).

² Neither the collapse of Napoleon III’s regime after the Franco-Prussian War nor the collapse of the Argentine junta after the Falklands War makes it on to Mansfield and Snyder’s list of legitimate examples of war-caused democratization. They argue that these are cases of “reciprocal causality” because there were democratic tendencies before the wars, and the regimes tried to use war to strengthen their position. But the regimes’ desperation does not prove that democratization *caused* these wars, and we cannot run history over again to see whether they would have democratized in the absence of war. In both cases, what we know is this: The regimes gambled on war, lost, and were replaced by democracies. Both instances surely qualify as legitimate cases.

³ Reiter and Stam use the term “selection effects.” But because I here use “selection” in its Darwinian sense, I have substituted “self-selection” to characterize Reiter and Stam’s argument about different regimes’ initiation of wars.

⁴ Lake (2003) makes a similar rebuttal to Desch, arguing that his theory also predicts gross mismatches because authoritarian regimes’ unconstrained rent-seeking saps their wealth, while their imperialist bias generates overwhelming countercoalitions. For further evidence on democracies’ selecting conflicts that they can win, see Gelpi and Greisdorf (2001). Desch tendentiously refers to all those who hold that democracy is causally related to winning wars as “triumphalists” and argues that this error has contributed to the hubris of the Bush administration in going to war in Iraq. But if the self-selection argument is right, the edge that democracies have historically enjoyed comes in large part from being more cautious and hesitant about initiating war than authoritarian regimes have been. Desch is so anxious to make a political point that he misses the opportunity to read Reiter and Stam’s evidence as bolstering the case for constitutional constraints on the executive that he wants to make.

⁵ Another analysis of the same data on battle outcomes also finds that democracy is associated with military effectiveness but that the relationship depends entirely on democracies’ advantages in human capital and stable civil-military relations, as well as Western culture (Biddle and Long, 2004).