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A New Paradigm in International Relations: A Reduction of War and Terror in the World through Democratization and Deterrence

*John Norton Moore**

Thanks to McGeorge for this opportunity to share some of the research that I have been doing, initially at the U.S. Institute of Peace, and then over the last decade at the University of Virginia. This presentation will provide an overview of the latest information on war and violent conflict.

While gathering and analyzing the data over the last decade, I have started to realize the broader implications my research has for all the principal issues in foreign affairs. Indeed, it is actually leading to a new paradigm in international relations.

Right now we are focused on September 11th, but we should place this in some perspective. As terrible as September 11th was, the casualties of World War I were the equivalent of two September 11th attacks every day for three and one-quarter years. This gives you a sense of how important it is to avoid a major war.

We will start with what we generally know about the causes of war. There is a short list of some of the major things that we hear over and over about the causes of war. Certainly, there are specific disputes among nations; ideological disputes; ethnic and religious differences; proliferation of weapons and arms races; social and economic injustice; imbalance of power; competition for resources; incidents; accidents; and miscalculation. The old Marxists believed that wars were caused by economic determinism. There are many other theories, but what do we really know about the causes of war? The answer is that nothing on the list of the most important traditional causes of war powerfully correlates with war.

If we look from the opposite perspective there is another list, which in many respects builds on the causes of war list described above. That is to say, looking at traditional approaches for avoidance of war rather than causes of war, there are a number of mechanisms including, diplomacy, balance of power, third party dispute settlement, collective security, arms control, and resolving underlying causes. However, once again, the point is that there is nothing on this list that we know to have a robust correlation with wars.

This is not to suggest that these approaches are not important. They are collectively an important part of the human arsenal for dealing with war and conflict. For example, if we want to focus on the issue of weapons of mass

* Director, Center for National Security Law, University of Virginia School of Law. The reader should keep in mind that this was a PowerPoint slide presentation prepared for a visual presentation rather than an article. For a more complete and updated presentation of this theme, see JOHN NORTON MOORE, SOLVING THE WAR PUZZLE (2004).

destruction, it would be an error not to focus on the importance of arms control. However, these approaches, by themselves, are not the answer to understanding war. Rather, the most important empirical correlation found to date, which is quite robust, is the finding that democracies rarely, if ever, wage war against other democracies.¹ This finding is called the Democratic Peace. According to Bruce Russett, the Chairman of the International Relations Department at Yale, "A striking fact about the world comes to bear on any discussion about international relations . . . [when we consider that] democracies have almost never fought each other."

Another powerful correlation we know about, which is almost as powerful as the Democratic Peace, is that a high level of bilateral trade between two countries substantially reduces the risk of major war between those countries. There are a few other minor but significant correlations that fit into the broader approaches, but the Democratic Peace and bilateral trade are the two most important. Thus, Rudy Rummel, who was nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize a few years ago found that in wars between 1816 and 1991, democracies versus democracies scored zero wars, while non-democracies versus non-democracies were fighting each other at a fairly robust rate with 198 of those countries having had major wars.

Notwithstanding the compelling data, there are some remaining puzzles about war. It is clear that simply being a democracy does not prevent that country from engaging in warfare. For example, the United States is a democracy and it has still been involved in a lot of wars. In other words, the data shows that democracies do not fight democracies, but they are still involved in a large number of wars. So what are the mechanisms within democracies that account for the Democratic Peace? Are democracies as aggressive as non-democracies? The pathways that lead democracies to war become an important place to focus attention. How can democracies avoid wars with non-democracies? Or, if we ask the question in light of today's reality, how can democracies avoid September 11th type problems triggered by terrorist groups. The answer is found in a combination of democratic characteristics that ultimately account for the Democratic Peace. In democracies there is a system of checks and balances. For example, in a democratic system leaders are not chosen by violence, but rather, they are chosen for their ability to appeal to a mass audience. This process is in sharp contrast with non-democratic systems where people like Saddam Hussein can rise to power as the violent enforcer for a political party, but when left unchecked, such a person is able to kill the bosses and take over the political machinery. Democracies also have a high level of interaction with other democracies. This is where high levels of bilateral trade fit into the equation. The

1. Since we do not have time for complex explanations, we are going to use a very simple set of definitions. The term "major war" is used to define wars with 1,000 casualties or more. Different scholars have used very different definitions of "democracy," but rather interestingly, all of them have reached the same conclusions.

most important causation factor explaining the democratic peace, however, is public choice theory. Leaders of democracies have far less ability to externalize the cost of failure. Non-democratic leaders have almost unfettered ability to internalize all the benefits of international aggression while externalizing the cost of potential harm upon their populations. Thus, non-democratic leaders are far more disposed to high-risk aggressive actions risking major war and other disasters. This theory won the Nobel Prize in Economics several years ago and is increasingly used in economic theory. Democracies are far less aggressive in initiating major coercion than non-democracies. That is, with respect to the “Democratic Peace,” there is a striking correlation between levels of aggressiveness and government structure.

Our most recent research about war responsibility is contrary to the prevailing view within international relations today. Since the adoption of the United Nations Charter in 1945, at least 89 percent of major wars have been initiated by non-democracies. These include a total of 28 major wars, including Afghanistan, in the post-Charter era. Out of these major wars, there were two with arguably democratic aggressors—Turkey’s incursion in Cyprus and India’s incursion in Bangladesh. However, these two examples are debatable because Turkey and India may not have been aggressors. The only example of a major war with a clear democratic aggressor in the post-Charter era is when the British and French went into Suez in 1956. This was condemned by the United States as a violation of international law. Israel’s participation in that action was not considered democratic aggression because its action was in response to guerilla attacks against Israel.

Examining all the casualties in the 28 major wars provides even more compelling data. Wars initiated by the non-democracies since 1945 account for 99.6 percent of the total casualties resulting in over three million total human casualties. Wars initiated by democracies total 13,365 casualties or .04 percent. In contrast, this is a staggering difference.

There is, however, another side of the war prevention equation, the role of deterrence. Deterrence is all the external consequences factoring into a decision of whether to go to war. Here we are talking about the broadest conception of deterrence. Deterrence includes a totality of positive and negative actions, such as potential military responses, economic relations, diplomatic relations, international organization or lack thereof, international law, alliances, and collective security. On the Democratic Peace side of the equation, there are very powerful statistical models based on major wars since 1816. The deterrence side of the equation is lacking an equivalent empirical database. We do not have that kind of empirical evidence on the deterrence side of the equation. Nevertheless, there are a number of sources suggesting that deterrence plays a significant role. Donald Kagan, one of the top historians in the United States, examined a variety of wars starting with the Peloponnesian war. Kagan concluded that all of those wars were avoidable if there had been appropriate deterrence.

Part of our research analyzed the level of deterrence in all the major wars since the United Nations Charter. We concluded that every single war could have been avoided if there had been appropriate levels of deterrence.

To summarize, democracies rarely go to war against other democracies. Democracies have engaged in wars against non-democracies, but the major wars were principally initiated by non-democracies. Democracies are likely to be far less aggressive in settings that require major coercion, or that run the risk of turning into a high casualty war. On the other side of the equation, effective deterrence can prevent war. Thus, we can formulate a new paradigm in international relations based on an understanding that major war is a synergy between aggressive, predominantly non-democratic regimes, and an absence of effective deterrence. I would suggest to you that this is also precisely the synergy that generated the September 11th tragedy.

Now, we need some techniques for testing this hypothesis.

We can begin to test the hypothesis by asking a series of questions. Is the hypothesis consistent with major wars? Is it consistent with non-war settings? What happens when the levels of deterrence dramatically increase or decrease? Do you see a major change?

If, after asking these questions, we discover that government structure is one of the most important elements in the origins of war, we should also test that conclusion against all other major foreign policy goals. In other words, test the conclusion in other foreign policy settings such as human rights, economic development, environmental protection, famine avoidance, avoidance of terrorism and avoidance of corruption. If we find that there is a high correlation in those settings, too, it will give us some confidence that we are holding the right answers. More significantly, it will tell us that we are dealing not just with a theory of war and peace, but also with a broader theory of international relations.

To test the hypothesis, we look for consistency with major wars such as, World War I, World War II, the Korean War, the Indo-China war, the Iran-Iraq war, the Gulf War and the War Against Terrorism. For our purposes, I will focus on World War I and the War Against Terrorism.

World War I has been described as a war that started by accident, that no one really wanted, or a war that occurred because of a tightening system of alliances. These explanations are false.² Those elements were there, but they were, at least in part, not the cause of World War I. Rather, World War I fits the synergy perfectly. There was a non-democratic regime, and an absence of effective deterrence. Contrary to what is typically thought, the war started on the eastern front, and not the western front. It started when Germany convinced Austria to attack Serbia, using the excuse of the so-called "Black Hand terrorist group's"

2. In Germany 15 years ago, there was a huge debate between the establishment and a young historian named Fritz Fisher. Fisher claimed that Germany was responsible for World War I. There was a 15-year debate, and in the end Fisher won that debate and today in Germany, unlike the United States, Germans are taught that Germany was the aggressor in World War I.

assassination of the Arch Duke. Yet, Germany and Austria knew, based on their intelligence services that Serbia had nothing to do with the assassination. Nevertheless, it was decided that the incident should be used to annex the rest of Serbia. Indeed, on close examination the Austrian Foreign Minister is the principal villain of World War I.

On the other side of the equation, there was an absence of effective deterrence. For example, the British refused to give any kind of guarantee to the French, the Russians, or others that it would enter the war.³ In fact, the German Kaiser was shocked when Great Britain entered the war. Moreover, the Germans perceived the French as militarily weak. And at that time, the United States had only one division of soldiers who were training with wooden rifles. The United States was irrelevant to the initial decision.

With respect to the War Against Terrorism, we certainly have a non-democratic aggressor. Specifically, we are dealing with Al-Qaeda and Osama bin Laden, and their extraordinary interconnection with non-democratic regimes like the Taliban government of Afghanistan.

There is also an absence of effective deterrence. In the 1970s, as Counselor on International Law for the U.S. State Department, I was asked to draft the U.S. treaty to respond against terrorism in the aftermath of the Munich massacre. I can remember trying to sell that perfectly good treaty to the United Nations' General Assembly. The climate on deterrence against terrorism had been incredibly weak for 50 years. It is hard to imagine how weak the climate against terrorism truly was in the world before September 11th. Specifically, there was a history of weak responses to Al-Qaeda attacks against the United States. First, there was the bombing of the World Trade Center in 1993. In 1996, Osama bin Laden actually issued a declaration of war against the United States. This was followed by the Covar Towers' bombing in 1996. There were also the embassy attacks in Nairobi and Dar Es Salam. Finally, there was the attack on the USS Cole, which garnered no response.

Next, we ask if our hypothesis is consistent with non-war settings. These are the proverbial dogs that never barked. In these cases, how was major war avoided? What prevented certain events from triggering World War III? The answer is that even though there were aggressive regimes on one side, there was also a very effective system of deterrence in the form of NATO. I personally believe formation of NATO may well be the policy that prevented World War III.

There are also a number of strong democracies that have curtailed the number of wars. For example, the United States and Canada are two democracies that share a border without a conflict that has escalated into major war. France and Switzerland are both strong democracies in close proximity and yet no one

3. Today, NATO guarantees that all members would be obligated to defend another member if such aggression occurred.

worries about a war between them. No one worries about nuclear attack from the French or the British even though both could take out all of the major American cities. Why not worry? The United States is not worried because it knows perfectly well that France and Great Britain are democracies and they are not about to attack another democracy like the United States.

In conclusion, I believe there is compelling evidence to support a new paradigm in international relations. We can see that major war is predominately a synergy between aggressive non-democracies and an absence of effective deterrence. Therefore, to reduce war and terror in the world we must work to develop democracies and impose effective deterrence to deal with aggressive regimes. To this, terrorism adds an additional requirement. We must work to rebut radical ideas to reduce the pool of recruits ideologically committed to terror against us.